

Rex Jaeschke's Blog Postings from
Tales from the Man who would be King
Volume 05 – Dec 2013 through Nov 2014

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Introduction

When I decided to start a blog, I wrote the first three installments and let them “bake” awhile before I posted them and announced the creation of the blog. I wanted to get past the romantic aspect of dreaming something up, jumping in and doing it, and then, later, finding out it wasn't sustainable. Now, more than 11 years later, looking back, not only was I able to deliver a substantive posting each month for 132 months, I have 16 of the 24 postings for the next two years already written, and ideas for the remaining eight mapped out!

On a semi-regular basis, over a home-made café-au-lait, I read an old posting, and I'm very happy to say that *I'm not embarrassed by any of them!* It surely has become a labor of love!

Over the years, a number of regular readers have suggested that I publish the postings in some sort of printed book form. Having written numerous technical books, many articles for technical journals, and a newspaper column, I am well aware of the formal publishing process, and the work involved in getting what I might consider to be a perfectly good manuscript into a shape that a publisher would accept. Regarding writing books, my financial return was probably far less than the minimum wage! Of course, I could self-publish, and, in fact, I have access to a facility to do just that at a very reasonable cost. After serious consideration and putting my ego aside, I decided that I would indeed re-publish the first 11-years-worth of installments, but in an electronic book form, PDF. And I would do so, 12 installments (that is, one year's-worth) per Volume.

To make it worth having these Volumes available for downloading instead of readers simply going to the website for installments one at a time, I've added some small value to the Volumes. Here are the enhancement and/or changes I've made:

- Did some light editing: corrected spelling mistakes, improved punctuation, and tweaked some grammatical constructs
- Corrected factual errors
- Updated outdated information
- Added an occasional bit of extra relevant information as an aside
- Added *many* more links, primarily to Wikipedia and Wiktionary
- Added a few photos. [I write installments using MS Word, which easily allows me to arrange embedded photos. However, when I export the result to my blog (which is hosted by the freely available BlogEngine.NET), the result is far from pleasing. As such, after some early experimentation, I have included very few photos.]
- Added forward pointers to relevant installments that came later

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- Regarding links to other installments, links to destinations that are in the same Volume resolve to the corresponding chapter in that Volume; otherwise, they resolve to the blog web site.

Lastly, a very big “Thank You!” to my reviewers, good friends John Tew and Tom Plum, who have been with me from the beginning. Now I say “good” friends. There is a saying, “Friends help you move, but good friends help you move bodies!” I have not yet asked either to help in such a manner, but for now, I’ll give them the benefit of the doubt.

Happy reading,

Rex Jaeschke, April 2021.

1. December 2013, "Travel: Memories of Italy"

Welcome to a new travel series, titled, "Memories of" I'm starting with Italy, my first ever stop in Europe.

In each instalment, I'll borrow from my diaries. I'll also add other commentary. I've deliberately chosen to not include any photos, as you can see pictures (and plenty of other information) by following the on-line links.

1.1 Rome (Roma)

My first time there was in 1979, when I spent several days visiting the obligatory sites. I didn't return until 30 years later, when I wrote copious notes about my experience. It was April and, surprisingly, very hot and humid.

[Diary] ... Through the trees, the Coliseum loomed into view. It was built at the bottom of a valley between several of Rome's hills, and I approached it from one of those. There were lots of tourists, mostly in groups with guides. Near the entrance, a number of men were in full centurion costume complete with swords, and, at regular intervals, they lured passers-by into photos. Off to the side, I saw one Roman soldier smoking a cigarette. Perhaps that was the real reason behind the decline and fall of the Roman Empire!

Now I'm sure you are up with your Roman history, but just to freshen your memory, here are some details. Construction of the Coliseum was started in AD 70 by Emperor Vespasian (known to his good friends as "Bruce"). He up and died in AD 79, leaving the completion to his son, Titus, who had the opening ceremony in AD 80 with a 100-day celebration that saw the slaughter of 5,000 animals. The completed structure had tiered seating and 80 exits (called vomitoria, I kid you not). 240 wooden masts were erected to hold up a vast set of sailcloths over much of the open top to protect the spectators from the elements. A fire in AD 217 devastated the upper levels and wooden arena. Of course, the operators had neglected to take out insurance. (Don't you just hate that when that happens!) In the years following, there were other fires as well as earthquakes, all of which inflicted damage. At one time, the main arena could be flooded, so they could recreate famous sea battles. Seating was segregated by class, and gravediggers, actors, and retired gladiators were banned from attending. Really!

[Diary] ... I walked the full length of the Circus Maximus, home track of the Rome Chariot Grand Prix. Much of it was grassed, and people were out lying in the sun or picnicking in the shade. In several places, I came across pieces of coconut husks, which I thought might have been dropped by African swallows on their way to England. (See Monty Python's "Holy Grail" for details.)

[Diary] ... It was a long walk from the Metro stop to the Vatican City, and, as you might expect, it was wall-to-wall vendors along the way, interspersed with guides trying to sell their services. I walked around St. Peter's Square taking pictures and shooting video. It wasn't too busy. Then, I went through security and joined the hour-long line to go up to the top of the dome of the Basilica. Fortunately, that line was in the shade. There were some 550 steps up to the top, and one had two choices to get there:

pay €5 entrance and climb the whole 550 or, pay an extra €2 and ride an elevator and walk the last 320 steps. I took the elevator option.

[Diary] ... My first stop of the day was the famous Fountain di Trevi where I watched Neptune rule over his domain. People were constantly throwing coins over their shoulders into the fountain. Tradition has it that doing so means that one will return to Rome. I took some photos and video and then rested in the shade watching the tourists and listening to the many different languages being spoken around me.

From there, it was on to the Pantheon, a temple that was built by Hadrian starting in AD 118. It was very well preserved, primarily because it had been covered in bronze and lead for many years, although, later, that cladding was taken away to be used in other building projects. The dome was as big as St. Peter's, but quite plain inside. At its top, there was a 28-foot hole, which was designed to allow one to commune with the Heavens from the inside. Being a sunny day, the sun streamed in and cast a tube of light down onto a large painting on one wall. Apparently, it is something to experience when it was raining, and the water came through.

1.2 The Dolomites (Dolimiti)

I was on a driving trip with my family. From Bavaria, we drove south through Innsbruck, Austria, and then up through the famous Brenner Pass into Italy. We spent the better part of a day driving on steep mountain roads before going east and north into Switzerland. Along the way, we stopped off at a glacier where I was very surprised to see ice worms living in the ice!

1.3 Milan (Milano)

I've been to Milan twice. The first time, I was very adventurous, and I stayed at a youth hostel, where I shared a dorm room with a group of guys from Peru. (Who'd have thought I'd get a Latin-American Spanish workout in Italy!) The cultural highlight of that visit was a look at Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting The Last Supper. I also remember the Linate airport being fogged-in such that I missed my connection in Frankfurt.

On my second trip, I was riding in a taxi from the airport to my hotel when the driver asked me if I was in town for the big fashion show. As I looked down at my hiking trousers and boots, I wondered what about my dress made him think I was in the fashion business.

[Diary] ... In the bathroom of my hotel, I noticed a cord hanging down the wall by the bath, and thinking it activated the ceiling fan, I pulled it. As soon as I did, I noticed a small sign further up the wall, that said "alarme," and I knew I'd done something wrong. Sure enough, within seconds, the phone on the wall rang and the front desk was asking me (I suppose they were, as they spoke in Italian) if I'd had an accident in the bath. I politely informed them that everything was okay. [Considering how many accidents do occur in bathrooms, it seemed like a sensible idea; however, I'd never seen it before.] Afterwards, I had the sneaky suspicion I'd learned—and subsequently forgotten—that lesson during my previous trip.

1.4 Porto Venere

[Diary] ... At La Spezia, I learned that there was a train strike for the service around Cinque Terra, so it was on to Plan C. (Always have a Plan B, even for Plan B!) So, unexpectedly, I took a bus to Porto Venere (which was not on my destination list) where I had two absolutely wonderful days!

... We pulled into the small town of Porto Venere where the bus route terminated. It was the end of a number of major hiking trails that came south from Cinque Terre, and given the beautiful weather, it was no surprise that the hikers were out in force. I walked 100 meters into the town where I found a friendly young policewoman who spoke passable English. She gave me some directions for the tourist office (which didn't open until 16:00) and some accommodation tips. I soon found my Shangri La, the hotel Genio. It was built up a steep hillside with lots of steps and terraces that overlooked the main plaza. The friendly front-desk assistant, a Russian called Igor, was happy to give me a very good rate for two nights if I paid cash. Breakfast on the terrace between 08:00 and 10:00 was included as was high-speed Internet access at his desk—and all for only €65 a night. Igor took me to see Room 6, way up the back with its own little garden under fruit trees. It was a very nicely appointed double room with en-suite bathroom, all quite modern and spacious. I accepted his offer and went down to check in. By the time I unpacked and settled in it was 15:30. A church clock chimed at 15-minute intervals.

[Diary] ... When I came out the alley, I was in (another) St. Peter's Square, at the end of which was St. Peter's church, built in 1277 on the site of earlier temple ruins. It was constructed from black and white marble. I went inside, out on several balconies hanging over the cliff, and up onto the roof from where I could see north up the coast to Cinque Terre. Nearby was Byron's Cove, which had a connection with the English poet, Lord Byron. It was flanked by some very interesting geology consisting of nearly horizontal thin layers of rock. At the entrance to the cove, a man played music on an electronic keyboard.

I walked back into the village on the high street, which was a little further up the hill. It was entirely residential, with people hanging their washing on lines across the alley from upper floors; all the clotheslines were on pulleys so the clothing could be pulled out and back in from a window. There was an old public drinking fountain in one small plaza, and several tourists were gathered there. I chatted with a Dutch family, the daughter of which was living in Australia. I also spent time with an Irish couple from Dublin.

I decided to stay another day and night, so made plans on how to spend that extra time. Late morning, I headed up the steep hill to see the castle. It was quite a climb, but I paced myself. Fortunately, there was plenty of shade and places to sit and rest along the way. The castle was an impressive structure built way up high, and it was in wonderful condition. I took some great photos and video of the town and surrounds. Nearby was the main church and cemetery, and I toured both. I was most interested to see a mailbox at the cemetery. I was pretty sure there wouldn't be in-coming mail, and wasn't sure who'd be sending any out either! I thought perhaps that it might be the "dead letter office."

Back at my hotel, I had a small picnic on the terrace and read for several hours before fading. I tried napping, but only managed to close my eyes, so I lay in the sun reading my novel.

At 15:00, I went down to the tour boat office to enquire about the 15:30 tour around the three islands nearby. They needed eight passengers minimum before they would go, and, so far, they had only seven. I checked back at 15:30, and they had about a dozen, so I paid my €10 and went on-board. It was a very large boat with three crewmembers, and I went upstairs out in the open. I shot photos and video and picked up a few things from the narration, which was in Italian. On one island, there was a large concrete bunker built by the Germans in WWII. There were also remains of Austrian fortifications from WWI. The islands were very rugged, and the largest had hiking paths that quite a few hikers were using. Forty-five minutes later, we were back at the dock.

1.5 Cinque Terra

[Diary] ... At the Porto Venere waterfront, I bought a 1-way ticket on the ferry to Vernazza. The ferry departed promptly at 11:00 with cloudy skies and a light sprinkle of rain. Occasionally, the sun broke through and warmed things up. We headed up the coast with our first stop being the southern-most Cinque Terra town of Riomaggiore (which I referred to as riqor mortis whenever I couldn't remember it). The boat struggled to keep close enough to the rocks to let the people get off on the constantly moving gangway, but not so close that we'd be on the rocks. It was quite a feat to watch, and I took photos and video. All the while, the waves crashed on the rocks, occasionally splashing the passengers getting off or waiting to get on. Although the ferry serviced the second town, Manarola, we didn't stop there. And the ferry doesn't service the third town, Corniglia, at all. We arrived in Vernazza right around noon. It was easier getting off the ferry there.

Vernazza was crowded with day-trippers, many of whom had come from a cruise ship anchored in Livorno. My first order of business was to find a place to stay for at least two nights. There were no hotels, but there were quite a few rooms, mostly in private houses. Well, it was a bit like Goldilocks; beds too hard, too soft, none available, or only one night available, and so on. On the fifth try, I succeeded. I rang the bells of two places in the same building, but no one answered. And just as I turned to leave, an elderly lady arrived on the street, smiled, and chattered away to me in Italian. She seemed to be the proprietor of some rooms, so I followed her up some steep stairs. She showed me a large room with double bed, en-suite bath, and plenty of storage and a table with chairs. Very quickly, I used up my Italian, but she understood I wanted a room for one person for two nights. The price was €65/night, cash, no breakfast included. We sealed the deal, and she took my passport to go off and take down my particulars. Once I'd unpacked, I met her husband who spoke some English. They were both very friendly. The room was way back in a quiet corner of the house.

Within 50 feet of my front door, I found a small supermarket, a cash machine, and an Internet café. I refreshed my emergency rations with milk, peanuts, cheese, and peach/mango juice. Nearby was a very narrow alley, which I set out to explore. I soon found a coin-operated laundry, which had a book exchange with most books in English. As I spied several candidates, I raced back to my room to get two books and swapped them.

[Diary] ... At 08:45 am, I packed my gear for the hike to Monterosso, the next and northern-most town in Cinque Terre. By 09:00, I was several hundred yards up the path waiting at the Park Ranger's hut for him to arrive. He wandered in at 09:10 and sold me a 2-day pass to hike the National Park trails; cost, €8.

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For the first 20 minutes it was very steep. I did get some nice photos and video of Vernazza, however. Everyone I'd talked to had told me that that was the toughest section of the trail, and I believe it. I climbed a lot and went up and down a few times along the way. I saw only four hikers going my way. For the first hour, I hardly met anyone coming from Monterosso; the hikers had either come through earlier or had a late start. However, passed the halfway point, things got a bit busy especially on some of the narrower parts of the trail. Almost all the people I met were Aussies, Canadians, or French with an occasional smattering of Americans.

I saw terraced vineyards in which bamboo poles were used as trellises. There were many wildflowers, and the occasional smell of their perfume was welcome. At one point, I could see all four towns to the south.

I ambled into Monterosso at 11:20, 2:10 hours after starting. My only thought was to get some ice-cold whole milk, and it took a bit of searching. Finally, I bought a carton, and that, along with a nice ripe banana, replenished my body. I walked around the old town taking pictures and video, and then went through the tunnel to the new town. Both had beaches with requisite chairs and umbrellas for rent. I sat in the shade and read my novel with my boots off.

As they say, it's the journey not the destination, and that surely was the case with this town, so, by 12:20, I was at the train station waiting for a train to take me back to Vernazza. It arrived and I got on for the supposed 5-minute ride. I got talking to an Aussie couple, and when the train stopped five minutes later a large group of us thought that was our station (and it was), but we were in a tunnel and it was dark out all the windows. By the time we worked out that we should move to another carriage whose doors opened, the train was pulling out. Okay, no problem, we all said; we'll simply get off at the next town and go back. Of course, it wasn't a local train and didn't stop for three stations. So, unexpectedly, we were at the southern-most town, Riomaggiore. We had to wait there 40 minutes for a northbound train that stopped at Vernazza. C'est la vie!

[Diary] ... *At 7:45 am, I was ready for some hiking, and I headed off on the steep steps out of town headed south. I took a little less than 90 minutes to get to Corniglia. Apart from a workman repairing the trail, I saw nobody until I met two young women near the end of that leg. It was cool and overcast, and there had been light rain during the night. I alternated from a sun hat to a woolen cap. The level of difficulty was similar to the day before, and I went from right around sea level to some 650 feet up. Corniglia was just waking up as I arrived. A few tourists were heading to the train station, which was 300 steps down from the town. (There was a bus for those happy to pay and save the effort.) I certainly was happy to be going down the steps rather than up.*

After that, there was more traffic, especially as the path to Manarola was almost flat as well as wide. It was so easy I had to stop myself from breaking into a run. In Manarola, I stopped at a little coffee place and sat at a table under a large umbrella, where I sipped a milk coffee. It was so good I had a second one. I chatted with three women from Salt Lake City, Utah, and we exchanged information and tips about travel. It was a great break.

The path from Manarola to Riomaggiore was even easier, and I was there in no time. As I approached the town, very light rain fell intermittently. The skies stayed grey and threatening, but it didn't result in any serious interruption. I toured the whole town including right down to the waterfront where a ferry

was arriving. I spent several hours there sitting in the sun, reading my novel and chatting with a number of different lots of people, including some from my home state of South Australia.

1.6 Lucca

[Diary] ... My host, Carmine, arrived at the station in his car to take me to his apartment. After we finished supper, we walked around the old city visiting a number of plazas and monuments including the relatively new bronze of well-known local boy Giacomo Puccini.

[Diary] ... At 09:30 am, armed with a tour map, I headed towards the northern gate of the city wall. It was quiet out with only a few tourists. Mostly it was people opening up shops and setting up stalls. At the Piazza Santa Maria gate, I visited the tourist office and got some more information, especially about Sunday hours. The young lady was ever so happy to also rent me a high-speed internet cable for €1/10 minutes, so I hooked up my netbook computer and checked my email and phoned the day host I planned to meet the next day.

As I was leaving the tourist bureau, I spied the bicycle rental place next door, and, suddenly, the 4 km-trip around the top of the city walls didn't seem so arduous, especially not at €2.50/hour. I had to leave my passport as security and in return I got a bike and lock. The proprietress took me out the back where she asked the repairman to fix me up with a bike of size suitable for my height, and he did.

I headed up the ramp to the top of the wall, and, pretty soon, it all came back to me, and I was on my way, in a counterclockwise direction. However, it occurred to me that made it harder to see inside the walls as I was riding on the far-right side of the very wide road, so I reversed direction. And to make it a bit more challenging, I took out my video camera and shot while riding, keeping one eye on the road and the other through the camera's viewfinder. Large trees all along the route provided plenty of shade.

There was no need to change gears, as it was quite flat. I stopped at a number of places to take photos and to look around. In no time at all, I had completed the loop. Only once did I come close to an accident; an unsteady young Frenchwoman was pulling out from the side and failed to look in both directions, and blocked me off completely.

Back at the start, I went down the ramp to street level, and put my video camera away, ready for "Toad's Wild Ride" (the "Wind in the Willows" ride at Disneyland) around the streets, scaring children, pets, and little old ladies. By that time, the tourists were out in force. Although the streets were paved with small cobblestones, they were still a bit rough. I went back around the city in a counterclockwise direction poking around in many back streets and narrow alleys. By the time I got back to the rental place the novelty had worn off and different parts of my body were aching. However, it was a good workout.

I started my walking tour by heading for the Contrini Pfanner Palace and gardens. I toured the rooms that were open for display and then walked around the garden. Two rows of statues lead to a fountain surrounded by lots of flowers in full bloom. I sat in the shade and contemplated life in a palace with a walled garden. From there, I went to the central square and church, Piazza San Michelle, and then on to the elliptical Piazza Anfiteatro. On the way home, I rescued a bottle of iced-cold Coke to have with my

lunch—a tuna and sun-dried tomato roll—which I ate back in the apartment with a breeze blowing in one window and out the other. Life was good.

1.7 Pisa

[Diary] ... I stopped on a bridge over the Arno River to take some photos and video. Eventually, the crowded streets gave way to the "Field of Miracles," which opened out before me. At the left end was the round baptistry. In the center was the large cathedral. And to the right was the famous Leaning Tower, and it surely was leaning. The more I looked at it, the more I thought it was going to fall, right then! The buildings were set in a long rectangular park that was mostly covered in long green grass.

I walked around the buildings and up to the old city walls and one gate; however, I declined to go inside. I thought about going up the tower, but there was a 2-hour wait and it cost €15, so I decided not to. In any event, those who did go up the very steep steps could only go outside on the smaller top level.

1.8 Siena

[Diary] ... After a train ride to town, I rode a bus to the city center and started to look for accommodation. Not seeing any and not finding anyone who knew where the tourist information office was, I asked a couple of tourists if they could recommend a cheap hotel nearby. An American guy did, and, in five minutes, I was standing at the registration desk of the Albergo Tre Danzella, barely 50 yards off the edge of the main plaza. Yes, the man would be pleased to give me a very large double room for two nights at the incredibly low price of €49/night, cash or credit. Breakfast was not included and there was a share bathroom for each five rooms. I checked it out and it was just fine, so I signed up.

I unpacked, splashed some cold water on my face, and sat and rested for a while. It had taken quite a while to get there from Lucca. After I was restored, I walked to the main plaza, where the bright sunshine fell on the tower and half the square. It truly was a magnificent sight. People sat all around the plaza in the sun eating ice cream, talking, and sleeping. Around half of the plaza there were outdoor restaurants doing a roaring trade.

Each July and August, riders race horses bareback around the edge on dirt that is trucked in. The whole event takes only several minutes, but people start getting into position 12 hours ahead. I took some photos and video of where they raced and then sat by the fountain. I met a young Aussie couple that had been traveling six months and had more than a year to go. We exchanged some travel tips and sat talking for a good long while.

1.9 San Gimignano

At 09:20 am, I was on the bus headed for the well-known hilltop town of San Gimignano. Very soon after we left Siena, we were in the countryside among rolling hills covered in forest with cereal farms and vineyards all around. It was a pleasant drive that lasted 1:10 hours.

The town had many very tall towers and was built on a hill. I walked around looking in a variety of shops. I stopped to shoot video and photos especially of the surrounding countryside. I hiked up to the top of the highest hill where I found an olive grove and some old town defenses. I sat in the shade for some time listening to a man play a variety of flutes. In a courtyard nearby, I sat again, to hear a young Florentine woman in traditional dress perform on a large harp. We chatted a while between tunes, and

I bought one of her CDs. On the way back down the hill I stopped to watch a woman painting; she had a large collection of watercolors for sale. She was a grandmother originally from New Zealand, but now living in San Gimignano, enjoying sitting in the sun painting, talking to the tourists, and selling the occasional painting.

I sat in the shade and had leftover pizza for a late lunch, and then I walked some of the quiet back streets taking photos of doorknockers, signs, and such things. Back outside the walls, I found the bus stop, but people waiting there told me I had to buy my ticket back in the town. Well, when the bus came, the driver said I could ride to the next town and pay there, so I did. On arrival, I paid and after a few minutes wait, transferred to an express bus headed for Siena. It was a very comfortable air-conditioned double-decker bus. I sat upstairs at the front where I had a bird's-eye view of the countryside.

1.10 Conclusion

Certainly, there are other places in Italy I'd be happy to visit; however, only one area has any priority. That is Venice, in conjunction with Trieste, and the neighboring country of Slovenia, along with northern Croatia. Arrivederci!

2. January 2014, “The Cost of Bad Weather and Natural Disasters”

On a cold, winter's day in February 2013, I was sitting in a doctor's waiting room watching a big-screen TV. All the news and weather channels were tracking two huge storm systems that were converging on the US northeast, and it was going to be a big (and expensive) disaster. As I watched, I started to think about the impact these storms would have. People would lose their houses and cars, and maybe everything they owned, and even their lives. Businesses would close indefinitely, and wages would be lost. If hotels and restaurants were open, there'd be few guests. And so on. What would the cost of all this be and who would/should pay?

I was raised in a semi-desert area of rural South Australia. About the only natural disaster we experienced there was drought on a regular basis and an occasional (small) bushfire. [My, how that eucalyptus tree oil loves to burn!] Of course, from radio, television, and newspapers, I knew that other parts of the world suffered from all sorts of weather-related and other devastating natural phenomena, but they were as remote as those “starving children in India” of whom our parents spoke when we wouldn't eat our vegetables. Even the disasters in other parts of my own country were “off in some other world.” However, once I moved to and traveled around the US, these problems got much closer, and I got to experience some of them firsthand. Likewise, when I started traveling to other countries.

Unlike most people, for the past 29 years, I've worked mostly from home. Without a daily commute or a fixed schedule, bad weather has rarely concerned or impacted me. However, it has “knocked on my door” a few times, as I'll discuss below. And at the end of the main essay, I share my Disaster-Preparedness Plan.

2.1 Snow and Ice

While I find that *ice is not so nice*, I am still fascinated by snow. I was 17 years old when I first saw snow, and I tried skiing without knowing anything at all about it, especially regarding how to stop! The good news was that for the most part, snow in Australia doesn't fall in major population centers; you have to drive up to the mountains to see it and to take advantage of it. Now, however, I experience it each winter and have done so for more than 30 years. Following, are a number of snow and/or ice incidents I recall:

On January 13, 1982, an Air-Florida jet crashed on takeoff from Washington National Airport, and it hit the 14th Street Bridge over the Potomac River; that bridge is a major road from Washington DC to Virginia. The crash was compounded by the Federal Government having let its DC-area employees out early due to the extreme weather, many of whom would ordinarily take that bridge. A friend of mine was living with me at the time and working in DC. It took him some 10 hours to get home the 22 miles (40 kms), and all along the way he saw cars on the edge of the highway that had run out of gas.

One winter, I drove to Raleigh, North Carolina, on a Sunday afternoon and arrived at my hotel as snow was starting to fall. By morning, we were snowed in by the “great Raleigh blizzard of 2000,” and the city was shut down. (It wasn't that North Carolina didn't own snow removal equipment; the problem was that all that equipment was in the mountains several hours west, and of course the blizzard

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completely immobilized the Interstate highways.) Fortunately, the power and Internet service stayed on. Ordinarily, the hotel restaurant served only breakfast, but staff managed to produce several meals each day for the three days that we were stranded indoors. (It's amazing how many ways there are to prepare waffles and bacon!) Other people in town to attend the same meeting as I were in similar situations in hotels nearby. Finally, streets were plowed, and we managed to find a room where we held a 1-day meeting (instead of the planned four).

From pretty much my first personal encounter with ice, I guessed how dangerous it could be. On a couple of occasions, I tried to back out of a parking space covered in ice and started sliding ever so gently over towards the neighboring car. One's instinct is to accelerate even more, but of course, that only makes the slide worse!

Regarding freezing rain, I'd parked my car in a parking lot in the morning, but when I came out to go home that evening, a slick layer of ice had formed from the rain. As I stood there trying to unlock my car door, I felt myself start sliding towards the car door. Instinctively, I put out my hand, and my thumb absorbed the full weight of my body pushing into the door. That thumb was very badly bruised and only semi-operable for several weeks.

One autumn, my city resurfaced a major road near my house. However, that winter when snow fell, we had sunny days during which the snow melted into the road surface where it refroze overnight. As you know, water expands when it freezes, and by the end of winter, the new road was completely ruined and had to be resurfaced (again!) the following spring.

The winter before I arrived in Chicago, the city had had a 1-in-a-100-year storm. Whole streets were bulldozed clear and many cars were never seen again.

Twice in 28 years, my townhouse development was snowed in so deeply that we had to have earth-moving equipment come and clear it out by the truckload. The up side was that the big lake nearby froze over completely, and the kids were able to skate. However, the resident ducks and geese were unable to get to the water.

When my son was going to school, we had more than a few *snow days* when school was delayed one or two hours, or was cancelled. [My friends in central Maine used to laugh at the idea of snow days. "Why don't you just drive them there on the snowmobile?" they'd ask.] With a stay-at-home Mom and with Dad often there too, we didn't have to scramble for emergency childcare like many other parents.

It's amazing to think of the cost of de-icing, plowing, snow removal, and spreading salt or sand, and having all the necessary equipment on hand just in case it is needed.

For many years, I provided consulting services to a paper company in Maine. It generated most of its own power from steam and hydro. In the case of hydro, snow on the ground is money in the bank! And the longer it stays there the better. Have an early spring thaw, and some of that water will be wasted as it has to be let over the dams.

Needless to say, few drivers are trained to drive on snow or ice. The first winter my son had his license, I took him to a large, empty parking lot to get some practice at driving in snow, but without other cars—and crazy drivers—around.

2.2 Earthquakes

The magnitude of an earthquake is often measured in terms of the Richter scale, which is logarithmic, not linear. For example, a level 6.0 is ten times the power of a level 5.0, which, in turn, is ten times the power of a level 4.0.

My first, but indirect, encounter with this kind of event was when I visited Antigua, the old capital of Guatemala. Now, it's a thriving tourist destination and a place to learn Spanish. However, many years ago, it suffered a number of big quakes, which destroyed thousands of buildings including lots of churches, many of which remain in a partially collapsed state.

The earth moved beneath my own feet not on my first kiss, but as I lay in bed around 2 am in Kamakura, Japan. Over breakfast, I asked my host if indeed there had been a quake overnight, and she replied there had, perhaps a 3.0, but "that happens all the time." Okay, if you say so!

On 2011-08-23, at 1:51 pm, Eastern Time, a level 5.8 earthquake occurred in the greater Washington DC area, and it lasted for 45 seconds. I was working at my desk at home and knew right away what it was. After the first tremor, I stood up and then the second one hit, and that did rock me. Being "a cool, calm, and collected kind-of-guy" I took the backup memory stick from my computer, grabbed my hand-held computer and my wallet and keys, and went outside to the parking lot, where I stood with several of my neighbors. I had just had a lot of repairs done on my 3-level townhouse in preparation for its sale, and my first thought was that work might have been undone. Fortunately, it was not; the whole house had moved all as one. However, in the weeks following, I did get earthquake coverage added to my insurance policy "just in case."

In September 2013, I was lying awake with jetlag in my hotel in Tokyo when my bed started to move. And then the metal coat hangers in my closet started to knock together. I immediately knew what it was, but it was quite gentle, and the whole hotel tower moved as one. Next morning, the front desk staff told me they thought it was a level 2.0 although at the epicenter it had been 5.0. [Note that like some other countries in earthquake zones, rooms in many western-style hotels in Japan come with a flashlight that charges off the main power. It's there to help one find one's way during a power outage caused by a quake.]

2.3 Rain and Floods

Back in 1956, the River Murray that ran through my hometown (in South Australia) had its biggest flood since dams were built on it. I was not yet three years-old, so have no recollection. I do, however, remember lesser floods during my school years. For years, local-area residents had been pleading for a bridge across the river, and one was finally built. However, the government couldn't afford to raise the level of the access road to the bridge for the several miles that road ran across the flats. Subsequently, when the river flooded, the road leading to the bridge was closed. Sigh!

More than 30 years ago, I had my first adventure trip, to a primitive jungle camp on the Amazon River in northeastern Peru. We started out at Iquitos, the provincial capital. There, I visited a shanty town made up of rickety old shacks that were built on large log rafts. The residents threw all their trash out the open windows. And when the rainy season came, the river rose some 40 feet (12 meters), the

houses-on-rafts simply raised up with the water, and all the trash was washed away. It was great town planning!

The most rain I ever experienced at once was 7 inches (175 cms) in a few hours. And although trees and power lines came down around the city, and the lakes overflowed, the power stayed on in my neighborhood. Fortunately, I lived at the highest point of my development, so flooding wasn't a problem and no sewage backed up in my drains.

2.4 High Winds, Hurricanes, Typhoons, Tornados, and Cyclones

For many years, I lived in a neighborhood that had many, tall oak trees. Apparently, they are shallow rooted, so when high winds blew, some trees came down. I had the "pleasure" of helping cut one up with a chainsaw after it fell in my development's playground. I also spend a memorable 4th of July holiday one year helping friends cut up and remove a number of tall trees that had come down in a mini tornado.

Some six weeks after a huge [hurricane](#) swept across Florida, I went to visit the [Emerald Coast](#) (to witness a friend compete in an Iron Man triathlon qualifier race). As my plane approached [Pensacola](#), I noticed something unusual about the houses. Many of them had bright blue roofs. As it happened, these were blue [tarpaulins](#) that had been provided by the [US Army Corps of Engineers](#) after the storm had damaged much of the city.

I've experienced three [typhoons](#) now, two in Tokyo and one on the Korean island of Jeju. The second one, in Japan, flooded much of the subway system and caused my group to cancel its evening harbor-cruise dinner.

In the summer of 2013, I visited the Pacific coast in both Washington State and Northern California for the first time. I was surprised to find that both areas had [tsunami](#) warning signs and sirens high up on poles to sound an alarm. In the case of Crescent City, California, the tsunami that resulted from the earthquake (and subsequent nuclear reactor disaster) in Japan, damaged shipping and facilities in its harbor after having crossed the whole of the northern Pacific Ocean! Similarly, that area was damaged, and someone was drowned in the aftermath of the 1964 [Good Friday quake](#) in Valdez, Alaska.

Once while driving in the US southwest, I saw a [tornado](#) way off in the distance, but that was close enough for me. Then several times in my own area, there have been tornado warnings and a couple actually touched down and caused damage, although not too close to my house. However, now that I no longer have a basement, I have no good place to hide if one hits.

On Christmas Day, 1974, [Cyclone Tracy](#) devastated the city of Darwin in the north of Australia. It was a monster system and the biggest the country had ever experienced.

2.5 High Humidity

I'm not a fan of high humidity, but I've visited the tropics on numerous occasions. Now I happen to be a non-recovering book addict, and I'm also a big watcher of videos. So, imagine my horror when I stayed with a host family in [Vera Cruz, Mexico](#), whose house had no air conditioning, and found their

large book and video tape library beset with mold. Many of the tapes were no longer playable, and many books had black pages and were falling apart! C'est la vie!

2.6 Conclusion

According to the 14 June 2013 issue of *USA Today* newspaper, "With \$110 billion in damage, 2012 was the second-costliest year for weather and climate disasters 11 separate weather and climate events that each had losses exceeding \$1 billion in damage. ... Hurricane Sandy (\$65 billion) and the year-long drought (\$65 billion). ... In all, the US has endured 144 weather/climate disasters since 1980 where overall damages/costs reached or exceeded \$1 billion. The total cost of these 144 events is more than \$1 trillion."

Don't forget that each time you curse at harsh winter weather, that some people's livelihoods depend on it, for example, ski resorts and all those snow-removal workers and contract companies. Besides, snow replenishes the underground water supply that so many of us rely on.

American humorist Mark Twain once wrote, "Everyone complains about the weather, but nobody does anything about it." How true!

When it comes to weather, what we really want is the Goldilocks variety, not too hot and not too cold, but just right!

I'll leave you with the following poem that I learned way back in elementary school:

*Whether the weather be fine,
Or whether the weather be not,
Whether the weather be cold,
Or whether the weather be hot,
We'll weather the weather
Whatever the weather,
Whether we like it or not!
[Anon.]*

2.7 Weather Emergency Planning

2.7.1 Contact Info

1. It's all on computers, so if I have no power, I can't get at it. Have a printed list of emergency contacts.
2. Make sure pocket-computer version is up to date; however, that will lose power after a few days.

2.7.2 Utilities/Appliances

House is all-electric, so a long-term loss of power is far-reaching. Should I buy a small generator?

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1. Refrigeration:
 - a. If it's cold, leave frozen stuff in freezers and/or put in ice boxes in the garage, outside, or in snow
 - b. Otherwise, set priorities on what will thaw and spoil first, and cook that and store cooked/uneaten stuff in a cold place
2. Cooking:
 - a. Gas camping stove; check that I have enough gas bottles and matches; ensure that the gas cooking area is adequately ventilated
 - b. Pot-belly stove top
 - i. Read the instruction book
 - ii. Make sure I have a supply of (dry) wood
 - iii. Get kindling, newspaper, and matches
 - c. Can opener
 - d. Use thermos to keep liquids hot/cold
3. Heating:
 - a. See "Pot-belly stove"
 - b. Extra bedding (Arctic sleeping bag)
 - c. Clear snow away from heating/air-conditioning unit, if the power is on
4. Lighting:
 - a. Gas lantern; check that I have enough gas bottles, matches, and spare mantles
 - b. Candles
 - c. Flashlights and spare batteries (hand-cranked flashlights)
 - d. Charge cordless flashlights
5. Telephone:
 - a. Old-style land lines run off the power on the phone line, so loss of power does not automatically mean a problem, but trees could be down on phone lines
 - b. New-style land lines via fiber optic cables typically have an associated battery pack that supports 6–8 hours of talk time
 - c. Can recharge my cell phone from my car cigarette lighter plug provided the car runs, that is. (Don't run the car in an enclosed garage though!)
6. Radio/TV:
 - a. Have a portable radio and spare batteries
 - b. Car radio, provided the car runs, that is
 - c. No power or internet/fiber-optic connection, no TV
7. Internet:
 - a. None if the power is down
 - b. Maybe none even if the power is up, but the cable is cut somewhere

2.7.3 Food

1. Have dry goods and cans on hand
2. Energy bars, nuts, dried fruit, chocolate, peanut butter
3. Rice and cups-of-noodles are good, but require hot water
4. Crackers and cookies
5. Eat less!

2.7.4 Water/Fluids

I have a well, and that has an electric pump; so, no power, no water! No toilet after one flush. No shower. No laundry

1. Have 3 gallons of water/per person on hand
2. Some canned food is in water/liquid
3. Have a store of Gatorade
4. Fill the bathtub and other containers beforehand
5. Get water from melted snow

2.7.5 Cash

1. Check emergency stash; can't swipe credit cards anywhere if there is no power.
2. Make sure I have smaller denomination bills (notes)

2.7.6 Mail Service

I can get to my mailbox, assuming mail is being delivered.

2.7.7 Medical/Safety/Hygiene

1. Emergency phone numbers
2. First-aid kit
3. Prescription medications and eyewear
4. Fire extinguisher
5. Create outdoor pit toilet, if possible

2.7.8 Business

1. If I'm supposed to get out to travel, tough; cancel if I can notify clients
2. Otherwise, if no phone or internet, then tidy up my home office, catch up on reading, and do some of those long-overlooked administrative tasks

2.7.9 House Access

1. County snowplow clears the public street, but that might not be a high priority
2. Trees/limbs down on road or on/around house
 - a. Chainsaw (have gas/oil on-hand)
 - b. Hand saw(s)
 - c. Gloves
3. Snow shovel to get out of garage, front door, deck doors

2.7.10 Vehicle

1. Have the gas tank full (gas stations can't pump if no power)
2. Have sufficient spare gas on hand (in lawn mower gas container)
3. Find a safe place to park if coming home and can't get in my street or driveway
4. Know how to open the garage door without any power

5. Store in my vehicle:
 - a. Water
 - b. Some energy bars
 - c. First-aid kit
 - d. Pad and pencil or pen
 - e. A blanket
 - f. Extra set of mittens or gloves, wool socks, wool cap
 - g. Battery jumper cables
 - h. Basic tools including a hammer, pliers, and rags
 - i. Knife
 - j. Matches

3. February 2014, “Travel: Memories of Scandinavia”

In the first installment in this series, we visited Italy. This time, we'll take a quick trip around Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden.

In each installment, I'll borrow from my diaries. I'll also add other commentary. I've deliberately chosen to not include any photos, as you can see pictures (and plenty of other information) by following the on-line links.

3.1 Denmark

Official Name: Kingdom of Denmark (Danmark); Capital: Copenhagen (København); Language: Danish (dansk), also Faroese (føroyskt), Greenlandic (Kalaallisut), and Bornholmian (bornholmsk); Country Code: DK; Currency: Danish krone (kr. or DKK)

From my first visit in Denmark more than 20 years ago, up to my most recent, I've very much liked this country. My main reason for being there has usually been to attend conferences in Copenhagen, and I've used that as a springboard to go off and visit the countryside. Most often, I've flown to the capital and taken the train out to the Jutland Peninsula, to the island of Funen, or to the north of the main island. Once, after a week in Copenhagen, my family and I took the boat train south to Germany, then we trained across Northern Germany, spent time on a Christmas tree farm in Jutland, visited Lego Land, and spent time in Odense (Hans Christian Andersen's home town), before getting back to Copenhagen.

Denmark is a country of islands. On one trip, we spent a delightful weekend on the island of Avernakø, off the south coast of Funen. We stayed with a host family who were renovating their house, and all materials were brought onto the island on a small ferry. About 100 people lived there and that island and a neighboring one used the local school. We were there for an annual festival for which a village from somewhere else in Denmark was invited to come and play against the locals in a game of soccer with much beer drinking (a favorite Danish pastime).

You might know that Denmark has long been active in providing peace-keeping forces in various hotspots around the world. One day as I was driving around Jutland with my Danish friend Paul, we came over a hill and there ahead of us was a group of huge tents with the Red Cross symbol on each roof. When I asked what this was, my friend told me that it was a camp for Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka. Yes, really!

My dear friends Hans and Anne Lise come from Ollerup, a town on the south coast of Funen. [I first met them when I hosted them in Virginia. They were leading a retired group of Danes on a folk-dancing trip. I've since visited them numerous times.] Each morning at Hans' house we lowered the pennant—a very long and narrow rendering of the national flag—that flies overnight, and we raised the Danish flag. Then in the evening, we did the reverse. (This same flag design has been in use for more than 700 years, and was since adapted by all the other Nordic countries.)

There are a number of “must see” places in Denmark: Roskilde for the Royal Tombs and Viking ship museum; Hillerød for its castle-in-the-lake and gardens (one of my all-time favorite places in the

world); Copenhagen for its pedestrian shopping area, Tivoli, and Little Mermaid; and the [Louisiana Museum of Modern Art](#).

I've long been interested in [Queen Margrethe II](#) who is a very capable monarch. She's a talented painter and illustrator, and some of her work was used in the Danish edition of [The Lord of the Rings](#). According to Wikipedia, she is fluent in Danish, French, English, Swedish, and German. And for me, there is a royal Aussie connection: [Crown Princess Mary](#) hails from Tasmania.

During my most recent visit to Copenhagen, I joined a group for dinner right in the heart of the pedestrian zone, [Strøget](#). The maître'd showed us to our table, and she proceeded to tell us, in English, the specials of the day. When she was done, I asked her if these dishes were "just like Grandma used to make," and without hesitation, she replied, "These are like your grandma wished that she could make!" It was an excellent answer, we got great service, and we left a big tip.

As you may know, [Greenland](#) and the [Faeroes](#) are also part of Denmark. Up until 1917, what are now known as the [US Virgin Islands](#) (St. Croix, St. John, and St. Thomas) were owned by Denmark, which then sold them to the US for \$25 million in gold.

While giving a lecture in Copenhagen on "internationalization," the process of designing and implementing computer software for multi-cultural and linguistic environments, I made the mistake of saying that "the Danish alphabet has three extra letters." One attendee politely raised his hand and informed me that there were in fact no extra letters, they used and needed them all. Of course, what I meant was that the Danish alphabet was the basic 26-letter one used by English with three more letters (å/Å, æ/Æ, and ø/Ø).

***[Diary]** ... Ollerup is the home of a world-famous [gymnastic school](#), and each semester, they take in several hundred students, including some from other countries. I had visited the school on a previous trip, but the students were on break, so nothing was happening. However, this time, they were putting on an end-of-semester show for the locals, free of charge. We got front-row seats to watch 250 young men and woman aged 18–21 go through dance and gymnastic routines. It was awesome. Afterwards, there was coffee and cake, and community singing from books that were passed around to the guests. A choir of 45 students gave a performance. (Some years ago, via the same program through which we'd hosted Hans and Anne-Lise, we hosted two lots of gymnasts from that school.) By the time we left the school, it was after 22:30, and we stopped off on the edge of a forest to hear nightingales singing. Back home, we each had a small glass of port to round out the day. Lights out at 22:45 after a great day.*

***[Diary]** ... All too soon, it was lunchtime, and we ate in the gazebo in the garden by the pool. It was a traditional frokost (lunch) in the style of a smørrebrød (smorgasbord), with dark bread that contained all our daily vitamins, with all kinds of meat and vegetable pieces to pile on top, including, of course, pickled herring. We washed that down with cold water into which had been squeezed just the right amount of lime juice. The only thing missing was a string quartet playing Vivaldi's Four Seasons!*

***[Diary]** ... The sun was streaming down, and all was right with the world, at least in our little corner. We got in the car and drove off to [Christiania](#), an alternate lifestyle community on an old unused military base near downtown Copenhagen. We walked around there for some time taking in the sights and smells. From there it was on to the waterfronts of several islands where we walked around the new*

opera theater and watched the water taxis and tour boats go by. We also parked downtown and walked along a canal looking at all the private boats and barges tied up there. We finished up on an old pier where we ate ice cream while watching a large cruise ship leave its berth.

[Diary] ... Back home, Lene began preparing food to be cooked on the outdoor grill. [It's very likely someone coined this phrase before me, but a few days ago, it occurred to me that the Danes not only eat to live, but they also live to eat! Food and drink certainly play an important part in their everyday lives.] We ate in the gazebo out by the pool. To start with, we had sticks of hot asparagus, which we dipped into butter and salt. Then came ears of BBQ'd corn smothered with butter and pepper, a peppered steak, and a salad. Sometime later, we drank some Hungarian sweet wine with ice cubes, and, to finish off, we ate some chocolate. Afterwards, we walked around the neighborhood. Lights out at 22:30 after another great day.

3.2 Finland

Official Name: Republic of Finland (Suomi, Finland); Capital: Helsinki (Helsinki, Helsingfors); Language: Finnish and Swedish (suomi and svenska); Country Code: FI; Currency: Euro (EUR), formerly Finnish markka (mk or FIM)

Finland is the 6th largest country in Europe. 10% of the country is covered with water and there are more than 187,000 lakes and 160,000 islands in those lakes and offshore. 65% of the country is forest and about 8% is cultivated. For many years, Sweden and Russia fought over what is now Finland, with Russia last having control. However, when the Russians were distracted by their revolution in 1917, the Finns declared independence and formed a new country. Given the Swedish history, the Constitution makes the country bilingual with a 5% Swedish-speaking minority.

My first visit to Finland was in 1992 with my family. From Helsinki, we took a new Finnish train to St. Petersburg, Russia, where I gave a series of lectures and workshops over a 2-week period. When we came back, we had a 1-week Finn Rail pass. We headed north to Rovaneimi and the Arctic Circle, where we visited Santa Claus, in person! He spoke quite a few languages and received more than 500,000 letters each year from kids all around the world. From there, it was on to [Savonlinna](#), the home of the famous castle and opera festival. And, you guessed it, we arrived during the festival without any reservations for a place to stay. However, we found one 500 meters from the castle. From there, we went back to [Helsinki](#) and to [Turku](#), the old capital nearby. On the day we flew out, international leaders from the G8 Group (or some such) were arriving, and airport security was, shall we say, over the top!

[For details of this trip, see my December 2020 posting, "[Travel – Memories of Finland.](#)"]

I returned 10 years later to attend a conference hosted by the Finns. However, instead of holding it in Helsinki, which would be convenient for everyone, especially the Finns, they held it some distance north of the Arctic Circle.

[Diary] ... We boarded a Finnair DC9 for the hour and a half flight north. Seating was open, and we managed to get the bulkhead with plenty of legroom and a spare seat between us. A snack was served. If you look at a map of Finland you will immediately see that it is covered in glacial lakes, and I mean

covered, especially in the east toward the Russian border. And there was no shortage of trees; this was lumber and paper country.

We landed at Ivalo at 9:45 pm. This was the main airport for Lapland, and we were more than 250 km north of the Arctic Circle. The plane had its own staircase, which the flight attendant operated. It came from the belly of the plane and unfolded quickly. I had never seen such a thing before on such a large commercial plane. We had a short walk to the terminal, which was a large log cabin. The luggage took all of two minutes to arrive, and we stepped outside and loaded it right on to the bus. Standing right there was a large reindeer, complete with a full rack of antlers. He posed for photos and wandered about the parking lot.

[Diary] ... I was wide-awake at 3:30 am, and it was between twilight and daylight outside. I got up at 4:30 am, and went for a brisk walk around the resort village. It certainly was fresh out. A few people were also out, but I suspect they had not yet been to bed! The last eating-place had closed at 4 am. That weekend was some sort of motorcycle get-together here, and I counted at least 200 bikes parked nearby. They sure came in a multitude of colors, shapes, and sizes, with many of them being very fancy touring bikes.

[Diary] ... Once I went off to work, Jenny and friends went on an organized trip to a reindeer herder's farm. The herder, Maarco, was dressed in traditional costume. All the Sámi people (the Lapps) had the colors red, blue, green, and yellow in their dress. Blue was the dominant color, and represented the water. Red was for fire, green for the trees, and yellow for the sun. Firstly, they saw, up close, the five reindeer he had fenced-in close to his house. The large male had an enormous rack of antlers. The others were younger or female and had varying size antlers. Reindeer were trained to pull sleds, but were really not tame animals. Even though these five see people several times every day, they were still quite skittish. They enjoyed a snack of freshly cut silver birch leaves.

Next, the women were invited into the wooden teepee where they enjoyed tea and cake. They asked questions of their host and learned about life as a reindeer herder. This was most informative and interesting. Then they enjoyed a reindeer roping demonstration. They all tried their hand. Jenny was the only one actually to rope the stationary, wooden reindeer; the others had the right idea, but just didn't throw hard enough. They concluded their visit in the home of the herder. They saw reindeer skins, shoes filled with straw for warmth, costumes worn by children and adults and different means of transportation used in the snow.

[After a week in the Arctic, we took a high-speed boat from Helsinki to Estonia, where we spent 8 delightful days mostly staying with host families.]

Eight years later, I returned for another conference and an extended holiday.

[Diary] ... Around 10:15, I bought a 3-day Helsinki Card at the front desk, and headed down to the waterfront to where three large cruise ships were tied up. I walked along to the ferry terminals at Market Place. My ferry was scheduled to depart in 10 minutes, and soon we were on our way to the Suomenlinna island complex. The ferry ride and all museum admissions were covered by my travel card.

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Construction on the fortifications was begun by Sweden in 1748. However, in 1808, the Russians took control and ran the place until 1917 when Finland declared its independence. The weather was overcast with a stiff breeze blowing, but I was well prepared with outer coat, cap, and hood. I started with the church and then moved to the visitor's center where I saw a 25-minute film about the history of the complex. Next came the two huge dry docks where many of Sweden's warships were built. I climbed downstairs to the bottom of one dry dock.

I stopped off to tour a submarine built in 1933. Yellow and purple flowers were everywhere, and the tall grass swayed in the breeze. Several places looked and were idyllic. For the most part, I took the back paths poking around all kinds of back street places. Some 800–1,000 people live on the island and a Naval School still operates. However, in 1991 the military parts were declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The stonework certainly was impressive, and the tourists were out in force as were locals having picnics on the grass. There was even a nice little secluded beach well out of the wind.

I dropped by a small art exhibition and then visited the Customs Museum where I had a long chat with a pleasant young woman who was studying museum management at university. My final stop was a military museum.

I was back at the ferry terminal at 16:30 and my legs were very much looking forward to a rest. The ferry arrived 10 minutes later, and we were on our way back to the mainland. As I got off the ferry light rain fell, and by the time I got back to my hostel my jacket was getting damp.

[Diary] ... *I decided to start out with a 90-minute bus tour of the city (Helsinki), which departed at a tourist kiosk not far from my hostel, at 11:00. We had a full bus and each of us could listen to the audio guide in a selection of 12 languages, including Latin (yes, you read right) and two dialects of Finnish.*

The bus was almost full, but no one cared to sit next to me despite the fact that I'd put on deodorant. [Perhaps I should have put on some trousers as well!] I sat at a left-side window while following the directions of the audio guide. The bus had a video camera mounted on top of the dash and several TVs throughout the bus, which enabled us to see what was happening ahead as we went along. I'd not seen that before, and I thought it was a good idea.

We drove around to the waterfront to see pleasure craft, parks, and the special platforms where the locals go to wash their large rugs in the sea each summer. At a large shipyard nearby, 60% of all icebreakers are built, along with numerous cruise ships. We stopped for a look at the Rock Church, a Lutheran Church built into a large rock formation with a dome full of windows providing natural light. Much of the ceiling was fitted with 22 kms of copper wire wound around. We heard about the various levels of education in the country. School is compulsory between 7 and 16, and is free with a hot meal served at lunchtime each day. As Finland is a bilingual country, everyone is taught Finnish and Swedish.

There is a large park dedicated to the world-famous Finnish composer Sibelius, and we stopped there to look at the abstract monument built in his honor. Three students from the Sibelius Music College were performing for the tourists playing trombone, cornet, and horn. We drove past the national parliament where we were told that the Finnish women were the first in Europe to vote, back in 1930. After that, we ran into a long procession of people in folk dress, and the police stopped the traffic for quite some time to let them cross the street.

[Diary] ... and soon I was in my hostel kitchen making milk coffee and snacking. A young Russian woman dropped by, but had difficulty figuring out how some things worked. She spoke no English and I can count my Russian vocabulary on one hand, but we managed to communicate. It's all in the hand gestures. Besides, if they don't understand, you simply talk louder, right?

[Diary] ... I headed for the [Olympic Stadium](#). I found the entrance to the stadium tower and rode an elevator the 11 floors to the top for a great look over the city. Japan had been awarded the 1940 games, but as it was at war with China, the games were given to Finland instead. However, the Soviet Union invaded Finland in 1939, so the 1940 games were cancelled, as were those in 1944. London hosted the 1948 games and, in 1952, they were finally held in Helsinki by which time some of the facilities were 12 years old!

[Diary] ... The trip involved many activities, the highlights of which were sea kayaking in a 2-man kayak with Juha, and then spending four great days with him and his wife, Johanna, at their cabin in the country for the longest day/[St. Juhannus Day](#) festival holiday. Each day, I cut wood and we enjoyed an hour in the wood-fired sauna. Ask a Finn and they'll tell you that the way a house is built is to start with the sauna and build around that!

3.3 [Iceland](#)

Official Name: Iceland (Ísland); Capital: Reykjavik (Reykjavík); Language: Icelandic (íslenska); Country Code: IS; Currency: Icelandic króna (kr or ISK)

Back in 1987, I had to attend a conference in Paris, France, and I wanted to take my wife and 3-year-old son. Back then, one of the cheapest ways to get to Europe from the east coast of the US was with Icelandair. However, that required being routed through [Reykjavik](#) in both directions, which adds on quite a few hours to the flying time. However, not having been to Iceland, we stopped over in the capital for three days on the way over, but just changed planes on the way back.

We arrived around 6:30 am at the brand new [Keflavik](#) international airport. We drove by bus to the (now) domestic airport near the capital. Although I should have expected it, I was startled to see lava fields in every direction with house lots literally carved out of the lava. Of course, the only trees were those planted near houses.

As it was summertime, it was twilight all night, with cars driving around with parking lights only.

One day, at great expense we rented a 4-wheel drive vehicle and set off into the countryside to a famous geyser. We saw beautiful fields of grass with Icelandic ponies grazing. Another day, we lazed in the hot, thermal pools, although I could only stand in very shallow water in the third-to-hottest one.

By the way, [Iceland is green](#), and [Greenland is icy](#); you figure it out!

3.4 [Norway](#)

Official Name: Kingdom of Norway (Norge); Capital: Oslo; Language: Norwegian (norsk) and various Sami dialects; Country Code: NO; Currency: Norwegian krone (kr or NOK)

Although my first visit to Norway wasn't until 2003, I went three more times over the following four years. And I very much enjoyed each visit. The first time, after my business ended, my wife and I spent a delightful week driving across to Bergen with Gunnar and Sonja (who we'd first met in St. Petersburg in 1992), staying in self-catering cottages.

[Diary] ... Plenty of traffic slowed our journey towards their cabin on a lake two hours to the north, but the picturesque scenery kept us occupied. On the way, we stopped at an orchard and picked 8 kg of plums and 5 kg of apples. Their cabin was comfortable, warm and in a pretty, rustic setting and ideal for relaxing. It came complete with outdoor plumbing, and 12-volt lighting powered by a solar panel. Gunnar and I went fishing, and put in nets. We caught two fish by rod. After a fine dinner of stroganoff, Gunnar and I played backgammon. (This became an evening ritual, with three games being played each night for the next week.) We slept well under fluffy down quilts.

[Diary] ... Next morning, we had nine fish in our nets, mostly bass and trout. (Many of them became dinner that evening.) After Sonja's "cowboy breakfast" of kidney beans, bacon, eggs, bread, and coffee, we packed up and left by noon, a civilized time to be starting the day's adventures. We traveled northwest towards the mountains, and saw many, very long, narrow lakes. We visited a very old wooden church (stavkirke) built in 1188. There had been an event there that day, with people in period costume. A lady entertained us by playing an old stringed instrument. At 3 pm, we had a late lunch at a picnic table by a creek. We stayed in two fairly basic cabins by a rushing river next to a sheep farm. Many of the sheep wore metal bells, which tinkled constantly as they grazed. The shower was in a separate communal building. We ate fresh fish with potatoes and salad.

[Diary] ... Instead of taking the new (not to mention expensive toll) 24 km tunnel through the mountains, we decided to take the windy, narrow road 43 km up and over them instead. The scenery was spectacular! At the town of Flåm, we took a railway trip 20 km, rising 800 meters through 20 tunnels; it was stunning.

[Diary] ... After leaving Bergen our trip took us south and east towards Oslo. We rode across the fjords on two ferries, and then drove along the shore of one fjord until we reached a small town called Sundal. We took a 45-minute (each way) hike to the glacier that was visible from our cabin. It was a great walk. The view of the glacial lake and the glacier itself was worth the effort.

My second visit was to the beautiful city of Trondheim.

[Diary] ... The Norwegian Air flight from Oslo to Trondheim took 50 minutes. We broke through the clouds to see rolling hills with forests and small farms, whose barns were all painted blood red. (Although such small farms are not economical, the government encourages traditional farming by providing generous subsidies.) The airport is small, but busy with budget airlines flying both domestic and international, as far away as the Greek islands. Trondheim is the 3rd largest city in Norway, and a former capital. It is more than a 1,000 years old.

[Diary] ... That evening, our hosts provided a formal dinner at a rather up-scale restaurant called Credo. There was no menu; the chef decides each day what to serve, and you eat whatever he has decided, although in my case, being allergic to shellfish, they did make some substitutions. There were many

courses; fortunately, most were quite small, but even then, I really didn't need the main one. Then came some disgustingly smelly cheese and a nice desert.

[Diary] ... Once again, our host provided a social event. A large bus picked up partners at the hotel then picked us up at the meeting site, and we drove to a village out of town. There, we were given a tour of a museum that consists mostly of wooden buildings moved there from towns and farms in the area to recreate times gone by. Our host was quite entertaining and sang traditional songs. An exotic dinner of old-style wild game followed.

[Diary] ... Once we reached the Norwegian coast, the ground was about 10% covered in snow as far as the eye could see. And the mountains to the west were white. We followed the big fjord right up to Oslo, and out my window, I got a great view of the downtown area and royal palace. As the Gardemoen Airport is some 50 kms north of the city, we flew over the suburbs, then forests and farms, complete with their classic blood-red painted barns. Most lakes and a few narrow sea inlets were still frozen. The airport is rather new and very nice, in the usual Scandinavian style architecture of wood, glass and steel. There was a long walk from the gate to the baggage hall, but once I got there, my bag came out right away.

3.5 Sweden

Official Name: Kingdom of Sweden (Sverige); Capital: Stockholm; Language: Swedish (swede); Country Code: SE; Currency: Swedish krone (kr or SEK)

My first visit was in 1990, and it was a quick trip over on the ferry to Helsingborg from the Danish town of Helsingør. I was on Swedish soil all of four hours. I noticed that while the Danes had all the good food and wine, the Swedes had all the furs, cars, and jewelry. Because of this, the ferry crossing the narrow straight between the two countries was loaded with each group crossing over to buy the other's specialties.

It wasn't until 20 years later that I returned, this time to Stockholm. It was wintertime with very low temperatures and cold wind. As it was not conducive to playing tourist, I added only one personal day to my business trip. I spent quite a bit of that at the museum for the famous warship Vasa, which sank in 1628 and was raised, largely intact, in 1961.

3.6 Conclusion

I'd be happy to go back to any country in Scandinavia; however, I must say that during my most recent trip to Denmark I fell in love with that country all over again. So much so that I have two trips on my Bucket List. Trip 1: A circle starting in Copenhagen, across to Sweden, then to the Danish island of Bornholm, to the German island of Rügen, and back to Copenhagen. Trip 2: A walking trip around the island of Ærø, off the south coast of Funen, and possibly around some other islands in the area.

The taxes in Scandinavia may be high, but the countries have excellent social systems, strong currencies, and a high standard of living. They can serve as a good model for others.

4. March 2014, “A Little Bit of Mathematics”

Several years ago, I moved out into the country. By that time, I'd been without cable/pay TV for a couple of years, relying instead on a digital antenna for 30-odd free, over-the-air channels. However, at my new location, the antenna could not pick up any signals. After thinking about the implications for no more than 30 seconds, I decided that my life would be just fine with no TV reception at all. And so, I turned to my reference library, which had been gathering dust for many years. After a cursory glance, I settled on a couple of books on introductory mathematics, including one from my Year 12 High School class in 1969. [By the way, in Australia the abbreviated form of the word *mathematics* is *maths*, while in the US it is *math*. Go figure!] Yes, Dear Reader, I've been reading math books for recreation, but then, I've never been accused of being normal!

In this essay, I'll refresh your memory about some basics, and probably introduce you to some formal terminology for the things you've been using for years. As you read, you might find it useful to refer to some related essays, including the following: [August 2012, “What is Normal: Part 5. Numbers and Counting Systems,”](#) [December 2012, “Symbols and Marks,”](#) and [March 2013, “What is Normal: Part 6. Weights and Measures.”](#)

There is not a test, per se, at the end of this essay; however, as you'll read in “Conclusion,” **Never say Never!**

4.1 Basic Arithmetic

For most of us, the term *literacy* implies the ability to read and write. However, in general, it also includes the idea of proficiency with basic numeric operations. We know these collectively as arithmetic, so that's where I'll start. [According to Wikipedia, arithmetic is the oldest and most elementary branch of mathematics.]

The fundamental *operations* one can perform on pairs of numbers are *addition*, *subtraction*, *multiplication*, and *division*, which are represented by the symbols + (plus), – (minus), × (multiply), and ÷ (divide), respectively. [Not surprisingly, calculators and computer programs that emulate calculators have these mathematical symbols as keys. However, only the first of these symbols appears on a standard computer keyboard. Yes, there is a “-” key, but that's a hyphen; from a typesetting viewpoint, the minus character is wider. One of the most common uses of writing these operations is in computer programming, where the corresponding symbols typically used are +, -, *, and /.]

Let's start with the simplest kind of operation, addition, and consider the following *expression*, which contains two *terms*, the *whole numbers* 1 and 2:

$$1 + 2$$

The result—called the *sum*—is 3. Technically, both terms are called *addends*. Addition is commutative; that is, the two terms can be swapped over without affecting the result.

Let's look at subtraction:

$$5 - 1$$

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The result—called the *difference*—is 4. Subtraction is not commutative; $5 - 1$ is quite different from $1 - 5$. The left-hand term is called the *minuend*, while the right-hand term is called the *subtrahend*.

Here's an example of multiplication:

$$2 \times 5$$

The result—called the *product*—is 10. Even though multiplication is commutative, the terms have different names, the left-hand one being the *multiplicand* while the right-hand one is the *multiplier*. (Sometimes, both terms are called *factors*.)

Consider the following case of division:

$$13 \div 5$$

The main result—called the *quotient*—is 2, and the secondary result—called the *remainder*—is 3. Clearly, division is not commutative. The left-hand term is the *dividend* while the right-hand one is the *divisor*, except on Wednesdays between 10 and 11 pm, when they are known as *Jack* and *Mary*, respectively. [I'm just checking to see if you really are reading this carefully.]

Oftentimes, we'd like to have an arithmetic expression that contains more than two terms. To understand the meaning of such expressions, we need to know about associativity. Consider the following:

$$3 + 5 + 2$$

In this case, the 3 and 5 are added first, and the result is added to 2, giving 10. We say that addition is left-associative. We can write this explicitly using (redundant) *grouping parentheses*, as follows:

$$(3 + 5) + 2$$

(Subtraction, multiplication, and division are also left-associative.) What if we reposition the parentheses, as follows:

$$3 + (5 + 2)$$

No problem, we still get the result 10. A similar situation occurs with two multiplications, but not with two subtractions or two divisions.

Consider the following expression:

$$3 + 5 \times 4 - 1$$

Now we have several different operators. It turns out that multiplication and division have (the same) higher precedence than addition and subtraction, which have the same lower precedence. Adding redundant grouping parentheses to indicate precedence and associativity, we get:

$$(3 + (5 \times 4)) - 1$$

which results in $(3 + 20) - 1 \rightarrow 23 - 1 \rightarrow 22$.

We can override precedence using grouping parentheses, as follows:

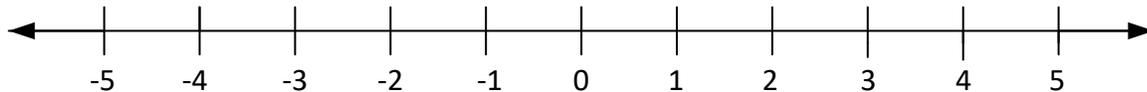
$$(3 + 5) \times (4 - 1)$$

which results in $8 \times 3 \rightarrow 24$.

4.2 Zero, Negative Numbers, and Infinity

The concept of zero has been around for a good while. In general, people aren't unduly confused by a count of "none." However, negative numbers cause some people great confusion. How can you have fewer than none of anything? [Note carefully that I did not say "less than none." See "Conclusion" below.] Of course, some of these same people have overdrawn their bank accounts, so they really have experienced having fewer than zero of their own dollars!

The idea that revolutionized things with respect to numbers was the invention of the number line, a horizontal line containing a point for each number with equal spacing between whole numbers. In the drawing below, the line segment shows -5 on the left and $+5$ on the right. However, as shown by the arrows, the line extends indefinitely in each direction, and we talk about the line's so-called "limits" as being minus infinity ($-\infty$) and plus infinity ($+\infty$), respectively.



When we think of numbers simply being points on this line, zero is just another point, and so are negative numbers. And it certainly helps us deal with arithmetic expressions such as $4 - 6$, whose result is -2 . It also allows us to deal with numbers whose values are "between the whole numbers." [It's also useful to use this line to represent historic time. The point 0 represents the Birth of Christ, with the year AD 1 starting immediately to the right, and the year 1 BC ending immediately to the left. As shown, there is no year 0, only a time-instant of zero.]

There is one unusual kind of division expression, that having a divisor of zero. Just how many zeros are there in any value? In general, mathematicians consider the result to be undefined. [In most modern computers, a negative whole number divided by zero results in minus infinity, while a positive whole number divided by zero results in plus infinity. This allows computers to do useful work with infinities even though they really don't exist. Of course, we mere mortals might then ask such questions as, "If infinity is the largest value, why can't I add 1 to it?" and "If there are infinity zeros in 1, how can there only be infinity zeros in 2? Shouldn't there be twice as many zeros in 2?" Of course, the correct response to these questions is, "Shut up and eat your vegetables, smarty pants!" And to make things really interesting, zero divided by zero results in a NaN, which stands for "Not-a-Number." Of course, computers can do useful things with these as well, but I wouldn't lose any sleep worrying about that if I were you.]

4.3 Fractions

According to Wikipedia, 'A fraction (from Latin: *fractus*, "broken") represents a part of a whole or, more generally, any number of equal parts. When spoken in everyday English, a fraction describes how many parts of a certain size there are, for example, one-half, eight-fifths, three-quarters.'

A fraction is written with a *numerator* overtop of a *denominator*, separated by a horizontal or slanted line; for example, $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{3}{8}$, and $\frac{27}{100}$ represent a half, three quarters, three eighths, and 27 hundredths, respectively. In general, if the value of the numerator is smaller than that of the denominator, we have a *proper fraction*; otherwise, we have an *improper fraction*.

I live in a non-metric country, and on the ruler I have in front of me I see divisions of $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{8}$, and $\frac{1}{16}$ of an inch. Some typewriters even had the first two of these as keys; however, I've never seen them on a computer keyboard. In my world, I see fractions on a regular basis. Some examples are:

- When I write a check to pay a bill (yes, I'm old-fashioned), as well as writing the amount as a number, I must also write it in words, except that the fractional dollar part must be written as a fraction. For example, a check for \$23.76 would say "Twenty-Three dollars and $\frac{76}{100}$ ". [By the way, if you use Microsoft Word, it provides a *field code* that can convert a financial amount expressed as a number into the corresponding text for a check.]
- Last week, I bought gasoline and the price was shown on an advertising board outside the gas station. It said, \$3.57 $\frac{9}{10}$ per gallon. Clearly this is a marketing ploy in that the fraction is not so easy to read and you are supposed to think the price is \$3.57 when it's almost \$3.58. My guess is that most commuters don't even notice.
- Originally, the U.S. dollar's value was based on the value of the Spanish *real*, a silver dollar that could be divided into eight parts. As a result, when the U.S. stock market began, stock values were based on one-eighth fractions. [In the US, an eighth was called a *bit*—a value of $12\frac{1}{2}$ cents—so a quarter was worth two bits. Such usage of this term occurs in literature and in the lyrics of popular songs.]

In every-day English, we usually use *fraction* to mean a small amount, as in, "He only saved a fraction of his take-home pay." Most likely, that fraction would be significantly less than 5%.

From the deep, dark recesses of my mind, I recall a puzzle from my early school days. It goes something like this (and clearly is intended to be spoken rather than written): A man is locked inside a room that contains only a table. How does he get out? Well, he rubs his finger on the wall until he develops a *sore*, *homophone* of *saw*. He uses that saw to cut the table in half. Now two halves make a *whole*—which is a homophone for *hole*—and he crawled out that hole.

4.4 Percentages

According to Wikipedia, 'a percentage is a number or *ratio* expressed as a fraction of 100. It is often denoted using the *percent sign*, "%". For example, did you know that 76% of all statistics are made up on the spot? Of course, this is a joke; it's actually 59%! So, by writing 76%, I mean "76 out of every 100," or, written as a fraction, $\frac{76}{100}$.

Here in the US, most states (and some cities and counties) levy a sales tax on most items sold commercially. In my state, Virginia, that rate is 5.3%; that's 5.3 cents for every 100 cents (\$1) of the

purchase price. Now what confuses many foreign visitors to the US is that the amount of sales tax is *not* included in the advertised price. So, when they see something on sale for \$4.99, they hand over \$5 to the cashier expecting to get one cent change. However, they are politely told they need more to cover the sales tax. Now, strictly speaking, 5.3% of \$4.99 is 26.4 cents, but as we have no coins of smaller value than 1 cent, that gets rounded down to 26 cents, making a total bill of \$5.25.

Another common use of percentages is in tipping. In the US it is pretty standard to tip a waiter 15% for decent service at a table. However, if one is eating at a counter, 10% is about right. That's 15 and 10 cents, respectively, for every dollar of the bill.

Every day in the news, we're told how high the unemployment rate is, as a percentage. In some areas it's as high as 15–20%; that's 15–20 per hundred of all able-bodied people of working age.

Then there's the interest rate on savings accounts and loans.

Short of doing a (possibly) complicated calculation, how then is one to calculate exactly or to estimate a percentage? In most cases, one can get a reasonable estimate. In the case of a 10% tip, one simply calculates one-tenth of the total by taking the total and moving the decimal place one position to the left. For example, a 10% tip on a bill of \$15.67 is \$1.57 (after rounding the 1.567 up to 1.57), which when added together comes to \$17.44. In the case of a 15% tip, calculate a 10% tip then add to that half as much again. So, a \$15% tip on \$15.67 comes to \$1.57 + \$0.77 (or \$0.78). In the case of the 5.3% sales tax, calculate 10%, then halve that to get 5%, and then add a smidgen. Of course, calculators or apps on a mobile phone will do all this for you, but if you don't use your "little grey cells" occasionally, don't be surprised if they atrophy.

Back in the 1960's, I recall my father having a *Ready Reckoner*, which according to Wikipedia, is a book "aimed at traders that catalogued the results of various routine calculations such as the percentages or multiples of various sums of money."

4.5 Weapons of Math Instruction

A number of years ago, soon after airport security started to get Über-serious here in the US, the following, very clever, piece of writing appeared. [Unfortunately, I have not been able to track down the author's name.

At New York's Kennedy airport today, an individual later discovered to be a public school teacher was arrested trying to board a flight while in possession of a ruler, a protractor, a set square, a slide rule, and a calculator.

At a morning press conference, Attorney General John Ashcroft said he believes the man is a member of the notorious *al-gebra* movement. He is being charged by the FBI with carrying weapons of math instruction.

"Al-gebra is a fearsome cult.", Ashcroft said. "They desire average solutions by means and extremes, and sometimes go off on tangents in a search of absolute value. They use secret code names like "x" and "y" and refer to themselves as "unknowns," but we have determined they belong to a common denominator of the axis of medieval with coordinates in every country.

"As the Greek philanderer Isosceles used to say, there are 3 sides to every triangle," Ashcroft declared.

When asked to comment on the arrest, President Bush said, "If God had wanted us to have better weapons of math instruction, He would have given us more fingers and toes."

"I am gratified that our government has given us a sine that it is intent on protracting us from these math-dogs who are willing to disintegrate us with calculus disregard. Murky statisticians love to inflict pain on every sphere of influence," the President said, adding: "Under the circumferences, we must differentiate their root, make our point, and draw the line."

President Bush warned, "These weapons of math instruction have the potential to decimal everything in their math on a scalene never before seen unless we become exponents of a Higher Power and begin to factor-in random facts of vertex."

Attorney General Ashcroft said, "As our Great Leader would say, read my ellipse. Here is one principle he is uncertainty of: though they continue to multiply, their days are numbered as the hypotenuse tightens around their necks."

4.6 Conclusion

Back in the 1980's, I used to fly through Boston's Logan airport (BOS) on a very regular basis. At that time, the city had a growing problem with teenage pregnancies and young girls subsequently dropping out of high school. To that end, there was a very clever advertising campaign, signs for which were posted on the jet ways going to/from the planes. Next to a picture of a pregnant girl was the text, "Make sure your daughter learns how to add and subtract before she learns how to multiply!"

Regarding my earlier comment about tests and "Never say Never," I'm reminded of the orientation night I spent at my son's high school the week after he started his freshman (first) year. As a group, the parents spent 10 minutes with each teacher with whom their child was taking a class. The math teacher said, "Before you tell me that you learned all this stuff when you were in school, but never ever found a use for it, consider the following" and he projected one of Gary Larson's Far Side cartoons. The picture showed a man waiting for admission at the Pearly Gates of Heaven. St. Peter said that although the records showed the man had lived a decent life, before he could be admitted, he had to answer one question. "Two trains are going in opposite directions ..." Many of us have been faced with such questions in school math class, so you just never know when you might need something you learned a long time ago. [In my case, 16 years after I was exposed to differential calculus for the first time, I actually found my one and only use for it, in a computer program I was working on that monitored and controlled hydroelectric dams. Who'd have thought?]

There's an old joke about asking a lawyer a question like, "What answer do you get when you add 10 and 15?" The lawyer replies, "What answer do you want?"

I'll end with one of my pet peeves: People insist on misusing the term number when they really mean digit. A number is made up of one or more digits. A number cannot contain another number! Now that you've been reminded about this, watch out for the number-vs.-digit police (who sometimes double as the fewer-vs.-less police as well).

5. April 2014, "Travel: Memories of Ireland and the UK"

As with previous installments in this series, I'll borrow from my diaries. I'll also add other commentary. I've deliberately chosen to not include any photos, as you can see pictures (and plenty of other information) by following the on-line links.

5.1 Ireland

Official Name: Republic of Ireland (Éire); Capital: Dublin (Baile Átha Cliath); Language: English and Irish Gaelic (Gaeilge); Country Code: IE; Currency: Euro (previously, the Irish pound [punt])

My first trip to Ireland was in 2001 with my wife, and started with a flight from the US to the Shannon Airport outside Limerick. After two nights there, we spent two weeks driving around the southwest counties of Kerry and Cork, staying with host families and Farmhouse Bed & Breakfasts. [Speaking of limerick, "There was a young man from the sticks; Who took to writing limericks; But he gave up the sport; Because he made them too short."]

[Diary] At Foynes we toured the Flying Boat Museum. (Foynes was the eastern terminal of the Trans-Atlantic flying boat services of the 1930s and 1940s.) Then we wandered along the Shannon estuary. We pulled into a picnic area and noticed a metal arch at each end of the pullout that we decided was to let cars in, but to keep out gypsies and their wagons. Travelers (the more polite term for gypsies) had quite a presence in Ireland.

[Diary] Contrary to our guidebook, our host suggested we explore the Dingle Peninsula by going over the Conor Pass first rather than at the end of the day. We stopped many times to shoot video. What a picturesque drive it was. At one point we climbed the rocks to a mountain lake. Dingle, a busy port town, was at the end of the pass. A bottle-nosed dolphin, Fungie, had taken up residence in the harbor and provided hours of amusement for tourists and locals. We decided to continue our tour and explore the town later. Of particular interest were the 5,000-year-old beehive dwellings made of stone and used by the early Christians.

[Diary] After dinner, we drove south on the Ring of Kerry, turning off to a beach overlooking the Inch Peninsula. The wind whipped up the waves in the ocean, but the more sheltered marshy area was quite calm. Many of the fields in which crops were grown were protected by two-to-three-foot hedges/fences. Watching the gale force wind that day showed us how practical this idea was. A house under construction had partially collapsed due to the wind.

[Diary] Next stop was Muckross House, built in 1843, visited by Queen Victoria in 1861, and given to the Irish Government by an American, Senator Vincent. We strolled around the stately home, through the vast gardens and into the craft center. Ladies View, so named because Queen Victoria and her ladies visited this spot, offered a spectacular look back up the Killarney Valley. We stopped in the town of Kenmore and walked to a ring of stones which supposedly had ties to the Druids. Quite a few sites have been excavated in different parts of Ireland.

[Diary] In June 1985, an Air India jumbo jet blew up off this Irish coast. Near the town of Ahakista, the Irish people created a memorial garden with flowers, a sundial, and a wall on which the names of all the victims are inscribed.

[Diary] We donned hiking boots and coats and set off to see the stone circle that was part of the walking trails on the Sheep's Head Peninsula. This part of the trail had been opened the previous year by the U.S. ambassador to Ireland. We traipsed across tundra-like terrain, through the prickly heather, furze, and ferns. After about 25 minutes, we came to a stone stile and back onto a road that eventually led to our farm.

[Diary] At 10 am, we left for Blarney and the famous castle. We decided to try lesser roads, and were surprised to find the best road of our trip so far. With only a few minor hitches, we pulled into the castle parking lot at 11 am. The entrance fee was reasonable at £3.50. The grounds were quite extensive, and the castle rather imposing up on the hill. The line to climb to the top to see/kiss the Blarney Stone was quite long, but it kept moving, and we chatted with others in line. Many of these folk were on organized tours, seeing the UK and Ireland in 10 days. (We were glad we chose to take our time.) We were inside the castle as the first rain of the day descended upon us. By the time we came outside at the top, it had stopped. Some of the stones were quite slippery and required extra care. The myth suggests that kissing the stone gives one the gift of the gab. I passed, as the Jaeschkes don't need any help in that department!

[Diary] Cobh (pronounced Cove) was our next destination. We circled around Cork, and, again, despite some confusing road signs, we found the N25 and Great Island on which the port town of Cobh can be found. This was the last port of call for the Titanic, and many of the 2,000 victims of the Lusitania (sunk during WWI) were buried there. Many Irish immigrants left their homeland from this port.

[Diary] Our next B&B was Killmuckey House, an impressive old home on a beef and dairy farm. We were the only guests, and so had the pick of the three rooms. We chose the brightest one. After cups of tea, we read and relaxed, a perfect way to spend part of a vacation. The weather continued to alternate between warm, sunny periods and showers. It was truly a charming, peaceful setting. At about 7 pm we drove into Castlematyr to find that the only pub serving food had closed its kitchen early. We drove to the shore at Garryvoe and, from a mobile kitchen, enjoyed sausages, fish and chips and a burger by the beach.

In December 2009, as one does, I met a Dublin-based couple at the Tourist Office in Caen, Normandy, France. We'd gone there to get information only to find it closed on Mondays, so we got talking and exchanged contact information. A year later, when I was making plans to go to Belfast, I decided to add on a week of play in and around Dublin, so I sent them mail to see about meeting up with them for a meal. They responded and invited me to stay two nights, and I accepted.

[Diary] At noon, we dressed warmly and ventured out. Although it was quite cold, the sun was shining, and the wind was not blowing. We drove to some scenic overlooks and then to Howth, a suburb with a large harbor for fishing and recreational boats. It was quite busy there with people eating brunch/lunch and shopping at the open-air market. We walked out on the sea wall to the small lighthouse and then around the town a bit. At the market, we ate bratwursts at the German food stall and then stopped at a nearby café for coffee, chai latte, and pastries. I had a very nice, buttered scone with jam.

[Diary] I'd made a plan to tour some cultural sites, and the first stop was the famous Trinity College Library, home of the equally famous Book of Kells, perhaps the finest illustrated book of the four Christian Gospels: Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John. For €5, I got an audio guide, which made the visit much more interesting. The self-guided tour ended in the Long Room, which housed some 200,000 of the library's books shelved between two long rows of busts of famous Irish scholars. The oldest harp in Ireland was also on exhibit. It's the one featured on Irish Euro coins.

[Diary] Next, it was on to Dublin Castle and Christchurch to have a look, and then to St. Patrick's Cathedral (or should I say St. Padraig's Cathedral?) where Jonathon Swift was buried. Next up was the National Museum (Anthropology). The good news was that admission was free; the bad news was that it too was closed on Mondays. Nearby was the National Gallery. The good news was that it too was free; the bad news was that it was open! I tried very hard to appreciate the paintings, but failed to get excited. Across the street was a statue of Oscar Wilde, so I went to pay my respects only to find the area cordoned off for repairs. However, I did manage to get a glimpse of his head through the trees. It was not my day, apparently.

[Diary] At 8:15 am at my Bed & Breakfast, I went down for breakfast where two young Egyptian men were eating. I ordered a cooked breakfast half of which I packed for Ron (as in "later on"). I had noticed a set of framed quotes from famous Irish literary people, mounted on the wall. The one that most amused me was from George Bernard Shaw, "Dancing is a vertical expression of a horizontal desire". Hmm.

I walked to the River Liffey and along one bank looking at some interesting architecture both old and new. What caught my eye was the new Samuel Beckett Bridge that looked like a huge harp hanging over the river with the cables being the strings. I came to O'Connell Bridge, which has the distinction of being wider than it is long. I strolled up the very busy O'Connell Street passed the stainless-steel millennium Spire to the Garden of Remembrance, which honors those who helped win Irish independence in 1921. Opposite was another gallery, so I decided once again to try to increase my art-appreciation quotient. The best I can say was that the gallery had seats in every hall, so a weary traveler with bad knees could sit and rest and look at the paintings. The coffee shop was wonderful. I spent a whole hour there keeping warm, sipping very strong coffee, and working on some Sudoku puzzles.

I wandered through the main shopping streets to the river and back to Dublin Castle and the Beatty Library. Mr. Beatty was an American who had made his fortune in mining, and had lived much of his life in London and Dublin. Along the way, he collected a variety of things including very rare and ancient manuscripts most of which had some religious significance. He donated that collection to Ireland and the Library was built to house it. I was impressed with the man and the small collection that was on display.

[Diary] It had rained during the night and the leaf-covered sidewalks were a bit slippery. I walked to a rather swank hotel nearby, which was my closest tour pick-up point. The coach arrived at 9:30 and set off to pick up 25-odd others at various hotels and meeting places before heading out of town at 10:30. First stop was the Hill of Tara, at one-time the home of a large complex of wooden buildings from which the whole country was ruled. There is not much to see there now apart from old markers and mounds,

however. From there, we drove down into the Boyne Valley where in 1690 the Protestant William of Orange (husband of Queen Mary) defeated his Catholic father-in-law, deposed King James, at the Battle of the Boyne.

At New Grange, we stopped for three hours. From the visitor's center, we rode a small bus to the huge earthen mound that had been excavated only 50 years earlier, perfectly preserved from when it was constructed 1,000 years before Egypt's pyramids were built. We went inside the narrow passageway and saw a simulation of sunlight coming in through a shaft above the entrance at noon on the midwinter's solstice. (To experience that on the actual day, one must be a winner of a national lottery for that purpose.)

[Diary] I rode the light rail to the seaside town of Bray, where I found a B&B for two nights. Next morning, I headed south along the boardwalk to Bray Head. It was a steady climb up a paved road and the view back over the town and its bay were great. The cliff-top walk south to Greystones was 6 km, and having nothing better to do I set out. There had been rain a few days earlier, so the path had mud in places, but it was not too bad. The path was 50+ feet above the train line, which in turn was 50+ feet above the Irish Sea. The hillside kept most of the wind away until the 4-km mark where the trail topped the cliffs and was completely exposed to the elements. There were only a few people out and I met up with two women from Belfast, a German family, and four young women from Slovakia. Near Greystones, the path had collapsed into the sea and a detour with tall fences on either side had been built across a farmer's field.

[Diary] Breakfast was a big affair with two sausages, three rashers of bacon, an egg, toast, tea, and juice. As was my usual practice, I ate half and packed the rest into my emergency ration kit. Back in my room, I packed my bag and finished my novel. I spent quality time with the resident dog, an aging Labrador who bonded with me in seconds. Then I bid farewell and stepped out into a glorious day, especially for November. The sun was streaming down and there was no wind. I had plenty of time, so I walked along the boardwalk watching people with dogs playing in and near the water. At the marina, a flock of gulls, geese, and swans fought for the bread people were feeding them. I walked out to the end of the seawall that protected the marina, and chatted with a retired woman who was very friendly. After a while, three of her friends joined us and we sat and chatted in the sun, lamenting the fact that no one had brought tea and scones!

5.2 The UK

Official Name: The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; Capital: London; Language: English; Country Code: GB (although UK is used as an Internet address suffix); Currency: Pound sterling. Great Britain is the island containing England, Scotland, and Wales.

5.2.1 England

Well now, where to begin? I've been to England and London many times. From the dozens of diary pages, I've come up with the following handful of extracts:

[Diary from Bath] I rode a taxi to my very swank hotel, the Bath Priory, a member of a small luxury hotel chain. The normal rate was about £250 pounds (US\$400) per night, but we had some sort of corporate deal that made it halfway decent. We had very special individual service, the whole nine

yards; it was a bit posh, in fact. I expected I'd have to say "Please" when I ask them "I say old bean. Could you please pass the bloody potatoes?" All the rooms were named for flowers; I was assigned "Marigold."

That night, a company hosted a reception for 25 people. It was a rather nice affair. Being in a private dining room, and most of us being your typical technical computer nerds, we didn't wear ties or jackets, apparently, a rule inviolate in the main dining room at dinnertime. (In fact, I'm sure that some didn't even wear socks, although I don't remember that being a requirement in the posted dress code.) Well, it was a typical up-scale restaurant: the more expensive the dish, the bigger the plate, the smaller the serving, and the more artistic. In fact, I'd say that the appetizer and dessert looked more artistic than most art I'd seen, but then, I'd been known to have my taste in my mouth!

Off the entrance hall there was a medium-sized parlor/reading room, with comfortable chairs, paintings and books. They had a collection of Robert Louis Stevenson's work, a set of 1910 11th edition Encyclopedia Britannica, Diaries of The French Revolution, lots of English classics, and so forth. Just the sort of thing a country squire would have. (I made notes for my dream house plan.)

The adjacent larger parlor was, how shall I say, overrun with large deep comfortable chairs and cushions, many oil paintings (of people paying polo, cricket and rugby, of military officers, and numerous other topics), objects of art, and other quaint stuff. From here, one could exit onto the patio that overlooked the croquet lawn, fountains, and large garden. As the sun shone down, I must say that it did look rather impressive, what! (I made more notes for my dream house.)

[Diary from Oxford] We arrived in a slight drizzle, but that stopped as we left the station. We boarded a double-decker bus for an orientation tour of this university city. We were the only passengers, so we sat upstairs in the open, next to the guide. After the tour we started a walking tour at Christ Church, the best known of the many colleges there. While there is one big university, and all the students mix in for classes, they live and dine in their own colleges, some of which date back many hundreds of years. Christ Church has the big cathedral built by Cardinal Wolsey, who then fell out of favor with Henry VIII, who then suggested to Wolsey that it would be good for his health to give it to the King, who made it his own design. (Oh, it's good to be King!) Lewis Carroll (author of Alice in Wonderland) was a math tutor there, and numerous references to his characters are embodied in stained glass in the dining hall.

Back in Australia, my first car was a Morris Minor, so I was pleasantly surprised to discover that William Morris had started out in Oxford with a bicycle shop and then built his first cars in a factory on the edge of town. This led to the world-famous Mini, which BMW had taken over and launched a new model. (Shagadelic Baby! as Austin Powers might say.) The MG (Morris Garage) sports car was also well known.

[Diary from London] We set off for Abbey Road to see the studios made famous by the Beatles, although, it turned out, those studios were already quite well known for other reasons. We walked on the famous Zebra crossing that is featured on the Beatles' album "Abbey Road". ... Then it was on to King's Cross station, and Saint Pancras, the wonderful church/train station next door. After a short walk we were at the British Library, opened only two years earlier. It houses the Magna Carta, an original Shakespeare folio, some very fancy Korans, numerous other literary treasures, and, last but by no means least, Beatles lyrics written on airline napkins and scrap paper. In the multimedia room we

looked over some rare books that have been digitized, including Da Vinci's notebook. He wrote his Italian backwards (right-to-left), so you needed a mirror to read it. Of course, the computer reversed it for us.

[Diary from [County Kent](#)] From Hastings we took a 15-minute ride to the town of Battle, some six miles to the north. The [Battle of Hastings](#) actually took place there in 1066 resulting in William the Conqueror's whipping Harold, but only just. Apparently, after killing all those Saxons, William decided to build an abbey on the site as part of his penance. In the years that followed, the town of Battle grew up around [Battle Abbey](#). At the battlefield tour office, we bought our tickets, got our audio wand, and headed out around the grounds, museum, and battlefield for a narrated tour. The audio wand allowed us to get commentary from the point of view of a Saxon soldier, a Norman knight, and Harold's wife who was part of his medical support team. Of course, the two sides had different versions of the story.

In May and June of 2005, I hiked the [Thames Path](#) (184 miles/294 km) along the Thames River. For details, see my [essay](#).

5.2.2 [Scotland](#)

My family and I spent a week there using a Brit-Rail pass. We started out in [Edinburgh](#) where we spent two nice days playing tourist (visiting the [castle](#) and its [Mons Meg cannon](#), [Holy Rood Palace](#), and so on) and eating pub food. Next was [Aberdeen](#), the center for North Sea oil activities. In the north, we spent half a day in [Inverness](#) where I bought a beautiful woolen sweater hand-made by a craftswoman from the remote islands. [As I write this, it's snowing and tonight's temperatures are forecast to be below zero Fahrenheit, so that sweater might come in handy, especially if the power goes out!]

We had a delightful and low-key weekend in [Kyle of Lochalsh](#) staying in a private home. From there, we took the short ferry ride across to the [Isle of Skye](#) and a bus down to Armidale, and the ferry back to the mainland and Fort William.

We'd been making up our plan as we traveled, but once we discovered that Glasgow was hosting an international garden festival, we found it impossible to find any accommodations in that area. As such, we looked at the map of the area 50+ miles to the northwest of Glasgow, and picked a place where we'd get off the train and try to find a place to stay there. As the train pulled out of the station, we found ourselves the only ones who got off, and that the station was unmanned. There were signs to two neighboring villages: Tarbet and Arrochar. Although both were within a short walking distance, we chose the closer one, Tarbet. On the edge of town, we found a B&B with a nice room, so we signed up for two nights. Although our choice of train station had been purely arbitrary, we found ourselves in the town that tourists use to visit the famed [Loch Lomond](#), whose banks were "just down the hill from the pub." We did the obligatory boat tour of the loch, only to be "attacked" by two Royal Air Force jets that were practicing a bombing run on the dam nearby. To have jets come at you upwind at only hundreds of feet over your head, and then have a sonic boom hit you after they were well passed is quite an experience, not to mention cause for an underwear change!

On the final day of our rail pass, we spent the afternoon walking around [Glasgow](#).

5.2.3 Wales

Our visit here started in Bangor, where we stayed two nights in a B&B. Next up, we were hosted by a 40-something single man who lived in a converted country chapel. One novel feature was that the front door was a typical heavy wooden church-door affair, and the key for it was “hidden” under a stone on top of the wall, in plain view! On our final morning, we helped our host repair bicycles in his bike-rental shop in town. After that, we had a rest day while staying at a country pub. We were the only guests, and the publican was happy to have the company. We enjoyed walking on rights-of-way across fields, and eating lunch in front of a roaring fire.

We stayed with a second host family where the wife worked while the inventor-husband ran the house. We were introduced to several different kinds of tandem bicycles, wild-berry picking, and sleeping in a tent in the garden. The final host was a country doctor husband and wife, who were out on their rounds each day. He was a Quaker and she was an atheist, an interesting combination. This was not long after the Chernobyl disaster, and the people of this Welsh village were hosting 20–30 children from the affected area, to give them a psychological as well as medical respite. The last night of the trip was spent in Cardiff. [This was our first time as a family staying with hosts from Servas International.]

5.2.4 Northern Ireland

I've been to Northern Ireland only once, for a business conference in 2010. To get there, I flew into Dublin and took a bus to Belfast. I departed by train back to Dublin. Although it rained hard much of the week I was there, I was able to visit some of the countryside and to sample some great food and hospitality.

[Diary] ... The Europa Hotel was a rather posh place with a grand lobby complete with open fireplace radiating quite some heat. The staff was ever so happy to have me as a guest for seven nights at the paltry cost of £90 per night, taxes and full breakfast included. However, internet access was not. I rode the lift to the 9th floor and opened the door to my room. As soon as I saw the bed, I thought there must be some mistake. Although it was a double, it was designed for two leprechauns! And the writing table certainly had character; that is, either the legs had different lengths, or the floor was uneven. Tea- and coffee-making facilities were provided, as is the typical British Commonwealth custom. I unpacked and settled in. I'd been “on the road” 17½ hours.

Now I'm sure some readers will be interested in knowing whether it really is safe these days in Northern Ireland. I must say that I had been wondering that myself, so I picked up a daily paper in the hotel lobby and here's the stories splashed across the front page: “Officers injured in bomb ambush” (police officers were bombed as they responded to a burglary call); “Hunt on for kidnap gang;” and “Dentist trial to start later this month” (a dentist and his lover were to go on trial for murdering their previous partners). There was one bit of good news, however. The Farming Life insert proclaimed, “Beef producers look to happy new year.” Well, that was a relief; just when I was starting to think this might be a dangerous place. [One factoid I learned that day was that my hotel, The Europa, had been bombed or threatened more than 35 times during The Troubles, which ended in the late 90's.]

[Diary] ... On our free day, a colleague and I rented a car. After a long drive, we came to the main natural attraction of Northern Ireland—Giant's Causeway—an extensive basalt rock collection of 4-, 5-,

and 6-sided vertical columns of rock formed after a huge volcanic eruption some 60 million years ago. We hiked down to the water's edge and climbed all over the formations along with other tourists. Then we climbed a trail and hiked a ways to see a huge amphitheater containing some of the tallest and best column sets. Then we hiked up to the top of the cliffs and into the teeth of a strong and cold wind back to the visitor center. After all that exercise and the cold, we were well and truly ready for a hot meal, and we settled into the hotel nearby for a great lunch.

[Diary] ... I walked with a group of fellow conference delegates to the town hall where some 50 of us were given a guided tour. The rest of the delegates joined us afterwards and we all had drinks and appetizers to the sounds of a string quartet. From there, we moved into a large dining room and sat at circular tables of 7–8 people. The deputy Lord Mayor gave us a rousing welcome in a very good speech, and then the food was served. To start with there was hot pan-seared salmon with herbed potato bread and dulse (seaweed) cream. The main course was braised Northern Ireland lamb shank with champ (mashed potatoes with herbs), spring greens (beans), and baby carrots and caramelized shallots, served in Bushmills (local whiskey) and red currant jus. Dessert was Irish rhubarb and champagne crême Brulee with Grenadine (liquor), roasted rhubarb and Irish butter shortbread. That was followed by tea and coffee. Throughout the meal, waiters served red wine from France, white wine from Chile, and bottled water from England's Blenheim Palace grounds (Churchill's ancestral home near Oxford).

Some speeches followed, a man played traditional tunes on different flutes, and four colleens danced some traditional steps accompanied by recorded music. I sat next to a retired Irish couple and we spent the evening discussing all kinds of topics relating to the Republic and Northern Ireland. It was quite an interesting history lesson.

[Diary] ... The skies turned dark soon after we departed Belfast and rain fell. Several Irish Republic delegates and I talked most of the 2:20-hour train journey to Dublin comparing all sorts of things in our respective countries, and getting an Irish history lesson as we crossed the famous River Boyne.

5.3 Conclusion

Although I'd be happy to visit or revisit numerous places in Ireland and the UK, I have only one major thing on my bucket list for that part of the world. And that is a visit to Yorkshire. Yes, I might have a romantic notion of it from James Heriot's books and TV series, "All Creatures Great and Small," but I'd like to go anyway. I must admit, however, that I have also thought about hiking the Hadrian's Wall path. Yet deep in my heart I know that truly is a crazy idea.

I'll end with the following anecdote: A Scotsman and an Englishman were talking about the relative merits of their heritage, and the Englishman said, "By God, I was born an Englishman, I've lived as an Englishman, and I'll die as an Englishman!" To which the Scotsman replied, "Have ye no ambition?"

6. May 2014, “What is Normal - Part 7: What’s in a Name?”

In previous installments, we’ve looked at all kinds of things that we take for granted, sometimes on a daily basis. This time, we’ll look at the names by which some things are known. These include people, countries, and geographic features, among other things. In some cases, the same thing may have different names or have essentially the same spelling, but with a different pronunciation.

Mention to a native English speaker the term *English Channel* and it’s a good bet they’ll know you are referring to the body of water separating England and France. However, some months ago, I was looking at that waterway from the French side, in Brittany, and there they referred to it as *la Manche*. Meanwhile, the Dutch call it *Het Kanaal*, and the Spanish *el canal de la Mancha*. Similarly, from time to time, we hear the term *Baltic States* used, and many of us think Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, all of which border on the *Baltic Sea*. However, the Germans and Swedes refer to that body of water as the *East Sea* (*die Ostsee* and *Östersjön*, respectively).

On my first trip to Amsterdam, I decided to go in search of the famous Van Gogh Museum. Now I’ve found that the vast majority of Dutch people speak a reasonable amount of English, so along the way I stopped and asked a local for directions. He replied that he’d never heard of the place. I said that surely, he’d heard of the world-famous Dutch painter *van Gogh*. But no, apparently not. I persisted and after more discussion, I learned that I was using the English pronunciation. In Dutch, it is something like *van Hhhoch*. That is, the two g’s are pronounced differently from each other and different from the hard-g sound in English. (Similarly, the Dutch town Gouda—and its famous cheese—is pronounced *Hhhouda* in Dutch.)

My final example here has to do with road signs in countries or areas that are bilingual, such as Finland, Wales, and Ireland. In general, the two names for the same town look nothing like each other.

6.1 Country Names

This is the age of the Internet; browsing web pages and sending email are parts of many peoples’ daily lives. Now while many website and email addresses end in “.com”, that suffix is used primarily by US-based entities. (Certainly, control of the allocation of such names lies in US hands.) As such, each country has a 2-character country code, so it can have its own unique addresses. For example, the official website of the British Monarchy is www.royal.gov.uk, that for the German Parliament (the Bundestag) is www.bundestag.de, and Honda’s Japanese home is www.Honda.co.jp. As such, we deduce that the respective country codes for these countries are uk, de (Deutschland), and jp. [In fact, the country code for the UK is gb, but uk is also reserved.] When used in an Internet context these codes are not case-sensitive. That is, uk, UK, Uk, and uK are equivalent. By the way, as you travel around the world to various tourist attractions, you’ll often find guide/souvenir books for sale. The language in which they are written is usually indicated by an abbreviation. For English, that abbreviation is GB!

The complete list of official 2-character country names in English is defined by the standard ISO 3166-1 alpha-2. Consider the codes for Australia (au) and Austria (at). One can argue a strong case this these can be confusing. As such, a 3-character version—ISO 3166-1 alpha-3—was introduced. In this, Australia (aus) and Austria (aut) are more distinguishable.

From an English-centric point-of-view, most of the 2-character codes are obvious. However, some require a bit of detection to recognize and understand. Here are some such examples: Algeria: dz (from the colloquial Arabic word *Dzayer*), Cambodia: kh (the home of the *Khmer* people), Chad: td (known in French and Arabic as *Tchad*), Croatia: hr (*Hrvatska* in Croatian), Estonia: ee (*Eesti* in Estonian), South Africa: za (*Zuid-Afrika* in Dutch), Spain: es (*España* in Spanish), and Switzerland: ch (from the Latin *Confoederatio Helvetica*).

6.2 Changes over Time

Some countries and place names have changed over the years, and some have even reverted to older names. For example:

- In elementary school, I learned that *Ceylon* was a great exporter of tea. Now it's *Sri Lanka*.
- *Persia* became *Iran*; however, after the US-hostage crisis, the Iranian taxi drivers at Washington National Airport suddenly became "Persian" to distinguish themselves from the modern-day Iranians.
- *Abyssinia* became *Ethiopia*.
- The African state of *Tanganyika* became *Tanzania*.
- The boundaries of *Transjordan* changed, and it became *Jordan*.
- At its beginning, *Australia* was called *New Holland* (and its island state, Tasmania, was *Van Diemen's Land*).
- *Northern Rhodesia* became *Zambia*.
- *Southern Rhodesia* became *Zimbabwe*, an old tribal name.
- The military government of *Burma* decided to call its country *Myanmar*.
- In 1947, *East* and *West Pakistan* were spun off from India, and after a civil war, East Pakistan became the independent nation of *Bangladesh*. (Pakistan was initially referred to as *Pakstan*, which came from the following province names: Pnjab, Afghania Province, Kashmir, Sindh, and Baluchistan.)
- The former *Yugoslavia* was (eventually) broken up into *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, *Croatia*, *Kosovo*, *Macedonia*, *Montenegro*, *Serbia*, and *Slovenia*. However, as Greece has its own province called *Macedonia*, it refuses to acknowledge the name of the independent country claiming the same name. As such, many maps show the country name as "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)".
- *Anatolia* became *Turkey*.
- What was *Siam* is now *Thailand*.
- *Cathay* became *China*.
- Modern-day *Iraq* came from *Mesopotamia*.
- The island of *Formosa* became the country of *Taiwan*.
- *French Indochina* became *Cambodia*, *Laos*, and *Vietnam*.
- *Malaya* plus *Singapore* became *Malaysia*, and when Singapore split off, what remained is still Malaysia.
- *British Somaliland* became *Somalia*.
- *Namibia* was formerly *Damaraland* and *German South-West Africa*.

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- *Hawaii* was formerly called the *Sandwich Islands* (named for Captain James Cook's benefactor, The [Earl of Sandwich](#)).
- Present-day *Belize* was once *British Honduras*.
- Part of the *New Hebrides* became *Vanuatu*.
- *Kiribati* was formerly the *Gilbert Islands*.
- The *Ellice Islands* are now called *Tuvalu*. (Interesting, its country code, tv, is used by certain TV-related businesses!)
- The *Dominican Republic* was formerly known as *Santo Domingo*, the name of its current capital.

A quick look at my 1900 Rand-McNally World Atlas shows the following country names that no longer seem to be around: *Dalmatia*, *Bohemia*, *Moravia*, *Silesia*, *Galicia*, *Transylvania*, and *Transcaucasia*. (By the way, at that time, Ireland was part of the UK; and Poland, Finland, and the Czech Republic did not exist, but Prussia did. And the Arabian Peninsula was yet to be carved up.)

A number of well-known cities have had their names changed as well. I grew up with *Peking* and *Bombay*, but now they're *Beijing* and *Mumbai*, respectively. Of course, *Constantinople* became *Istanbul*, and *Edo* became *Tokyo*. *St. Petersburg* became *Leningrad* and then back again. Likewise, *Volgograd* became *Stalingrad* before reverting. *Podgorica*, the capital of Montenegro, was renamed to *Titograd* and back. And the East Prussian city of *Königsberg* became the Russian city *Kaliningrad*.

Closer to home, some 25 years ago when rural roads in northern Virginia were given names as well as route numbers, Route 287 became Berlin Turnpike. Apparently, that was its name many years earlier, when it led to Brunswick (formerly Berlin), Maryland.

Going back to Biblical times, we have cities and states like *Carthage*, *Nubia*, *Thrace*, and *Troy*. (Ironically, in the US, *Trojan* is a brand name for condoms, so the esteemed name lives on! I can see [Helen of Troy](#) doing a commercial for them: "Just the thing to take on a hot date with a good-looking Greek!")

6.3 Differences between Languages or Cultures

I love the topic of geography, especially maps, and when I travel abroad, I like to look at maps in the local language. I certainly have trouble finding places I know. Those darn foreigners have names for everything! For example:

- What the English-speaking world calls *Holland* is really *The Netherlands* (of which two provinces are North and South Holland). From my experience, people from Germanic-language countries use names for that country that look much like one of these two. However, the French name is *Pays Bas* and the Spanish name is *Países Bajos*, meaning "low countries," as in "nether lands."
- Of course, most of us are familiar with *Deutschland* being the German name for *Germany*. Some of its neighbors call it *Aleman* or some such. However, the Danes call it *Tyskland* and its language *Tysk*. However, the Italians call it *Germania* and its language *tedesco*.
- What I call *Munich* the Germans call *München*.
- *London* is known as *Londres*.
- *Capetown* is *Kapstadt*.
- And *Cologne* is the alter ego of *Köln*.

- The Finns refer to *Finland* as *Suomi*.
- The Germans call *Hungary* *Ungarn*.
- *Geneva* can be *Genf*.
- In Spanish, England, Wales, and Scotland become *Inglaterra*, *Gales*, and *Escotia*, respectively.
- To the French, the *United Kingdom* is *Le Royaume Uni*.
- What the English-speaking world knows as the United States (*US*) is known as *VR* to the Germans (*Die Vereinigten Staaten*) and the Dutch (*Verenigde Staten*), as *EU* to the French (*Les États-Unis*), and as *EE.UU.* to Spanish speakers (*Los Estados Unidos*).
- Of course, *USSR* stands for the United Soviet Socialist Republic. So why then do Russians write it as *СССР*. Actually, it's a trick question: In this case, the letters *СССР* are from the Cyrillic alphabet not the Latin one, so with the Cyrillic C being equivalent to the English S, and P the R, we have, in Russian, *Soyuz Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik*. That is, *SSSR* in English, which is *СССР* in Cyrillic.
- What I know as *Copenhagen*, the Danes call *København*.
- The Italians like to have their own names too, for example: *Firenza* (*Florence*), *Roma* (*Rome*), and *Napoli* (*Naples*).
- Drive a BMW? Well, they come from the Bayerische Motoren Werke (Bavarian Motor Works) whose initials in German just so happen to be the same as in English.
- Ask an Argentinian about the *Falkland Islands* and they might take offence. They call those islands the *Malvinas*.
- The country I call *Belarus*, the Germans call *Weißrussland*.
- The city I know as *Bratislava*, the Germans call *Preßburg*.

The *Danube River* is well known. However, as it meanders across Europe, it goes through some name changes: It rises in Germany where it is called the *Donau*. It goes on to become *Duna*, *Dunaj*, *Dunav*, *Дунав*, *Dunărea*, *Дунáў*, and *Tuna* before it reaches the Black Sea.

We've seen a number of examples of common abbreviations being different across languages. I'll leave you with one more, from the main railway company in Switzerland. Is it the SBB, the CFF, or the FFS? The answer is YES! As the Swiss have three main official languages—German, French, and Italian—and a fourth minority one called Romansch, the company is called *Schweizerische Bundesbahnen*, *Chemins de fer fédéraux suisses*, or *Ferrovie federali svizzere*) depending on the language of the speaker.

6.4 People's Names

Some years ago, I was traveling in a Spanish-speaking country, and I had the need to find someone's telephone number. So, I located a phone directory and proceeded to search. However, unbeknownst to me, a Spanish person's name consists of a *given name* (sometimes called *Christian name*) followed by two family names (sometimes called *surnames*). Apparently, the first family name is the father's first family name, and the second the mother's first family name, except, of course, on Wednesdays that fall on a full moon! Of course, even that complicated rule is too simple. According to Wikipedia, "In Spain this order may now be reversed, according to a new gender equality law." It seems that the first family name is the formal/legal one, so use that when searching a list alphabetically.

We take for granted that certain people's names were exactly as we learned them. However, were the New Testament guys really called Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John? Actually, they weren't. These are

simply modern-day translations to “equivalent” English names. (The same goes for the names of Jesus' disciples.) For example, the popular English man's first name John might translate to Johannes, Giovanni, Ioan, Juan, João, Jean, Johan, Jan, Hans, Jens, Ieuan, Ifan, Ianto, Ioan, or Sïon. And William might translate to Wilhelm, Willelm, Williame, Willem, Guglielmo, Guillermo, Gwilym, or Liam. [Follow the two hyperlinks for more details.] In the case of William being Guillaume, I only learned that a few years ago when I visited the grave of the so-called “William the Conqueror” in Caen, Normandy, France.

If you'd like to know about the meaning of various family names in a number of languages, click [here](#).

6.5 Some National Oddities

The UK (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) is a country made up of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Okay then, so what are those four entities? States? Provinces? But no, Wikipedia says England is a country and that it has its own national football team! It says the same about Scotland and Wales, but for Northern Ireland, it says, “It is variously described as a country, province or region of the UK, amongst other terms.” Yet it has an entry for a Northern Ireland national football team. Can one country “contain” another country? Is there something funny going on that the Queen and Prime Minister are not telling us? [Yes, there is, but that is a whole other story!] If we look a bit harder, we find that Wikipedia has an entry for Countries of the United Kingdom in which it claims that the UK is a “sovereign state under international law” made up of four countries. Now that article goes on to say, “[These countries] ... compete separately in many international sporting competitions, including the Commonwealth Games.” However, I don't believe that's the case for the Olympics.

Now the British Crown has some dependencies (the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man) and overseas territories (which include Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, the Falkland Islands, and Gibraltar), but these are not part of the UK, per se. All of these appear to have their own 2-character country/internet codes.

Many people know that the US (United States of America) is made up of 50 states and a Federal Territory, the District of Columbia (or Washington DC). However, there are also populated and unpopulated territories, such as Puerto Rico, Guam, the US Virgin Islands, and Midway Atoll. (The inhabitants of some of the populated territories are not US citizens.) Although a US territory, Puerto Rico has country code PR, and competes in the Olympics as a separate entity.

According to Wikipedia, “The Kingdom of the Netherlands is a sovereign state ... [whose] ... four parts—Aruba, Curaçao, the Netherlands, and Sint Maarten—are referred to as countries. ... [There are also] three special municipalities (Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba).” The four parts each have their own 2-character country/internet codes while the others share those for the Netherlands and the Netherlands Antilles.

So, when is a country not a country? It appears that the answer is “as clear as mud”!

6.6 Conclusion

Think Motown music and you think of the “motor town” of Michigan, USA, Detroit. Now pretty much everyone I know pronounces that name as *de-troit* or *dee-troit*, both with a hard ‘t’ ending. A lot of that area was explored and settled by the French, so it is no surprise there are many names there having a French connection. The French word *détroit* means *strait* in English, as in a narrow waterway. For example, the waterway that flows from the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara and then on to the Mediterranean Sea is known in French as *les Détroits* (The Straits), shown on maps as the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus. In the case of the city of Detroit, the waterway flows from Lake Huron to Lake St. Clair and on to Lake Erie. In French, *détroit* is pronounced *day-twa*, which I think you will agree sounds much more sophisticated. Given its current sad situation, Detroit needs all the help it can get, so a more sophisticated name just might work.

7. June 2014, "Travel: Memories of Australia"

I was born in Australia and spent the first 25 years of my life there. I left in 1979. However, I've been back numerous times since then, and each time, I have added a significant "tourist" component to my usual visits to family and friends. In fact, my first visits to three of the six states have been on trips back.

Official Name: The Commonwealth of Australia (pronounced by the locals as *Orstralya*); Capital: Canberra; Language: a dialect of British English (see also strine, and an Aussie version of Rhyming Slang); Country Code: AU; Currency: Australian Dollar (\$ or AUD)

7.1 South Australia (SA)

This is my home state, and it was created in 1836 as the only Australian state to be settled without convicts. [1836 was the year Texas became a Republic. As such, SA and Texas are "sister" states and their respective capitals, Adelaide and Austin, are "sister" cities.]

Over the next 10 years, many thousands of German-speaking Lutherans from Prussia emigrated to SA, where they spoke German until Australia joined WWII in 1939.

One of the biggest lessons I've learned when travelling around Australia on trips back there is that with a few exceptions, the Germans did not settle much outside SA, so many of the things I'd taken for granted as "being Australian," really were only "South Australian," and some of those were just regional.

From a 2006 trip to visit my home state:

[Diary] *In the state capital, Adelaide, I walked around the Festival Theatre Centre, casino, and Parliament House. Then it was on past Government House to the Immigration Museum, the former site of the Department of Chemistry, where I worked from 1973–75. Next, it was on to the Adelaide University music department to meet a friend who lectures there. We lunched outside at the Art Gallery cafe nearby.*

[Diary] *I headed back into the city, where I had a meat pie with sauce, and iced coffee, at the railway station. From there it on to Parliament House for the 2-pm sitting of the lower house, the Legislative Assembly. I sat in the Strangers' Gallery. The house is decorated in green, just like the UK lower house, the House of Commons. There was a lengthy tribute from the state premier, his deputy, and cabinet ministers, and members of the opposition, to the recently deceased agent-general of South Australia to the U.K. He was to have become the next Governor of South Australia. (The Governor is the Queen's representative in a state, while the premier is the elected state government leader.) Afterwards, I went into the Strangers' Gallery of the upper house, the Legislative Council, which is red like the UK House of Lords. However, the upper house was not in session.*

[Diary] *In the afternoon, my brother-in-law, Colin, picked me up and we went to the Loxton Rifle Club. I shot as a guest. The range was 600 yards. From my 10 shots, I scored one bull's-eye and once missed the target completely, with a total of 34 out of a possible 50. At no time was the Australian Olympic*

Rifle Team threatened! After the shoot, we had afternoon tea at the clubhouse, along with a club meeting.

[Diary] *My brother Ken and I prepared his new boat and motor for a fishing trip. We put into the river around 10:30 am. It was a very nice, but hot, day. We saw a hawk feeding babies on a nest, kangaroos came down to drink, and kookaburras and pelicans were common. We had a snack and drinks, and we caught some nice callop using shrimp and worms as bait.*

[Diary] *Nephew Andrew got a number of his motorcycles operational, and then he, the kids, and I rode around the fruit property to a Motocross track they had built. Andrew and Tyler showed us how to race and jump. I shot plenty of video. Later, we all went down to Hogwash Bend on the River Murray nearby, towing a boat and 40-HP outboard motor. The kids rode their hydra slides, and I shot video. We had a picnic supper on the beach.*

[Diary] *Awake and up by 6:30 am, although I could have done with a few more zzs. I had a light breakfast before setting off with Andrew for Nuriootpa in the Barossa Valley an hour to the west. We had a pleasant drive on some very good, hard dirt roads before we got onto the main highway. Along the way, we stopped at a bakery to rescue some pastries and cartons of iced coffee. Andrew gave me a quick orientation of the town and then went to a College where he had an all-day class on viticulture. From there, I walked into town where I looked around, shot video, and looked in shops. There were a lot of nicely landscaped garden areas most of which had numerous varieties of rose in bloom. I bought a postcard the picture on which showed a narrow dirt road lined with gum trees on either side, set nearby. Right then, I decided that I wanted to retire to a restored old stone farmhouse at the end of that very road, which no doubt came complete with a Border Collie sheepdog! I bought a spare card to put on my work desk to remind me.*

[Diary] *I was up early, and spent the day with brother Terry in his truck carting grain from farms to the silo. We certainly covered a good cross-section of the mallee area, and saw a variety of bulk-handling loading and unloading equipment. I shot a lot of video.*

[Diary] *Up soon after 7 am, had a light breakfast, showered, then packed lightly for a 3-day road trip with Paul. We departed Hahndorf around 10 am, going on some local back roads. Our target was to spend the day exploring Fleurieu Peninsula (named for the Count of Fleurieu by the French explorer Nicolas Boudin). The weather was wonderful, and I shot a lot of great video. We saw quite a few large and small grey kangaroos, many quite close up. We hiked a bit through the bush.*

[Diary] *Around 4:30 pm, we left the highway for the 4WD track that leads to Tea Tree Crossing. That crossing was quite dry, so we had no trouble going over the Coorong, the very long water course behind the dunes. We found a secluded camp site right at the backside base of the dunes in bush land. Once we made camp, we crossed the dunes, taking several attempts up the first steep hill as we had too much air in our tires. Once we were on the beach, the going was flat and relatively easy. People had made camps at regular intervals, and were fishing. Back at our camp, we threw together some food. Then we climbed the dunes to witness the sunset. It was impressive. Then we had a few glasses of port wine before retiring at 9:30 pm.*

[Diary] I was awake around 5 am, feeling less than rested. We dressed and climbed the dunes to watch and photograph the sunrise. It was magnificent! We packed up the camp, leaving only footprints and taking only photos (and a few shells). We stopped at Policeman's Point for breakfast, and then drove home.

[Diary] Early evening, Paul and I headed out for a substantial hike on the [Heysen Trail](#). We found a steep section that went through dense bush land, passed several streams and a golf course. It was a good workout, especially for the heart. At home, we settled down with fresh melon and a glass of port.

7.2 [Western Australia \(WA\)](#)

I've visited this state twice, both times as a tourist from the US.

From a 2006 trip to visit my godfather in [Katanning](#) and surrounds:

[Diary] Each month, a Men's fellowship group meets for a social get-together. This month, we rode a small bus from town out to the host's [woolshed](#). We each took meat and salads and drinks, and the host provided several BBQs. We had sausages, lamb chops, and a bottle of port wine. About 25 people attended. A large quantity of [yabbies](#) (an Aussie freshwater mini lobster) were served as appetizer. One member raised yabbies in dams on his farm. He explained the process and demonstrated several pieces of equipment. I then spoke about some of my experiences traveling to various countries.

[Diary] After an outdoor lunch, Albert took me for drive around [Albany](#): Emu Point, the WWI light horse and camel driver [ANZAC](#) memorial, and the new port facility with bulk handling for grain, sand, and wood chips.

7.3 [Northern Territory \(NT\)](#)

My first time to this Federal territory was in December 1968 to visit my sister who had been living at the Aboriginal Finke River Mission at [Hermannsburg](#). (Like many Aboriginal Missions in Australia, this one is run by the Lutheran Church.) I was 15 and I took the famous "[Ghan](#)" train (short for *Afghan* from the camel trains in the early years) up from Adelaide and we drove back by car. My next trip was 10 years later, when I also flew in a light aircraft to [Ayers Rock](#) (now known by its Aboriginal name, Uluru.) Like almost all tourists who go there, I climbed the steep ascent to the wind-swept top where there are hundreds of miles of desert in all directions. Unlike a number of them, I did not fall to my death along the way. (The plaques dedicated to them at the start of the climb provide pause for thought.) It's the largest sandstone [monolith](#) in the world.

In 1997, I had my first visit to [Darwin](#), on the north coast, a city that was devastated by [Cyclone Tracy](#) in 1974, but since rebuilt. From there, I drove to and camped with friends at [Kakadu National Park](#), Crocodile Dundee country, and [Litchfield National Park](#). Out there, you can be a long ways from anywhere! From Darwin, I flew south to Ayers Rock where I stayed with friends. That time, I hiked through the [Olgas](#) (Aboriginal name Kata Tjuta), a much-eroded sister monolith to Ayers Rock.

7.4 [Queensland \(QLD\)](#)

I've been to this state once, in 2007, when I attended an international conference. However, for the few days prior to that, I spent some great days with friends.

[Diary] My hosts lived in a quiet neighborhood just south of Brisbane, the state capital. Native bush land came quite near their house, and there were many wild birds. We took the kids grocery shopping. After several weeks on the road, I was missing my kitchen, and I'd asked my host if I could borrow hers for some cooking. She readily agreed. Next to the supermarket, I spied a liquor store, so I rescued a fine bottle of Para liqueur port wine (can you say Nectar of the Gods?), which we emptied over the next three nights. Afterwards, we packed lunch and drove to a neighborhood park where we lit a classic Aussie BBQ. A number of wallabies came by to see what we were up to. One doe had a young joey in her pouch.

[Diary] We walked around the waterfront, and then took a hi-speed catamaran ferry trip up the Brisbane River. The wind took my hat for a swim, goodbye hat!

[Diary] We went to a local bakery to buy lunch. I bought good old Aussie meat pies and pasties, iced coffee, and buns. It was pretty darned good. That evening, we had a great BBQ out on the patio. I managed to force down some local Bundaberg Ginger Beer.

[Diary from a business conference] I went to the hotel restaurant for breakfast. The AU\$22 buffet was a veritable orgy of food. I ate outdoors by the pool; however, the sun was very bright and hot. I left my table to go to get more food from the buffet. That took a while, and when I returned, my table was cleared, my newspaper gone, and a stranger was sitting in my very seat. I decided then and there that the waiters hovered about way too much, picking up things before one had barely put them down. And now, they'd decided I'd abandoned my table. It really is hard to get good help! In any event, my paper was found, another table was procured, and all without my having to buy the hotel and fire everyone.

[Diary] Flight JQ417 to SYD was pretty full; however, I managed to get an exit seat, so had plenty of legroom. We pushed back from the gate on time, the ground crew chased the sheep and kangaroos off the runway (just kidding; there were no sheep), and we were up-and-away flying inland, to the west. Soon, we were over lakes and rivers, hills and forests, and expensive waterside houses with private docks. The ride west and south was smooth and uneventful, just as flights should be. There were forests and meandering rivers all the way.

Touchdown was textbook-style, and I was soon waiting for my baggage. With respect to collecting baggage, people all around the world seem to have the exact same poorly thought-out plan: Let's all stand so close to the carousel that no-one can see anything, and no-one on the outside can get to in to get their bags, which inevitably arrive before those for the inside people.

7.5 New South Wales (NSW)

I had my very first business trip when I was 18, and it was a week in Sydney, the capital city of NSW. I remember how the freeway we took from the airport ran under one of the planes' access roads to a runway. Almost every time I've departed and returned to Australia, it's been through SYD. Now they have a curfew there; no traffic before something like 6 am. I know someone who was flying from SFO to SYD, non-stop across the Pacific, and "due to weather conditions" their departure from SFO was delayed quite a while. Now you might think the conditions were bad, but, in fact, they were too good. There would be a very strong tail wind throughout the flight, and if the plane departed on time, it would arrive way too early to be allowed to land!

From a 2006 trip to the Albury/Wodonga area to visit some cousins:

[Diary] Awake at 5:15 am, and up soon after. I shot video around the farm as the sun came up. There were many bush birds. I picked up sticks from the area where two long rows of trees were recently cleared. After an hour of physical labor, it was time for coffee and bread out on the patio among the birds. After lunch, I did some laundry, Paul and I fixed a hose at the pump down on the creek, we put a mower on a tractor, and I had my first drive in the farm ute. [A ute—utility vehicle—is an Aussie invention, and is a sedan with the back half converted for carrying stuff, built as an enclosed tray-top.] We put blades on the mower, and I met the farm dogs Red, Max, and Todd, all kelpies. At 3:30 pm, we drove to the nearby town of Walla Walla, where we stopped at the original covered wagon from German settlers who arrived from South Australia in 1850. To celebrate Paul's birthday, we dined at The Commercial Club. I had a veal schnitzel and salad, my first in years.

[Diary] Mid-morning, I helped Kevin the farm hand, bring in several lots of cattle. Don't you know, one young calf decided to test me by running along the creek in the opposite direction, just as far as it could, making me trek up and down to get it back. It was a good physical workout, but, fortunately, I was wearing a felt farm hat, which made me look and think like a farmer. At 11:30, I lay on the lawn in the sun trying to nap, but I doubt I did. I quickly got back into the Great Australian Salute—brushing flies away from my face. After lunch, we worked with cattle, vaccinating and drenching them, plus ear tagging and marking calves. Then it was on to some fencing and moving cattle and sheep. We saw a lone kangaroo and some rabbits. I collected the eggs from the 12 chooks (chickens, that is), let the chooks out for their afternoon run, fed the dogs their daily dose of pellets, and checked their water. I knocked-off for the day at 5:45 pm, and had a most welcome shower to remove the day's dust. Muscles I had long forgotten I had started to ache after yesterday's stick picking. With great authority, Paul told me that the best course of action was to keep on working until the ache stopped.

[Diary] Up at 6:30 to the smell of rain, which had fallen in too small a quantity before dawn. However, it was enough to settle the dust. We got a load of laundry going, and I hung that out on the unique Aussie rotary clothes line. It dried in double-quick time once the sun came out. Paul and I had a light breakfast and then headed out to work. While I got my early morning dose of dust by sweeping hay and sand off a concrete floor of a large shed, Paul emptied fertilizer from a storage bin into a truck-mounted bin. We then dumped that fertilizer on the concrete floor then off-loaded the bin onto its own legs, and swept off the truck tray. Next, we drove 22 rams from one paddock to another, partly along a public dirt road. We put up stock-caution signs at both ends of the road stretch we used. Then Paul drove the truck to Walla Walla for a registration checkup; I followed in the ute. The 5-speed manual gears were no problem (my own car in the U.S. is a stick shift), but I reminded myself to drive on the left. In town, we sat at a table in the shade outside the Billabong Cafe, where we had morning tea: meat pie with sauce and iced coffee (coffee-flavored milk, that is) for me, and a toasted sandwich and juice for Paul. He figured it was 38 years ago when he last ate morning tea in town. (More of my decadent influence.)

At 6:20 pm, we were dressed in our finest, and were on the road to Henty, a town of about 1,000 not far away. We were guests of the Henty Rotary Club, and I was the guest speaker. It was my first Rotary meeting. I sat at the head table with several officers and their wives. Spouses were invited as were members of another club. We conducted some business and ate dinner. I then spoke and answered

questions for 30 minutes. My topic was a contrast of the U.S. Congressional form of government with the Westminster Parliamentary system used in Australia. It was well received, and the evening wrapped up by 10 pm. Back at the farm, we uncorked a bottle of vintage port wine from 1980, and had a small glass along with a Violet Crumble Bar. (More decadence!)

From a 2007 trip in and near Sydney:

[Diary] By mid-morning, we were on the highway heading west to the famed Blue Mountains. This was Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson country, the explorers who were first to cross these mountains. We hiked and took a lot of photos. At Katoomba, we saw the famous Three Sisters rocks, and even climbed right down onto one of them. A brightly painted Aborigine played a didgeridoo for the tourists, and had his photo taken with them. Near dusk, we hiked a very rugged bush track cleared under the command of one of friend Jane's pioneer ancestors. Along the way, we could see over a little bit of Paradise in the valley below, where small farms were scattered among the forest. On the way home, we stopped at a pub and ate outdoors, going home for dessert and coffee. Lights out at 11:15 pm. A great day.

[Diary] I awoke briefly at dawn to hear a magpie and kookaburra singing, and then went back to sleep until 8 am.

[Diary] We drove to the train station, and then took the train into downtown Sydney. We walked to the opera house, saw the bridge, visited the botanic gardens, and then took the high-speed ferry to Manly. There, we sat on the beach and watched the world go by before walking around to a cove. Then it was on to the slow ferry for a pleasant ride back to Circular Quay.

[Diary] I tried to wash away the tiredness from my legs in the shower. Although Bernie's Plan A was for us to walk across the Sydney Harbor Bridge, I opted for Plan B, which involved staying home, drinking coffee, and talking about walking across the Sydney Harbor Bridge. Plan B won!

7.6 Victoria (VIC)

I was raised in a county that adjoined the state border with Victoria, and I visited various rural parts from there. However, my first real visit to the state was when as age 18, I rode the train from Adelaide to the state capital Melbourne, where I stayed with a cousin for the better part of a week. From there, I did a day trip to the ski slopes of Bright, where I had my first experience with snow and skiing. I had no trouble at all getting started; it was the stopping that was problematic, especially when I was faced with a long line of people waiting for the lift, and I had nowhere to go but to fall over in the snow before I hit them!

On a subsequent trip, I drove by car with a friend down the SA coast and along the Great Ocean Road of Victoria with its spectacular coastal scenery. Afterwards, I tried skiing again.

From a 2000 trip to Melbourne:

[Diary] We were up at 8:30 am, and had a light breakfast. Then we all got into our warm undies and rainproof gear and headed off, with me riding pillion on friend Jeff's new 1100 cc Kawasaki motorcycle and niece Felicity on her racy looking Kawasaki 250. It was the last day of the big international motorcycle race at Phillip Island, and there were two legs of the Super Bike World championships. It

rained a little on and off during the 90-minute trip down, and then again throughout the day. We saw several riders dismount their bikes unexpectedly at the tight corner right in front of us. Bits and pieces broke off the bikes as they slid along on the road on their side. However, there were no serious injuries. The top speed on the straight was around 250 kph, which was rather quick for a bike.

In 2004, I had a conference in Melbourne, and I stayed in a very nice apartment on the edge of the magnificent parklands that surround the city. The weather was glorious the whole time, and each morning, I walked into through them to the city campus of [Monash University](#).

Melbourne is the Mecca of [Australian Rules Football](#) (AFL), the game for which I was recruited from high school to play, starting in 1970.

7.7 [Tasmania \(TAS\)](#)

I've been to this island state once, in 2002. Niece Felicity and I took her car on the ferry across the Bass Strait from Melbourne to Devonport, Tasmania. Those waters can be very rough, but, fortunately, that day they were calm. After a night in a very nice B&B, we set off west along the north coast where we stayed three nights in a cottage. From there, we drove halfway down the rugged west coast through a large wilderness park, staying in small hotels along the way. We stopped to walk on some impressive dunes. After six days, we arrived in the capital, [Hobart](#), where I stayed with friends I hadn't seen in 25 years. Hobart is a very nice, manageable city where they have a "rush minute" rather than a "rush hour"!

I did a number of interesting things while based in Hobart, but there were two things that stand above all others. The first, was a daytrip to the infamous convict settlement, [Port Arthur](#). This is where many male prisoners (and even boys as young as six or seven) were transported from "ye merry old England" for offences as petty as stealing a loaf of bread. [Of course, we have to put a stop to all this bread stealing!] The second was to the southeast coast and [Freycinet Peninsula](#). After an impressive bush walk up into the rocks, we had a spectacular view over [Wineglass bay](#).

7.8 [Conclusion](#)

Did you know that the name of the national airline, [Qantas](#), is an acronym for the former "Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Service?"

Bucket List: I have yet to visit my own country's national capital, Canberra. This is located in the [Australian Capital Territory](#) (ACT). In my dreams, I imagine hiking the final 250 kms of the [Heysen Trail](#) in SA, as it runs to the sea. I'd also like to make a big loop from Adelaide, driving across the [Nullarbor Plain](#) to Perth, and then up the NW coast to Darwin, then back south to Adelaide. And I can easily imagine spending an Aussie summer in Tasmania.

8. July 2014, "Technology, Revisited"

Back in [November 2010](#) [1], I wrote about the telephone, television, the internet, and recorded music. Then in [December of that year](#) [2], I covered automobiles, still and video cameras, the written word, a digital data preservation strategy, and my right-hand gadget. Three and a half years on, I'm back to update my thoughts on most of these topics.

8.1 Telephone

In mid-2012, I moved, and after 29 years with the same home/office telephone number, I was forced to change it. At first, I thought that would be a big loss, but as it happened, it stopped all those annoying sales and marketing callers from reaching me. And after a year of renting, I moved again, and had to change my number a second time. I've had my new number for a year now, but I still don't know any part of it except the area code. When asked my number, I open my wallet and take out a business card from which I read it. People often ask, "Have you just moved?" to which I reply, "No, I got this new number more than a year ago, but as I don't call myself, I haven't yet found a need to memorize it!"

Being an old-fashioned guy, I still have a landline. In any event, I work from home, so a landline is convenient for both work and play. When I moved the second time, I replaced my phone system for the first time in about 15 years. While the base unit is connected to a wall jack, the two extensions are wireless, so I can place them anywhere in the house and even outside.

Sometime after I moved the second time, my phone company ran a fiber-optic cable down my street, and they were very eager to have me move to that system from the old copper wire. After they answered a long list of questions, I agreed to the changeover, especially as it was at no cost to me. The big change was that the phone would no longer get power from the phone line. Instead, the technician installed a large box on the inside wall of my garage that contained a battery pack. The battery is kept charged by a connection to the electricity. In theory, if I lose my electricity supply, the backup pack provides some eight hours of phone use. Not having had a blackout since, this feature has not yet been put to the test.

In [1], I wrote, "I do not have a mobile phone and I have no plan to get one anytime soon. If I had one, I expect I would find uses for it, but I'm pretty sure I'd have it primarily for outgoing/emergency calls and would keep it switched off most of the time. And I'm certain its ring tone would not be a 100-decibel version of Beethoven's 5th, and that I'd have some manners when using it among other people."

I now own not one, but two mobile phones! Aggh; the Devil made me do it! Once I sold my house, I rented for a year while I decided "what next?" In order to interact with renting agents as I was driving around the countryside reading their advertising signs, I bought a basic Samsung phone for \$10 that was compatible with the [TracPhone](#) pay-as-you-go service. It came with 20 free minutes and 60 days of service, and every minute/number-of-days I bought, would double. Exactly one day after I started looking, I found my dream house, and I made only one call on my new mobile. Later, I added a 240-minute/3-month card. Finally, I bought a 1,000-minute/2-year card. In the two years I've owned it, I've

made no more than 25 calls on it. As I predicted in [1], I use it for my convenience only; it's switched off most of the time with no message-recording facility! I simply do not give out its number.

A year ago, I had a houseguest coming from Australia for six weeks. It would be convenient for us to communicate when we were apart, especially for the two weeks we travelled in the northwest. What to do but buy another Samsung—this time for only \$7!—and three months of service. When that expired, I put the phone in a drawer. When the need arises, I will charge it up, both with power and minutes, and get a new phone number.

I've been a user of [Skype](#) for some years, and use it for international calls, but only to landline numbers as the calling rate is much cheaper. (As some friends abroad have found, when they've moved to mobile-phone service only, they no longer hear from me!) I used to use it for domestic, long-distance calls too, but my new home-phone service has unlimited time at no charge.

Once, I rode the high-speed Acela train from Washington DC to New York, and deliberately chose to sit in the "Quiet Car" where mobile phone usage is forbidden. Of course, that didn't stop some riders from taking calls, but after I glared at them and/or chastised them verbally, they got the message.

With all this hands-free stuff, I can no longer tell if a person is talking on a phone, to themselves, or their imaginary friend. Whichever, they seem to get pretty animated even when no one can see all their hand gestures. (Perhaps the [NSA](#) is capturing their actions by satellite as well as their call!)

As for texting, I just don't get it. It sure looks like a solution looking for a problem. Once, I used my mobile to order a taxi, so the taxi company had my (otherwise secret) number. Twice, I received text messages—at my expense—telling me the taxi was so-many miles or minutes away. Wow! I simply don't know how I survived this long without having that kind of information. In any event, my fingers are way too big for me to be able to select an individual key on a smartphone's soft keyboard. (Believe me; I've tried repeatedly.)

Earlier this year, I started a consulting contract with a well-known high-tech company based in [Silicon Valley](#). Not only was I issued a laptop, but I also got a smart phone. At first, I actually used the phone to have security codes texted to me each time I made a VPN connection to their site, but the need for that went away once I got a USB-based security card. Then after several months of that phone simply sitting quietly on a shelf in my office, it started buzzing so hard, it nearly jumped off the shelf! What could be so important after all this time? Perhaps WWII had started. No, it wasn't anything earth shattering. Instead, I was being notified that a car with license plate xxx had been left in the parking lot with its lights on, and could the owner switch them off. I was sure it wasn't my car as I was on the US east coast and the parking lot was on the west!

8.2 Television

In [1], I wrote how I'd moved to antenna-only TV. However, when I moved to my botanic garden-with-a-house-in-it rental place, I was almost surrounded by forest. As such, my antenna was able to find one channel only. (And that broadcast mostly in French; [sacrebleu!](#)) Thirty seconds after discovering that, I viewed that as a positive thing, and I rediscovered my library of books and videos. And things stayed that way for 18 months, until I moved, and fiber-optic service came down my street.

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I now have 100-odd TV channels, but not because I wanted them. What happened was that the combined package of phone, internet, and TV from one supplier was \$50/month cheaper than my previous phone and internet service from two suppliers, so I paid less and got TV as well. And while I wasn't planning to have a Digital Video Recording (DVR) service, I did get one, and I must say that is very convenient. I *never ever* watch anything live; it all is recorded for viewing when I'm ready, and I *never ever* watch anything on [Network TV](#).

For the 18 months I was disconnected from TV service, I made great use of my local library system by borrowing from its extensive video collections of movies, TV programs, and documentaries.

8.3 The Internet

My primary use of this is still for business, and even more so now that I use VPN access to run programs on remote computers. Email remains my biggest use, followed closely by access to webpages for documentation. I don't often look at newspapers online now, and I very rarely watch video online. For that, my aging eyes much prefer my 40-inch TV to my 27-inch computer screen, and my couch is much more comfortable than my office chair.

8.4 Recorded Music

Several years ago, as a prize in a raffle, I won an [iPod Nano](#), a stripped-down iPod. Eventually, I loaded it up with the songs from a dozen CDs. However, the only use I made of it was when I was a dog-walker at an animal rescue facility. There, I walked dogs for two hours each week, and as most of them weren't very interesting, I simply walked them around a farm while listening to music tracks played in random order. Since I stopped that activity, I stopped having buds in my ears. However, I have 10–15 CDs ripped to my laptop for when I travel.

What I have discovered is free internet radio via [iTunes](#). I have three favorite channels depending on my mood: Golden Oldies of Rock 'n Roll, Bavarian, and [Mariachi](#).

8.5 Automobiles

I'm still driving my low-tech, stick shift, subcompact, used car, and it still gets me from A to B safely and in good time. However, from time to time, I rent a car, and occasionally I have difficulty mastering some simple chore, like resetting the trip mileage meter. With all these auto solutions looking for problems to solve, and the complexities of software design, I'm not at all surprised with the kinds of electronic failures that have been occurring in the auto industry.

Last year, I had houseguests from Australia, and they had been driving in various parts of the US and Canada. Soon after they arrived, they bought a navigation system with [Global Positioning System](#) (GPS). When they left to go home, they gave it to me. Now I carry it in the glove compartment of my car, but never remember I have it, so except for some playing around soon after I got it, I haven't used it. I do recall, however, a couple of times when it gave me rather strange directions. All that said if I did a lot of driving to locations with which I was not familiar, I'm sure I'd use it on a regular basis.

I can report one very welcome addition to my auto experience. For two years now, I have had a 2-car garage, and, unlike almost all of the garages that I've seen in my travels around the US, mine actually has room for two cars!

Oh, and I'm driving a lot more miles now than I used to, but that's because of volunteer work.

8.6 Cameras and Video

I've never been much interested in photography, and I still don't take many photos, although it's nice to be able to look at the results immediately and to erase/retake shots. And as for video, I've shot little in recent years, partly because upgrades to my editing software don't work properly, and partly because I don't watch the DVD's I've created.

One major task I did perform was to digitize 76 hours of home movies recorded onto VHS tape, and to edit them down to 34 1-hour DVDs.

On the photo front, my ex-wife and I are in the middle of scanning to digital 3,000-odd paper photos we took starting in the late 1960's. The time it takes to name and catalog each image is far more than it takes to scan in.

8.7 Books and Reading

I still like my books in paper form. Eighteen months ago, I became a volunteer for a local library where twice a year, we solicit donations from the public of used books, books and music on CD, and DVDs, and we hold a sale to raise money. As a sorter, I get to look over all those treasures before the public sees them.

I still maintain my steady diet of novels interspersed with non-fiction and reference material. Most mornings I read in bed, and then again, the last thing at night. There's nothing quite like trying to hold a 1,000-page tome on US History on one's chest!

8.8 Backup

When it comes to backing up my personal and business computer files, I'm still quite anal! If it's worth doing, it's worth protecting.

Several years ago, as I was preparing my house for sale, we had an earthquake that measured 5.8 on the Richter Scale. After the second tremor, I calmly took the backup memory stick from my desktop computer, grabbed my wallet (with money and ID), picked up my key ring, and walked out to the parking lot. That stick, along with one of the master backup disks by my computer, in my fire safe, or in my bank's safe-deposit box, would get me operational again. And if all those had been destroyed, it is unlikely I would have been left standing myself!

One new habit I have developed is the use of offsite backup through DropBox. The price is right (as in free), and it is very convenient. I use it to share digital photos, and to backup and share work-related files for some business projects, as they require. However, I remain adamant that I will not backup any critical business or personal data of my own in the so-called Cloud. When cloud security gets broken—and it will, and in a major way—the affected users will be very sorry. As for me, you have to come to my place or bank and physically steal the data! And that's a big obstacle for a teenager in Russia, China, or Timbuktu who is hacking into a network.

8.9 My Beloved Personal Digital Assistant (PDA)

As I reported in [2], I've had a PDA for many years, and I never leave the house without it. Until a year ago, when I was at my desk, this little pocket computer was linked to my desktop computer, so their calendar and contacts databases were synchronized. The PDA had a removable 4MB SD memory card to which I backed up all my new and changed work and personal computer files.

I was running Windows Vista on my desktop computer, but decided to upgrade to Windows 7. And while that went well, Win7 no longer supported the synchronization program on my PDA. As a result, my automatic synchronization was no longer possible. Instead, I only update my PDA once each week, and then I have to do it via my netbook, which still runs Windows XP. It is inconvenient, but the process works. However, one day, disaster struck! The metal connector on my PDA where I inserted the synchronization cable broke. As such, not only couldn't I update the PDA, I couldn't even charge it, bugger!

The solution was obvious, buy a new PDA. However, that was easier said than done as no one makes PDAs anymore; the mobile phone industry had taken over that market space. I had a mobile phone, but it wasn't by any means smart, and I had absolutely no interest in buying a new phone and its attendant costs just to have a calendar and contact list. I was actually without a PDA for 6–8 weeks, and I can assure you it was quite traumatic, I kid you not. It turns out that I relied on it much more than I knew. I had all my passwords and PINs for credit and debit cards, on-line accounts, details of business contacts and friends, and much more. The final crisis came when I was admitted to the emergency room of a hospital and I was asked for the contact information of my next-of-kin, my son. His phone number, email address, and street address were all locked away in my PDA, whose battery was flat!

I set out in earnest to find a website from which I could buy a refurbished PDA, and eventually I found one. The PDA I selected was from the same family as the one I was replacing and although it was a bit smaller it had comparable capabilities. After a few weeks of using it, I called the company and bought a second unit as a backup.

Although I solved the immediate problem, I've deferred the long-term one. I've just bought a new laptop, which runs Windows 8, and thus far, I haven't found a way to make that synchronize with the old-technology PDA. So, the only way I have of keeping the PDA up-to-date is to do it via my old netbook, and there is no reason to believe that strategy won't work for some time yet. However, my calendar and contacts are stored in Microsoft Office, and the 2013 version I run on my desktop won't run on WinXP. Fortunately, the data files for both versions are the same, so I can exchange them. But that might not be the case for the next edition. I guess I'll find out in 2016. Don't you just love built-in obsolescence?

8.10 Laptop

After all my years of travelling with electric gadgetry, it finally happened. The AC-power adaptor for my laptop computer died while I was in Tokyo on business. Fortunately, that happened near the end of the trip, but, nonetheless, it still made an impact. I had no access to Skype and had to use other people's systems to look at my mail, to do banking, and so forth. Since then, I have bought a new laptop, which

is much lighter, less power-hungry, and its adaptor is small and light. However, it runs Windows 8, of which I'm not a fan.

Unfortunately, I now have a loaner laptop from a client, and I often have to take both machines with me when I travel. However, I've solved the problem by buying a nice, comfortable backpack to hold both and associated gear. It's much better for my stature than having a very heavy bag on a shoulder strap, and it leaves both my hands and arms free.

8.11 Conclusion

As I watch people preoccupied with thumbing their mini keypads while waiting, walking, cycling, and even driving, I really do wonder how Civilization got this far without all that.

I still think there are way too many solutions looking for problems, and my mantra remains, for the most part, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it!"

Oh, and just in case you were wondering, I'm not the least bit interested in the [Social Media](#) frenzy. If you want to by my friend, it's quite easy: phone me, send me a personal email or instant message, or even an old-fashioned letter. But don't think you can post something in a public, virtual place, and expect me and your 1,000 other so-called "friends" to believe you are actually communicating with us, personally.

9. August 2014, “Travel: Memories of Japan”

Official Name: Nippon-koku or Nihon-koku ([the] State of Japan); Capital: Tokyo; Language: Japanese (nihongo); Country Code: JP; Currency: Yen (¥ or JPY)

I've had at least a dozen trips to Japan, with more on the horizon. Apart from the fact that I'm allergic to shellfish, pretty much everything else in that country agrees with me.

9.1 General

[Diary] For those with a yen (pun intended) for Japanese food, the in-flight Business-Class menu had the Washoku Zen selection: appetizers of crabmeat in layered eggs, salmon temari, and burdock wrapped in glazed beef, shrimp with fish eggs, seared tuna with wasabi dressing, somen noodles and simmered shiitake mushrooms. The main course consisted of broiled sea bass saikyo yaki, shimeji mushroom, ginkgo nut, simmered bamboo shoot, carrot flower served with steamed rice and Japanese pickled vegetables. Naturally, green tea was served and hashi (chopsticks) were provided. Like most Japanese meals, it looked very attractive.

[Diary] ... It was at least 10 years since I last spent any real time learning basic Japanese, so I pulled out my introductory book, and refreshed my memory on some of the basics. Over the years, I have found that one of the most useful nihongo no tango (Japanese words) is wakarimasu (I understand) and its opposite wakarimasen (I don't understand). After dabbling in European languages, I must say I found Japanese quite attractive as it has no articles, no plurals, no verb conjugation, the verb comes at the end, and the addition of one suffix to the verb negates the statement while another makes it a question. Of course, as easy as the grammar and pronunciation are, the language is made very complicated with regards to writing and reading.

From a separate trip:

[Diary] I boarded the giant Airbus A380 through the front door of the main level. It was my first time on this behemoth, so I wanted to see how it was configured. It has 2 full levels with the upper deck having a handful of First-Class suites and 120-odd Business-Class suites, with ramps from the main deck at the front and rear. A separate boarding ramp served the upstairs only, to streamline the boarding process. The main deck has 425 Economy seats configured 3+4+3 across, starting at Row 50 at the front. Two ramps were used to board this level. I was in Seat 50C, first row, bulkhead with room to put at least one leg out in the aisle into the galley space in front. The cockpit is midway between the main and upper levels and is reached by 4 steps just in front of me. As far as I could see, the cockpit could accommodate up to 4 people. As you might imagine, it takes quite a while to load something that big, but finally we taxied way out from the terminal, and Flight LH710 was on its way, non-stop Frankfurt to Tokyo, 7 time zones and 11:30-hours flying time to the east. We headed up over Poland, Lithuania, across Russia, Mongolia, a bit of China, and South Korea, before landing at Tokyo International Narita (NRT).

A few words about life in a ryokan (inn): Each time on arrival, one is handed a pair of slippers, which one puts on right then and there while one's street shoes are placed in rows against a wall, on a shelf, or in some sort of unsecured storage space. While some inns have slippers of different sizes, others don't, in which case, very tall/big people like me (size 13 or metric 44 shoes) look a little odd in Asian

feet-size footwear. These house slippers can only be worn in the inn's common areas. They are *not* to be worn in one's room or in a toilet. Each toilet has its own pair of slippers, which all users share. One does not wear any footwear in one's room, as one is walking on tatami (rice-stalk) mats. (This situation is replicated in some Japanese restaurants. That is, one leaves one's street shoes in the entrance area and wears slippers in the restaurant itself.)

My room had a narrow, short passage with hardwood floors, so one could wear slippers there. To the left was a western-style toilet and vanity cabinet; however, the sink was at the height for people no taller than five feet! Toiletries and a hair dryer were provided. Although the commode looked quite familiar, one side had an armrest containing quite a number of buttons to control various options. The best I can say is never trust a toilet that plugs into an electric outlet! To the right of the passage was the bathroom. The tub was very deep and nowhere near full-person length. In fact, it was a tub for soaking after one has soaped and washed oneself thoroughly while sitting on the very small, short stool on the floor. A hand-held shower is provided for that purpose. Putting soap or shampoo in the bath is a definite NO-NO, as soaking water is intended to be shared by others. However, as mine was a single room with private bathroom, no other guests or staff were policing my actions!

My room was 3 meters by 6 meters, and as a tatami mat is 1x3 meters in size, the room was six mats in size. In an alcove, there was a small fridge, a tea/coffee maker, and TV. On the floor sat a low table with chair, a lacquered tray set with teacup and a pastry, plus a thermos of boiling water to make green or black tea, which was provided in teabags. As I had arrived in the evening, the bedding had been taken out of the storage behind some rice paper screen doors along one wall, and placed on the floor. It consisted of a thick pad with a thinner one on top, and a bottom sheet. A soft, fluffy one-piece cover lay on top. In a small floor-to-ceiling closet hung a yukata, and in a wicker basket at the bottom lay a western-size bath towel and the obi (sash) for the yukata.

Now, regarding tying the obi, it is important to remember that the left side of the yukata must be wrapped over top of the right side. The only time the sides are wrapped right-over-left is when preparing a body for a funeral. So, unless one wants to be seen as a "dead man walking," left goes over right!

9.2 Tokyo

It's a big and busy city, and I've seen and done a lot of the things on offer. Here are just a few, small extracts from my diaries, both involving food:

[Diary] I found a curry house and sat at a counter. The gaijin's (foreigner's) "Menu Book" was in English, Arabic, Russian, Portuguese, Korean, and Chinese. Interestingly, a separate sheet written only in Japanese had some sort of Dutch specials and had numerous pictures of windmills and tulips. The menu had this "Order by the numbers" approach. Choose pork or beef; 200, 300, or 400 grams of boiled rice; and choose the spice level from -1 to 10, with 0 being normal. I chose level 2 "For a little extra stimulation," the menu said. Level 5 was "Not for the faint-hearted. Consider the consequences." The food came quite quickly, and perspiration soon appeared on my brow. I managed to neutralize the heat with some Coke.

[Diary] We sat at two long tables each of which had several gas-fired hotplates built in. I sat in front of one, so became a designated cook. Each group was given a large platter of meat and vegetables, and another with shredded cabbage and noodles. We started off with pieces of steak, spicy sausage, lobster, and scallops with red peppers, mushrooms, and eggplant, over which we poured a variety of sauces. Towards the end, we added the cabbage and noodles. Copious quantities of beer were consumed, and a great time was had by all. I sat with delegates from Japan and Korea, and I was very pleased to sit opposite the former Head-of-Delegation from Japan, who'd stepped down several years earlier. His English was decidedly British.

9.3 Kyoto

Yes, it's a city full of wooden temples, and what magnificent structures they are. Just go visit!

9.4 Nara

I've visited this old capital twice, both times for conferences. And, yes, the deer really do wander around the open park among the tourists.

[Diary] A Finnish conference delegate and I set off on a walking tour of the area and its temples, shrines and gardens. Early afternoon, we stopped in at a small restaurant run by a tiny grandmother, to get some lunch. She was ever so happy to have us as guests. I had a large bowl of soba noodles with vegetables. She was fascinated by my height and the size of my boots, especially when she and I put our feet alongside each other. We chose our meal from the plastic models in the window.

Outside the park, we walked down the long, main street shopping area. I was looking to buy a woolen cap to replace the one I'd accidentally left on the train. I finally found one at a most unexpected place, a convenience store. Then, as I was quite low on yen, I went in search of a cash machine. I tried at least six without luck. One was closed for servicing, three accepted cards only issued in Japan, and the rest had only Japanese instructions, and I couldn't figure out how to work them. Finally, I found a Post Office, and its machine was ever so happy to be of service, so I withdrew twice as much as I'd initially planned just in case I had trouble finding another one later in the week. Armed with ¥40,000 (US\$400), I was ready to go again.

[Diary] ... At the station, I got my ticket for the 4:16 pm shinkansen (Bullet Train). To my right sat a middle-aged woman who read much of the way. To my left was an older man, a professor of Economics in Kyoto. He spoke very good English and had obtained his Ph. D in the U.S. many years ago. He had just bought two English-language magazines to read en-route. Both had President-elect Obama on the cover, and when I told him I'd volunteered for Obama during the recent [2008] elections, he stood up, bowed, grabbed my hand, shook it vigorously, and smiled. We had some great conversation and exchanged business cards.

9.5 Osaka

Late in 2000, I stayed with Harusa, a woman I'd hosted the year before when she was in the US for three months of English, American culture, and customer-service training. She lived with her family in the mountains of Hyogo Prefecture. She and her husband commuted to Osaka each day to work.

I spent three nights with them over a weekend during which time I offered to cook a meal. Harusa's mother, a widow who lived with her, ran the house. When Harusa translated for her my offer, the mother couldn't stop smiling. A man in the kitchen! Helping with domestic work! Whatever next! Anyway, she was gracious enough to let me in *her* kitchen, where I made Mexican food for the family and friends who lived nearby. It took a while for us to find all the ingredients and it wasn't until I found a large, international supermarket that I spied "Old El Paso" Mexican food kits containing all the ingredients. When it came time to cook, the three women appeared in their aprons, headscarves, and pads and pencils eager and ready to write down the recipe, so they might reproduce it. However, each time they asked me "How much?", "How long?", and so forth, I told them I just made it up as I went, and I never used recipes. They didn't understand that at all, so put away their pads and just watched.

9.6 Hiroshima

The visit to the Atomic Bomb museum and dome was very sobering, especially when at the entrance the ticket sign said that survivors of the blast were admitted free!

A highlight of being in that general area was a daytrip to the famous shrine at Miyajima.

9.7 Kamakura

After Tokyo, this is my second-most visited place in Japan.

We first met the Fukushima family when they hosted us in 1994. Since then, my family has hosted them numerous times, and vice versa. Most times I'm in Tokyo, I manage to make a day trip to see them or to stay for several days.

Misa teaches private English classes to children of various ages, and we help. My specialty is to teach them to play the card game Uno where we work on basic vocabulary regarding colors and numbers. Her husband, Kaz, and I like to go hiking.

[Diary] We drove to a nice summer house and grounds formerly used by Emperor Hirohito. The grounds ran down to the sea at Sagami Bay, which was a great place for collecting marine specimens. The emperor was an avid marine biologist, and we visited an interesting marine museum there.

[Diary] ... We walked to a large shrine complex nearby. The streets were crowded with cars and people. In a small building near the shrine, a wedding was taking place, so we stopped to watch. The bride had a large white headdress and a young female assistant to the Shinto priest was performing some sort of ceremony. It was the day to celebrate 3-, 5- and 7-year-old boys and girls, so many young girls were dressed in kimonos and the boys in fancy clothes. I got some great photos.

[Diary] ... Around noon, we all left to go out for lunch at a sushi restaurant. We sat in a large booth and a narrow conveyor belt delivered plates of food. Each plate cost ¥105. Each booth had a touch-sensitive flat-panel screen through which one could place custom orders; these were then delivered by a computer-controlled tray that ran above the belt. We ordered a number of plates and they came directly to our booth. Once we had taken the plates, we pressed a button and the tray returned empty to the kitchen. Each booth had a standard set of things: a box of chopsticks, toothpicks, wet towels, soy sauce, packets of wasabi, a large box containing slices of fresh ginger, and sweet and sour sauce (to be

eaten with eel). We each placed a small spoon of powdered green tea in our cups and filled them from a boiling water spigot mounted on our table. We ate miso soup with seaweed, a variety of fish and seafood sushi, and rice with soy sauce. Once we were done, we summoned the waitress by pressing a button on our screen, she counted the empty plates, multiplied that number by 105, and, voila, we had the final bill.

[Diary] ... Misa and I drove into Kamakura and visited two temples. The first was one of my favorites, and hers too, as it had a forest of dark green 50'-tall bamboos, along with my other favorites, moss, running water, and ferns. From there, we walked to another temple that had an English garden. We walked around that and then visited a teahouse. It had just opened, and we were the first customers of the day. We took off our shoes and sat on the tatami mats looking out over a rock garden. There was no table, just a large expanse of mats. Misa ordered cold green tea with ice while I ordered hot green tea. Our server was a young woman who arrived soon after with a tray. She put it on the floor in front of Misa, bowed, and said some words. Misa also bowed and was served her tea along with a paper napkin and a sweet cookie. The process was repeated for me and my bowl of hot tea. When we were finished, the server went through another little ceremony before taking our empty bowls and cookie wrappers.

9.8 Fuji-san (Mount Fuji)

Although a picture is worth a 1,000 words, seeing the snow-capped Mt. Fuji in person without its ever-present weather system is a sight to behold! And I've had that pleasure a number of times.

[Diary] We headed for Hakone and the lakes district near the base of Mount Fuji. I asked my friend, Kaz, to stop, so I could take a photo of the many fishermen on the lake. I did so, and then when I turned around, there was a clear view of Mount Fuji in the distance, complete with snow cap. It was magnificent. The place where we stopped also just happened to be the site of a festival the following day, and people were setting up for it. The main event was to be archery while riding on horses, just like in the old Samurai warrior days.

We drove up Mount Fuji to the 5th Stage, which was as far as the road went. From there, one could only go on foot, and plenty of people do. This was where the snow currently ended, but we did get to walk in it some distance on one path. It was rather touristy there as you might imagine, and we bought postcards and had lunch. Apparently, at the mountain top there is a public telephone and a mailbox, so one can get cards stamped on Mount Fuji. (Apparently, tourists climb to the top and post their letters and cards. Then some enterprising person climbs to the top, retrieves all the mail from the mailbox, and brings it back down to the Post Office.) The mountain is 3,700 meters tall, is a dormant volcano, whose crater is 800 meters across, and which takes an hour to walk around. For centuries it was a sacred site (and is still considered to be by some), and women were not allowed there. The oldest recorded person to reach the summit was 102 and had climbed it many times.

The clouds rolled in soon after we arrived, and as is often the case, the mountain was hidden in its own weather system. On the drive back down, we stopped off for a hike into some old and steep lava fields.

We drove back to Kamakura through the countryside. There was a lot of traffic and it took many hours, but it was well worth it. (The reason for the traffic was that this was a long weekend, after which

Golden Week was to start. During this week many businesses are closed as are the schools, so it was a national holiday week.)

During a separate trip to the area:

[Diary] Kaz had booked a cabin in the woods near Hakone. We checked in, unloaded our gear, and went for a good long walk down by the lake before the sun set. There were plenty of trees with lots of colorful foliage, especially Japanese maples. It was a good physical workout, so on our return, we went to the hot baths. It was my first time at such a place, so I had to learn the rules. The lady at the counter spoke fluent English with an American accent. (She'd lived in California and New York City.) She gave me a key in a rubber pouch that strapped to my wrist. At the entrance to the change room, I took off my boots and placed them in a small shoe locker, taking the key with me. That key I stored in a clothes locker along with all my clothes. I was issued a heavy-duty face washer and a mid-size towel. So naked I got, locked the locker with my first key, and off we went. Although there was a small indoor pool, Kaz said he was going to the outside one. So along I went. The pool was in the shape of a circle with a diameter of 15 feet. Down the middle was a tall wall that divided the men's' and women's' sections. The water was reasonably warm but not too hot and about 2–3 feet deep. A very big wooden roof covered us, but the sides were open to the cold evening. Steam rose from the water as we lay back and soaked with hot towels on our heads.

9.9 Hokkaido

I've had one trip to Japan's northern-most island. I knew almost nothing about that island before I arrived, but soon learned that it was only occupied by the Japanese in the late 1800's. It was the first land the Japanese had that was suitable for broad-acre farming. The US provided help with that, and influenced things in other areas, such as the use of a grid system with numbered and lettered streets, and New England-style red-brick buildings.

[Diary] As I walked outside from the Sapporo main train station, it was a pleasant evening. However, soon it started to drizzle, then rain, then pour. And, for good measure, the wind blew hard, so I had to hold onto my straw hat as well as my luggage. I headed in the general direction of my ryokan (traditional Japanese inn). I asked directions of a young couple along the way, and although their English was minimal, with my very basic Japanese and their street map, we figured out I was off by a block, so I backtracked, arriving at the inn around 10 pm, local time.

The ryokan staff was very happy to see me, dripping wet as I was. I registered and the front desk clerk took my luggage, while a hostess, dressed in full kimono and those wonderful socks with toes, escorted me to my room on the second floor. Inside the main door of my room was the area to leave one's shoes and to change into house slippers. The main room measured 8 tatami (straw) mats in size. There was the usual low tea table, a TV, phone, refrigerator, and the traditional rice paper sliding screens for inner doors and on storage closets. A small, but adequate en-suite bathroom was included, but, of course, that had its own bathroom slippers—one must not wear house slippers in the toilet! The hostess gave me a towel to dry myself. She then took one look at my size, and took the yukata from my closet and replaced it with a much larger one. (A yukata is a light-weight kimono that one wears to bed. It can also be worn around the inn.) An insulated jug of iced water and another of boiling water were provided,

along with a delicate piece of cake on a plate. Not being a green tea fan, and needing sugar with my tea, I did make tea, but used the black tea bags and sugar I'd brought from home.

I had a nice hot shower, then changed into my yukata, and got into my futon bed on the floor. Although I travel with my own feather pillow, I did use several Japanese pillows as extra support. They are small and stuffed full of dried rice kernels, which, although hard, can be quite comfortable. Lights out at 10:30 pm local time, more than 24 hours after I'd left my house.

[Diary] ... *When I went down to breakfast, the hostess welcomed me dressed in her beautiful kimono. After our bowing and pleasantries, she seated me and brought me a traditional Japanese breakfast. That included a tray with a bowl of hot miso soup, a piece of cold cooked fish, a variety of cold, pickled vegetables, the ever-present bowl of warm sticky white rice, and, of course, o-hashii (honorable chopsticks). As usual with food in Japan, it was all arranged like a piece of art, making it a shame to have to eat it.*

[Diary] ... *My friend Yoshiyuki, whom I'd hosted several years earlier, met me at the ryokan. The sun was shining, and the weather looked very promising. We drove to the Hokkaido Shinto shrine where we were very fortunate to watch a special ceremony. From there, we headed out on the main highway to Otaru, the port city an hour away. There were quite a few tour buses around, and young men were negotiating both hand- and bike-drawn rickshaw rides. The canal and warehouse district has been very nicely restored, and many flowers and art/craft stalls were along the canal. We ate lunch in a very small ramen noodle house. Mine was soy-based with pork, and mini-size, as the big ones were too big for me. Then on the street, we bought some wonderful melon-flavored ice cream. We drove along the coast a bit then up a small mountain, Mt. Tengu, which has a ski slope. At the famous glass factory, we saw many nice pieces and watched master craftsmen and their apprentices at work. Although we weren't that far up, it was pleasantly cool. We drove back along the coast.*

[Diary] ... *It was a nice day, so I set out for the Hokkaido University, a sprawling campus started as an agricultural college in 1876. A co-founder was Dr. William Smith Clark, who founded the Massachusetts Agricultural College 10 years earlier. (Massachusetts and Hokkaido are sister states.) There were a number of gardens and museums. The current student population was about 20,000.*

9.10 Okinawa

I've been there once, for a 3-day conference. It's quite some distance from the mainland.

[Diary] *At 7 pm, I went down to a reception hosted by the Japan Standards organization. Delegates and partners sat at a number of tables socializing, and eating and drinking. There was an eclectic selection of eastern and western foods, and some divine desserts. Mid-way through, a young woman in traditional dress arrived and began playing a local stringed instrument while singing. She was accompanied on drums by another young woman dressed in a dance costume. After several songs, they were joined by a troupe of dancers in bright costumes. Each had a large drum hanging at their waist, and they sure belted out some noise. They were volunteers from the Okinawa prefecture (local government). I sat with a delegate from China, and his wife, an editor at a Chinese art institute. This was her first time traveling outside China.*

[Diary] ... First stop on our tour was the castle occupied by the leader of the old Kingdom of Ryukyu, which comprised Okinawa and the surrounding islands. Although quite a few of the wooden buildings had been destroyed by fire over its 500-year history, most of them had been beautifully restored. After an hour there, we moved on to the famous tunnel network dug by hand by Japanese naval forces in preparation for the Allied invasion in 1945. Many military members committed suicide there rather than be taken prisoner.

9.11 Yokohama

Although I'd passed through this city numerous times on the train going to Kamakura, I've only stayed in the area once, and visited it briefly two other times. It's quite close to the old international airport, Haneda (HND).

I stayed in, and attended a conference at, a hotel right near the harbor. I believe that it was the tallest building in Japan. Now at some 70 floors, it didn't seem that tall, but considering Japan is in an earthquake zone, this is the upper limit allowed for construction. As a hotel, what made it interesting was that the reception was on the fourth floor and the rooms were on the top floors, with a restaurant at the very top providing a great view over the city and harbor. From there, I got a bird's eye view of the helipads on the surrounding buildings.

During my free time, I took a local bus out to a large garden where traditional buildings from all over the country had been reconstructed as a living museum.

9.12 Conclusion

Each time I plan a trip to Japan, I look forward to it very much, and I've never been disappointed. One of the highlights is when I see a woman in traditional dress, complete with white-powdered face, and wooden clogs. I've found the people to be very gracious, and, initially, was pleasantly surprised to find that many people from the time of the US Occupation spoke passable English and were eager to practice it. I get the impression that interfering with someone else's stuff is just not done. Time and again, I've seen stores and private houses with valuable things left standing out in or near the street, yet no one seems to take them.

Bucket List: I have this romantic idea of spending a month staying and working on a farm where the host family has little or no English. I'm also interested in hiking with a small pack, probably around Hokkaido. And although I have never flown into the famous Kansai Airport (KIX), I'll get there eventually. It's built on an island created from earth cut from the top of a mountain, and as the soil settles, the island keeps moving. To that end, some 10,000 microprocessors are continually monitoring and using equipment to keep the terminal buildings level. The good news is that during a big earthquake in nearby Kobe, the island wobbled, but only a little bit.

10. September 2014, “Abbreviations and Acronyms”

The world is full of shorthand names, and given the explosion in writing via a limited keyboard (such as those on most mobile phones) for text messages, email, and such, many more shortcuts to typing have been invented.

In this essay, we'll look at some abbreviations and acronyms in common use, but whose long form is not necessarily so well known or for which there is something of note to mention. A few are included because of a personal interest. [The idea for this essay and most of the entries came to me while I was awake with jetlag during a 2014 visit to Salzburg, Austria, between 04:00 and 06:30 one morning.]

Some references you might find useful are [Oxford English Dictionary](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/), <http://www.abbreviations.com/>, <http://dictionary.reference.com/abbreviations/>, and <http://www.acronymfinder.com/>.

10.1 Abbreviations

According to Wikipedia, an *abbreviation* “is a shortened form of a word or phrase.” An abbreviation is never read like a word; it is spelled out letter by letter.

AD or A.D. – Taken from the Latin Anno Domini meaning, “In the Year of the Lord,” and representing the year after the supposed birth of Jesus. The AD is written before the year, as is AD 1066. The politically correct equivalent is CE or C.E. (Common Era). See BC below.

A.M. or a.m. – from the Latin *ante meridiem*, meaning *before midday*: Of course, much of the world uses a 24-hour clock, thereby avoiding the silliness of having 12 pm be earlier than 1 pm! See P.M. below.

BC or B.C. – Before Christ: This seems odd, as English really didn't exist as such when the AD naming convention was invented in AD 525. Why not Latin like AD? The BC is written after the year, as is 345 BC. The politically correct equivalent is BCE or B.C.E. (Before the Common Era). See AD above.

BS or BSc – A Bachelor of Science degree, from the Latin *Scientiæ Baccalaureus*: Just to show that my time in university was not entirely wasted, there I learned that BS had something to do with “bullsh*t”, MS meant “more of the same,” and Ph.D. meant, “piled higher and deeper.”

DIY – Do it Yourself: Mostly used in the context of home maintenance.

DNA – Deoxyribonucleic acid: Its buddy is RNA, Ribonucleic acid.

e.g. – from the Latin *exempli gratia*: Means “for example.”

ETA – Estimated Time of Arrival: Commonly heard from the cockpit when flying.

GMT – Greenwich Mean Time: Named because the internationally accepted prime meridian runs through the Royal Observatory in Greenwich, England. (Refer also to Coordinated Universal Time [UTC].) On one visit to said observatory, I watched as tourists stood with one foot either side of the meridian, inserted a £1-coin in a machine, and received an official “I straddled the Prime Meridian” certificate!

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i.e. – from the Latin *id est*: Means “that is.”

IRS – Internal Revenue Service: The US Federal tax-collection agency. In the UK, this used to be known as Inland Revenue, and I remember well in a sketch English comedian Benny Hill questioning why he should pay taxes to them when “he lived on the coast!”

LSD – lysergic acid diethylamide: A psychedelic drug commonly referred to as *acid*.

M&M – A brand of candy/sweets: Not to be confused with S&M.

m.o. – from the Latin *modus operandi*: Means “method of operation;” commonly used by police detectives when discussing a possible suspect’s motives.

NB – from the Latin *nota bene*: Means “note well.”

OK – okay: Although no one knows the origins of the use of this, click here for some interesting theories.

P.M. or p.m. – from the Latin *post meridiem*, meaning *after midday*: Of course, much of the world uses a 24-hour clock, thereby avoiding the silliness of having 12 am be earlier than 1 am! See A.M. above.

PS – from the Latin *post scriptum*: Means “writing that follows after the main body.” If there is more than one thing to say, **PSS**, **PPS**, and **PPPS** can be used as well.

Q.E.D. – from the Latin *quod erat demonstrandum*: If you took a mathematics class in university, you may well have seen this written after a mathematical proof. Basically, it means, “As you can clearly see,” when in reality it requires someone with several advanced degrees to figure out!

R&D – Research and Development: Not to be confused with B&D.

RSVP – from the French *répondez s'il vous plaît*, (*reply, if you please*): When seen on a written invitation along with a date, means “please respond by that date.”

SOS – the international Morse code distress signal: The “continuous sequence of [easy to press] three dits, three dahs, and three dits” just happens to spell “SOS.” Of course, someone just had to retrofit this abbreviation with matching words, with Save our Souls being one such attempt.

UK – United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The purveyors of fine convicts, especially those sent first to the American colony of Georgia and later to Australia!

US/USA – United States of America: As I wrote in the May 2014 essay, “What is Normal - Part 7: What's in a Name?” the US is known as VS to the Germans (*Die Vereinigten Staaten*) and the Dutch (*Verenigde Staten*), as EU to the French (*Les États-Unis*), and as EE.UU. to Spanish speakers (*Los Estados Unidos*).

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics: However, when written in the Cyrillic alphabet, it's **СССР** (Союз Советских Социалистических Республик, that is, *Soyuz Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik*), as you've no doubt seen in photos painted on Soviet military and space vehicles).

VIP – Very Important Person: For some people, it means, “they are legend in their own mind” rather than “in their own time.”

10.2 Acronyms

According to Wikipedia, an acronym is “formed from the initial components in a phrase or a word. These components may be individual letters or parts of words.” An acronym is read like a word; it is never spelled out letter by letter.

ANZAC – Australian and New Zealand Arry Corps: Most noted for its WWI campaign at Gallipoli, Turkey. To this day, Australia's national day for remembering its war dead is Anzac Day, April 25th. (For a portrayal of that campaign see the movie Gallipoli, co-starring Mel Gibson.)

ASEAN – Association of Southeast Asian Nations: This political and economic group meets to discuss concerns for its region. Australia is an observing member.

BASIC – Beginner's All-purpose Symbolic Instruction Code: This high-level, computer-programming language was made popular by early mini- and personal computers. [It was my first programming language, on a DEC PDP-11 in 1974.]

COBOL – Common Business-Oriented Language: This high-level, computer-programming language has been used for many years for commercial business processing on mainframe computers. [It was my first production programming language when I started work as a programmer for a state highways authority in Australia.]

Fortran – Formula Translating System: This high-level, computer-programming language is suited to numerical and scientific programming. [I used it for programming mapping and graphics applications, as well as monitoring and controlling hydro and steam power generation.]

IKEA – According to Wikipedia, this well-known Swedish company's name was formed from the initials of its founder, Ingvar Kamprad, the name of the farm on which he was raised, Elmtaryd, and his hometown, Agunnaryd.

laser – light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation.

NASA – The National Aeronautics and Space Administration: A US government agency that would have us believe it landed several spacecraft on the moon and Mars. Yeah, right! [See the movie Capricorn 1.]

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization: Pretty much everyone knows about this political and military organization, but did you know that it once had a southern counterpart, SEATO? This was the South East Asia Treaty Organization. Separately, there is ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty). By the way, the Soviet-backed, cold-war archrival of NATO was the Warsaw Pact.

Nazi – A National Socialist, from the German Nationalsozialismus.

OPEC – Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries.

POTUS – President of the United States of America. Not to be outdone, the First Lady of the United States is FLOTUS, and the Supreme Court of the United States is SCOTUS. [Now, although you might see some similarities, POTUS, FLOTUS, and SCOTUS are not to be confused with Donald Duck's nephews, Huey, Dewey, and Louie!]

Qantas – Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Services. Australia's national airline is one of the oldest, continuing air services in the world, and one of only a few that has never suffered a fatal crash.

radar – radio detection and ranging.

scuba – self-contained underwater breathing apparatus.

snafu – Military slang for “situation normal: all f**ked up”. Generally used to mean a bad situation.

sonar – sound navigation and ranging.

Stasi – Ministry for State Security, from the German *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*: [These East German secret police had a compound on a hill overlooking the peaceful village of Tiefengruben (near Weimar in Thuringia), where my friends now live. When the East German government fell, the villagers went as a group to see what was in this off-limits area. To their surprise, they found a group of holiday cabins that were used by Stasi members and their families.]

ZIP (Code) – Zone Improvement Plan: According to Wikipedia, this US postal code, “was chosen to suggest that the mail travels more efficiently, and therefore more quickly (zipping along), when senders use the code in the postal address.”

10.3 Written Abbreviations, Spoken Words

Some words are typically written only as abbreviations yet spoken as the full words. Here are some common ones:

etc. – from the Latin *et cetera*: Means “and so forth.” This was a favorite word of the King of Siam in the musical and movie *The King and I*. The German equivalent is *usw.* (*und so weiter*); it's a favorite of mine when I enumerate a list of things in German and I have no idea whatsoever what comes after the first two!

Mr. – *mister*, from *master*: The plural, *Misters*, is sometimes written as *Messrs.*, from French.

Mrs. – *missus*, from *mistress*: The plural, *Mesdames*, from French.

I've always found the French connection interesting, especially as the French words were used regularly in photo captions in my hometown and regional newspapers in rural Australia in the 1970s.

10.4 Conclusion

Of course, there are many other sets of abbreviations and acronyms, ranks and titles, weights and measures, and month names, just to name a few.

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Now you've waited patiently to get to this really exciting bit of information, the longest known acronym, **ADCOMSUBORDCOMPHIBSPAC**. This United States Navy term stands for *Administrative Command, Amphibious Forces, Pacific Fleet Subordinate Command*, but you'll have to figure out for yourself just how the letters were chosen. It certainly isn't obvious to me.

11. October 2014, “Travel: Memories of the Benelux Countries”

According to Wikipedia, Benelux “is a union of states comprising three neighboring countries in Midwestern Europe: Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. The union's name is a portmanteau formed from joining the first syllable of each country's name – **Belgium Netherlands Luxembourg** – and was first used to name the customs agreement that initiated the union (signed in 1944). It is now used in a more general way to refer to the geographic, economic and cultural grouping of the three countries.”

I've been to The Netherlands quite a few times, but only once to Luxembourg, and twice to Belgium. On one trip, with my wife and young son, we visited all three. We flew with Icelandair to Luxembourg, via Reykjavik (where we stayed three days), then went by train to Paris where I attended a conference. From there, our Benelux Rail Pass took us to Brussels, Amsterdam, and, finally, back to Luxembourg. We flew back home via Iceland, but with no stop-over. Compared to most rail passes, this one allowed considerable flexibility. One could use it for any five days over a 15-day period.

11.1 Belgium

Official Name: Kingdom of Belgium; Capital: Brussels; Language: Dutch, French, and German; Country Code: BE; Currency: Euro (€ or EUR), formerly the Belgian franc.

Belgium is made up of two distinct regions, each with its own language and culture. The people of Flanders speak Flemish, a language closely related to Dutch, while the Walloons speak French. Belgium is rather a new country, having only gained independence in 1830.

My first visit was a family vacation, and we arrived by train from Paris. We had no hotel reservation, but soon found a place to stay. As I was reading some tourist information, I discovered the famous Waterloo battlefield was on the outskirts of Brussels, so we rode a local bus to have a look. While having a picnic lunch there we met a Canadian family, attached to their country's embassy, and they had a daughter the same age as our son. They offered us a ride back to the city and invited us to spend the rest of the day with them at their house for supper, after which they took us back to our hotel. (Such random acts of kindness are what make traveling great!)

We discovered that our hotel was on the edge of the Arab Quarter, which gave us some interesting shops to explore. One morning we woke up and when we looked out the window, the previously deserted square was filled with stalls. A huge market was in progress. We also visited the famous bird market where people bought and sold caged birds.

We took a day trip to Bruges, the lace capital, and another to Oostende on the English Channel coast.

Nearly 20 years later, I was back in Brussels for a 2-day business meeting. Although I didn't spend any extra time there, I did walk the streets each evening to look at the old part of the city.

11.2 Luxembourg

Official Name: Grand Duchy of Luxembourg; Capital: Luxembourg City; Language: French, German, and Luxembourgish; Country Code: LU; Currency: Euro (€ or EUR), formerly the Luxembourg franc.

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We rode a bus to the city of Luxembourg from the airport. From some tourist brochures I got some hotel phone numbers, and I proceeded to call around to try and find a place to stay. Eventually, we finished up at one where the staff spoke only French, which we did not speak. After we settled in, I went out to find a shop to buy juice, milk, and some snacks; however, by the time I got back, it was dark, and nothing looked familiar. Eventually, I found what looked like our hotel, and on the ground level was a bar and in its window sat a “Lady of the Evening” exhibiting her wares to passersby. Yes, Dear Reader, our hotel was in the heart of the [Red Light District](#)!

The hotel room did not have a bathroom; that was out in the hall. Imagine if you will a very large storage closet into which a prefabricated shower cubicle had been placed. The interesting problem was that you opened the closet door then opened the shower cubicle, but once you got inside that, you couldn't close the outer door. You needed a second person to help you get in/out of the shower/closet. It really was so ridiculous it was funny.

We spent half a day at the [American War Graves Cemetery](#) where we visited the grave of US Army General [George Patton](#). Ordinarily, the policy is to bury all ranks together, but as Patton was so popular, it was presumed there would be heavy traffic to his grave, so it was set away from the other soldiers.

We rented a car for several days and drove out into the countryside. We spent time in [Wiltz](#) where an American tank from WWII was sitting in the middle of a plaza. Luxembourg is a small country, and we saw most of it over a few days.

At the time, my son was only two years old, so we mostly ate at kid-friendly places that we knew would serve us quickly. That included Pizza Hut! The first time we did that, I struggled with the French menu and my little English/French dictionary, and after I'd placed our order, I noticed a small English version of the menu on the back page. C'est la vie!

11.3 [The Netherlands](#)

Official Name: the [Kingdom of the Netherlands](#); Capital: [Amsterdam](#); Language: [Dutch](#), [West Frisian](#) (in the province [and former independent kingdom] of [Friesland](#)), [Limburgish](#) (in the province of [Limburg](#)), and [Dutch Low Saxon](#) (in the northeast); Country Code: NL; Currency: Euro (€ or EUR), formerly the [Dutch Guilder](#).

From a 2008 visit to Amsterdam, [Haren](#), and Delft:

[Diary from Amsterdam] *At the Schiphol International Airport (AMS), the luggage was quite late in arriving. In the meantime, I asked a cash machine for 200 Euros, which it happily dispensed. The customs folks sat around talking, paying little attention to passengers, but as I approached the exit, one of them decided he needed to appear to be working, and, since I looked rather suspicious, he pulled me over and inspected my case. I was coming in from Oslo, Norway, and he was interested primarily in whether I was carrying any fish. Once he was satisfied I wasn't hiding anything, he thanked me for my cooperation and wished me a good day.*

[Diary] *From Amsterdam I rode a train to [Groningen](#), the capital of the province of the same name. My stop was the last one before the end. One interesting challenge is that mid-trip, the train splits into two,*

with one part going off to Leeuwarden, the capital of the province of Friesland. Over the years, I have found it best to be in the right half of the train when this happens. Once again, I had a whole carriage to myself, so I checked to see if I'd remembered to put on deodorant that morning.

[Diary from Haren] *Dessert consisted of fresh fruit with vla (pronounced "fla"), which is Dutch custard; it comes in many flavors. I love vla, and when asked why I'm going to the Netherlands, I always respond, "For the vla, of course!"*

[Diary] *After a breakfast of tea, bread and cheese, my friend Wietske and I set out on bikes for a ride into the countryside. After an hour, we pulled into a village restaurant for morning tea. I was definitely ready for a rest, as I probably hadn't ridden a bike in the year since I was last here. I had my usual, koffie verkeerd (literally "wrong coffee," as they put a little coffee into hot milk rather than the other way around). We also had a nice large slice of appelgebak mit slagroom (apple pie with whipped cream). After a 45-minute break, my upper legs were rather weak when I stood up. It was right about then I remembered Nietzsche's famous quote, "Was mich nicht umbrinkt macht mich sterker." ("That which does not kill me can only make me stronger.")*

From a 2009 visit to Delft, Utrecht, and Haren:

[Diary from Delft] *I met some colleagues, and we walked around the city in the sunshine. We took a 50-minute canal tour during which a young Dutch man gave us an overview of the city's architecture and history, and told us all about the East and West Indies Companies and merchants' houses on the canals. Delft was the home of the famous painter Vermeer, and a favorite place for William of Orange to stay. He did so because he thought it the safest place to be, yet he was assassinated there. After our boat tour, we stopped in at a small restaurant for coffee and apple pie. We sat in an indoor garden complete with several large macaws, although they didn't seem to speak any Dutch. As we came out of the restaurant, it drizzled lightly. One colleague and I went off to tour a museum and gallery where I got my cultural fix for the trip. By the time we came outside again, the sun was streaming down, so we strolled in the adjacent gardens.*

[Diary from Utrecht] *I arrived in the new town of Vleuten right on time, and there on the platform was my friend Elsa. We drove to her house nearby where her husband, Eduard, was working. We'd all met some 15 years earlier when they'd stayed with me during a 3-month driving trip around the US. I'd last seen them in 2001 when I stayed overnight on my way to the Schiphol airport. We sat outdoors sipping tea and catching up with each other's news. We ate supper outdoors. Then, after the kids went to bed, we drank coffee and port while we talked some more.*

[Diary] *Friend Jochem arrived to take me to his house in Houten, a suburb to the southeast of Utrecht. There, his wife, Floor, met us with their three girls, Bente, Jade, and Liane. (I met Jochem and Floor in 2002 in Puerto Rico when they were on their honeymoon.) We talked over tea, and then walked around their development, stopping to feed carrots to some pet rabbits, and bread to some ducks. It was overcast out with occasional sun, and a lot of wind. Back home, we drank more tea and ate a variety of snacks. The oldest daughter, Bente, decided she liked me, and took up a position on my lap. She had recently started to learn to read Dutch, and she showed me several of her favorite books. Her younger sister, Jade was not at all too sure about the foreign-speaking giant, so she kept her distance.*

[Diary] Jochem, Bente, and I drove through the countryside through sheep farms and apple and plums orchards. In downtown Utrecht, we parked in a garage, and walked to the big church in the old town. There, we bought tickets for the 12-o'clock tour of the church tower. We had some time to kill, so went into the church and neighboring gardens. At noon, a large group of us gathered for a 50-minute guided tour in Dutch and English. In total, we climbed more than 400 steep steps for a 360-degree view over the city. The largest bell in the tower weighed 8,000 kg, and it had a 250 kg clapper, which was the weight of the smallest bell. In the street, we stopped to listen to a man playing Spanish guitar, and then to two men playing Baroque music on button accordions.

[Diary from Haren] I arrived at Haren station and walked on several familiar paths until I came to the house of my good friends, Gerard and Wietske, and their teenage girls, Marly and Suze. I'd last seen them in April 2008. As soon as we met, we picked up from where we left off last time. After supper, we drank tea and talked of many things. Gerard's latest book, about a German SS officer, had been published, and he was hard at work on another one, about a US marine during the Pacific campaign in WWII. And he had a day job besides.

[Diary] I was up at 08:30, and I had a cup of tea with Gerard. After that, he did some warm-up exercises in preparation for a 12-km run. We left the house with Gerard stretching out, and me on a bike, which was just about an even match given the difference in our respective fitness levels. We wound around the edge of Haren and out through several other villages and long dark paths through the forest. The Netherlands probably has the best support for bike riding of any country.

[Diary] Early afternoon, Wietske suggested a ride to a village having a 2-day festival. Soon after, she, Suze, and I set out on the 7-km trip through forests. The main feature of the festival was a series of floats decorated with flowers, foliage, and vegetables. Each one had a theme, and most had people in costume for their theme. Given the perishable nature of the decorations, they had been completed only the day before. The floats were impressive. There was live music, and we listened for some time to a choir of over-60s singing old tunes in English. They were having a great time. There were numerous stalls selling clothing, food, and toys. Mid-afternoon, we peddled back home.

From a 2013 visit to Amsterdam, Haren, Utrecht, and Delft:

[Diary] Now I didn't actually want to be in Germany; it's just that my preferred airline group, Star Alliance, didn't fly directly from London to Amsterdam. The best they could do was to route me through Frankfurt, which was probably more than four times the direct distance. C'est la vie! Well, I followed the Connecting Flights signs, but I still had to go through passport control and security even though I was only in-country about an hour. The alarm went off when I walked through security, and I was subjected to a rigorous hand-check. The security officer gave me a series of instructions in German, to which I replied, "Auf English, bitte." (In English please.) And his reply, in English, was, "I speak only German!"

To say that I walked a half-marathon to my gate would be exaggerating a bit, but it sure was a long way. At least I didn't have to change terminals! No sooner had I arrived at Gate A34, that I found a woman from Mexico who spoke only Spanish, and she needed help finding her gate. So, I took her to the flight display, looked at her boarding pass, and directed her to a gate nearby. I found that my basic Spanish was a bit rusty as I struggled to remember my numbers.

In the waiting area I sat next to a very interesting young Dutch woman who was returning home to Utrecht from 12 days holiday on the island of Malta. She was a PhD student doing research on various aspects of cancer. We talked of many things and I discovered that in the Netherlands graduate students get paid a stipend. She would graduate in a year and planned to do post-grad work in London.

Boarding was called and being an elite flyer, I got to board Flight LH1002 early. At the entrance I asked the young flight attendant if the plane was going somewhere near Amsterdam. She replied with a smile, "No, we're going to Brussels, but you can get a taxi from there." We both laughed and agreed that it's the journey, not the destination!

[Diary from Amsterdam] *The Amsterdam International Airport (AMS) is called Schiphol and is up to 11 feet below sea level, so I hope that little Dutch boy keeps his finger in the dijk (dike). The name comes from "Ship Grave," a reference to the fact that numerous ships sank in the area before it was reclaimed.*

[Diary] *I had decided to do one significant activity that day, and that was to visit the Dutch Resistance Museum dealing with WWII. I spent more than 2½ hours looking at videos, reading information, and listening to an English-language headset. It was very well done and most informative. Of course, the theme suggests the problems the Dutch had with the occupation by the Germans, but one section of exhibits dealt with the impact of Japan's entering the war. Japan attacked and overran the Dutch East Indies. After the war, the Dutch expected to go back to the way things were there, but Sukarno and others pushed for independence, which eventually came in 1949. One theme I came away with was, during such an occupation, should the people "adapt, collaborate, or resist"? I guess we really won't know which we'd do until we're placed in that position.*

I took the tram back into the downtown getting off at Rembrandtplein (Rembrandt Square). There, right in the middle of the square was a large statue of the great painter, surrounded by many bronze, armed men. There were many tourists and locals lazing in the sun, and as I watched, a half a dozen policemen and women walked among the groups of people inspecting their bags, presumably for drugs.

I decided to enjoy the sunshine and I walked along a canal to the square in front of the palace. Along the way, I stopped to take photos of bikes, bridges, tour boats, canals, and interesting signs. I jumped aboard a Number 14 tram and headed back to my neighborhood. There, I dropped by a supermarket to rescue two liters of volle melk (whole milk), a liter of sinaasappelsap (orange juice), and a carton of vanillavla (vanilla custard). (As a growing boy, I have to keep up my strength!)

[Diary] *In the lift going down I met an American woman living in Berlin. Together, we walked to catch the tram. Having mastered the public transport system the previous day, I was ready for bigger moves, such as changing from one tram to another! After two very fast trips, I was standing at the end of a long line waiting to get into the van Gogh Museum. I wondered why it was so popular. Perhaps word had gotten around that Vinnie had cut off his other ear! The line moved quickly, and I paid for €20-worth of culture, which included an audio/video guide. Two hours and four floors later I still didn't understand art, sigh. [This was my second visit to that museum. My first was 32 years earlier during my first visit to Amsterdam.] A number of his works looked familiar. These included two of his sunflower series, several self-portraits (but not my favorite one done with dots), and The Potato Eaters. When I saw Still life with cabbage and clogs, I almost wanted to cut off my own ear! He certainly lived the life*

of a tortured artist, and died by his own hand at age 37. To be sure, the highlight of my visit was the restaurant, where I had a bowl of tomato and parsley soep (soup) and a saucijzen broodje (sausage roll). It was more food than I needed, but it sure was good.

The large, open space behind the museum was full of tents and people with what appeared to be a festival to promote all the museums and galleries around the city. The public was out in force with entertainment, food, and drink all around. An impressive, huge building dominated the end of the park, and I walked over to take a look at it. It was the Rijksmuseum. I wondered around its gardens and main hall, but declined to go into the exhibits.

There was a tram stop nearby, and after I stood there waiting for while I noticed that stalls were built over the tram tracks in that area. Perhaps the tram to this point wasn't running today, thought I, and I was right. So, I had to walk a bit to get outside the temporary pedestrian zone. I rode a tram toward the city station and got off to walk down some back streets. Then once I got back on the tram, it was stopped soon after by a police incident up ahead, so I got off and walked to the main station. From there, I headed towards De Oude Kirk (The Old Church) that had been recommended in one of my guidebooks. I saw the spires and headed down a side alley towards them. Just then, there was a loud knocking of metal on glass off to my right, and when I turned to see what it was, I saw a scantily clad, buxom, dark-skinned woman sitting in a window rapping on the glass with her rings. She was tempting me like a Siren, but it had nothing to do with any rocks! So, I raced off to the safety of the church, passing several more such ladies-of-the-night as I went. However, once I got there, I found the interior of the church quite underwhelming, and the €5 admission wasted. I might have gotten more value from one of the ladies! It was getting cold, and a stiff breeze was blowing. Besides, my feet were telling me to go home. So, I did, but I had to go through the Red-Light District to get there.

[Diary from Haren] *My friend, Gerard, came home around 13:00 and we ate lunch together and talked of many things. Around 14:30, we set out for his daily exercise (which doesn't include his 2x6 km bike ride to work each day). He was training for extreme races (those longer than a marathon; that is, more than 43 km) and he has a coach who sets him a monthly training schedule. This day it involved 1:15 hours of running, in five lots of 15 minutes with one minute walking between. I followed along on a bicycle. For the most part we were on paved surfaces, brick paths, or hard crushed gravel, but in a few places, it was soft sand, and I had to put in some serious effort. We did it all, trains, boats, planes, and automobiles. During our 15-km jaunt, we followed along the main inter-city train line, we crossed a major canal along which a German was taking his big motor yacht, we crossed the flight path of the local airport, and we followed the regional freeway and crossed under it. We wound through villages and forests and between fields on farms, seeing sheep, horses, sweet corn, and lots of thick green grass.*

Back home, Gerard prepared supper and we sat down to eat. Consider a family of four adults all of whom ride bikes and walk all the time and you can imagine they have hearty appetites, especially Gerard who completes in triathlons (swimming, running, and biking, with ice skating instead of swimming in winter).

After we finished eating and I did the dishes, Wietske and I went for a long walk on the edge of town where I patted and fed grass to some horses. It was very pleasant out and we talked of many things.

Back home, we all sat quietly in the lounge reading with the sound of the clock ticking. I started in on Bryon Farwell's biography of Sir Richard Francis Burton, an amazing man from the Victorian Age.

[Diary from Utrecht] *Around 11:00, we drove to a small river where we rented a rowboat and a 2-person kayak. We worked hard against the strong current for two hours with friend Floor and me rowing two girls in the boat and her husband, Jochem, with the third girl in the kayak. It was hard work and the seat was also very hard! However, the rain held off. We ate a nice lunch at a restaurant and then took only one hour to get back downstream. As we finished, a few drops of rain fell.*

Next, we drove Bente to a riding lesson at a local stable. The class rode in a large in-door area and we watched them through windows in an attached waiting room. We played cards, looked around the stables, and I worked on this diary. Back home, Bente (age 10) cooked salmon in puff pastry, which we ate with salad.

[Diary] *The next day, we all crammed in the car and headed out for our next adventure. The country road was just wide enough for a car and had marked bike lanes on each side. Despite the overcast day, many people were out riding. We also encountered a group of older motorcycle riders, including several with the ladies in sidecars. For some distance, we drove on a road atop an earthen dike. Finally, we reached a nature park where we walked a path along a river and among a herd of curious calves. Jade and I stopped to pick wildflowers. From there, they dropped me at a local station train; however, as soon as I reached the platform, the waiting train left without me. Don't you just hate that when that happens? So, the whole family came onto the platform and waited with me for 15 minutes.*

I bought a ticket to Utrecht Central, where I bought another one to Delft, supposedly via Den Haag (The Hague). The screen showed Spoor (Track) 8, and by the time I got there it was one minute to departure. I jumped on and just as the train started to pull out, I asked a woman if this was the train to Den Haag. She shook her head and said that we were going to Rotterdam. Apparently, I was on Platform 8a, and should have been a bit further along it at 8b. Oh well, Rotterdam is on the way to Delft, so I could change there. There was only one stop, in the famous cheese-market town of Gouda.

[Diary from Delft] *At the Delft station, nothing looked like I remembered it. No, I wasn't having a senior moment and I hadn't gotten off at the wrong station; the station was in a complete state of turmoil with major construction going on. Light rain fell and just as I spied a fietstaxi (a small bike-like taxi driven by pedals) with a young woman driver, someone engaged her, and I was left to walk to my hotel in the rain. Once there I dumped my luggage, freshened up a bit, and then headed back to the center of town for a dinner meeting with some colleagues. Back in my room, I prepared for several meetings the next day.*

My very nice room turned out to have a toaster oven for a bed cover, but due to some ingenious thinking, I managed to sleep most of the night without cooking. However, when my 07:00 alarm sounded, I was not ready to get up. A very hot shower rectified that and, by 07:30 I was in the dining room perusing the breakfast buffet, which was included in the room rate. I had a bowl of fruit with cornflakes, some dense, black bread with cheese and ham, and some juice. And to my pleasant surprise one of the three options on the coffee machine was café verkeerd, so I ordered up one of those and filled the tall glass mug with hot milk. It was all quite civilized. There was quite a crowd, eating quietly and talking in various languages.

[Diary] I shared a taxi to my meeting place with a committee secretary, a very pleasant Japanese woman I've come to know over the years. As we arrived early, I worked on my own for an hour until the plenary started at 10:00. Delegates attended from seven countries; however, the US delegation had gotten on an inter-city train by mistake, which took them to Rotterdam. Their train went through, but didn't stop at, the station they wanted! Don't you just hate that when that happens?

We broke for lunch at noon, and enjoyed some chicken satays with hot peanut sauce and rice with salad. At 1 o'clock, I joined an ad-hoc meeting that lasted for 90 minutes. Afterwards, I joined another committee, which met for two more hours. Meetings, bloody meetings!

[Diary] As I got to the train platform my train was standing there, but the doors were shut. I pushed the "open door" button and the train's electronics ignored me and the train pulled out of the station. A bit rude I thought! Anyway, there was another one in 15 minutes. As I waited, I noticed what looked like police activity listed on a few Inter-City train schedules. There were also some announcements on the PA system. When I asked a local to translate, he told me a dead body had been found at a station a few stops away, and that police were re-directing trains or not letting them stop at that station. Fortunately, that had no effect on my trip.

I caught a train that was direct to Schiphol Airport (AMS) via The Hague and the university city of Leiden. At Priority Check-In, I was processed in no time and the friendly Lufthansa agent got me a better seat on my second leg. After security, I located a business lounge that was happy to have me sit and rest a bit and to use its Wi-Fi system. I noted with interest how many people were drinking beer and spirits/liquor at 8:30 in the morning. AMS is at the crossroads of an international travel network, and it was interesting to see where everyone was going. My gate was one of many just on one concourse, and flights from there were scheduled to the following: Alicante, Basel, Berlin, Bilbao, Billund, Bologna, Bordeaux, Brussels, Canary Islands, La Coruna, Dusseldorf, Geneva, Hanover, Linkoping, Lisbon, Luxembourg, Lyon, Malta, Munich, Oslo, Nice, Prague, Stavanger, Stuttgart, Toulouse, Trondheim, and Vienna, all relatively short-haul destinations within Europe.

11.4 Conclusion

Bucket List: I've been to 11 of the Netherland's 12 provinces, with only Zeeland left to go. [Zeeland is the namesake of New Zealand.] I've gone wadlopen (walking out in the sea on the mudflats), so no need to do that again. In the back of my mind, I do have an idea about staying at a B&B in winter on one of the East Frisian Islands with a friendly dog to walk on the beach.

12. November 2014, “English – Part 5: Adjectives”

In [Part 4](#), we looked at pronouns. This time, we'll look at adjectives. An *adjective* (abbrev. adj.) is a word that describes a noun, a noun phrase, or a pronoun.

An *attributive adjective* precedes the noun or noun phrase; for example, White in “White House”. [Interestingly, in the romance languages, adjectives follow the nouns; for example, “casa blanca” (*white house* in Spanish, but literally *house, white*), “monte verde” (*mountain, green* in Spanish), and “Baton Rouge” (*stick, red* in French.)]

A *predicative adjective* takes the place of a *predicate*. For example, a predicate version of “He is a happy man.” is “He is happy.”

An adjective becomes *nominal* when its noun is implied, as in “I preferred the old version, but he preferred the new [version]”

Some adjectives can go before or after a noun, as in “proper house” and “house proper”, which have different meanings.

12.1 Compound Adjectives

When an adjective is made up of multiple words, it is a compound adjective. Ordinarily, these words are hyphenated, as in “easy-going man,” “sky-high prices,” “10-year-old boy,” and “hard-to-get toy.” Of course, like all good rules, there are exceptions: hyphenate a two-word compound except when the first word ends in -ly, as in “hotly debated topic,” “hastily drawn conclusion,” and “mostly unfounded claim.” Of course, when used in another context, such as a predicate, the same words do not have that hyphen. For example, in “He is easy going.”

12.2 Possessive Adjectives

As their name suggests, possessive adjectives indicate possession. These adjectives are:

Possessive Adjectives		
	Singular	Plural
1 st Person	my	our
2 st Person	your	your
3 st Person	his, hers, its	their

However, don't confuse these with their possessive-pronoun counterparts *mine, yours, his/hers/its, ours, and theirs*.

The word *whose* is a possessive adjective.

For example:

- "My car is blue."
- "Which are your containers?" "Her bins have her name on them."
- I believe this is their chair."
- "Whose turn is it?"
- "She's a person whose imagination knows no bounds."

The archaic version is *thy*, as in the Biblical quote, "Thy will be done", from the Lord's Prayer.

See also "generic you" and "determiners" below.

12.3 The Generic "you"

If one speaks with a plum in one's mouth, or one attended a proper boarding school, one might use the words *one, oneself, and one's* when referring to an unspecified person. For example, while in everyday speech we might say, "You must do your best", the more formal version would be "One must do one's best". As one can clearly see, *one's* is a possessive adjective.

12.4 Determiners

Question: "When is an adjective not an adjective?" Answer: "When it is a determiner." Just when I was convinced there were only eight parts of speech in English, I found that someone (probably a lonely bloke called *Ronald* who as a child never had a pet) sitting in his ivory, linguistic tower, decided that "No, some words simply can no longer be consider adjectives! Let's invent a new category and call it *determiner*, but only on Wednesdays, after 3 pm!"

In a previous installment, I raised the question as to what part of speech is an article (*the, a, and and*)? All of my dictionaries say these words are articles whereas for all other words, they actually tell me the part of speech. (Just like them to avoid the issue completely!)

To set the record straight, here's a direct quote from Wikipedia: "A *determiner* is a word, phrase or affix that occurs together with a noun or noun phrase and serves to express the reference of that noun or noun phrase in the context. That is, a determiner may indicate whether the noun is referring to a definite or indefinite element of a class, to a closer or more distant element, to an element belonging to a specified person or thing, to a particular number or quantity, etc. Common kinds of determiners include definite and indefinite articles (like the English *the* and *a* or *an*), demonstratives (*this* and *that*), possessive determiners (*my* and *their*), and quantifiers (*many, few* and *several*)."

As suggested above, another group of words that fall into this category is cardinal numbers. For example, "those 10 books", "the three little pigs", and "the seven wonders of the world". On the other hand, the ordinal numbers—first, second, third, and so on—are adjectives.

12.5 Adjective Order

It is quite common to apply multiple adjectives to the same noun. For example, "a little old lady" and "the big red shiny ball". In such cases, is there a suggested or required order for them? The hyperlink for this section leads to a detailed explanation, but here's the gist of what Wikipedia says in this regard. '... the adjective order in English is Determiners, Observation, Size and shape, Age, Color, Origin, Material, Qualifier ... adjectives pertaining to size precede adjectives pertaining to age ("little old", not "old little"), which in turn generally precede adjectives pertaining to color ("old white", not "white old"). So, we would say "One (quantity) nice (opinion) little (size) round (shape) old (age) white (color) brick (material) house.'" To borrow from Winston Churchill, the complexity of that previous sentence "is something up with which I will not put".

12.6 Comparison to Adverbs

We'll cover adverbs in a future installment, but a few comments regarding them are useful here. While an adjective qualifies a noun (or pronoun), an adverb qualifies a verb. For example, in the adjectival example, "the slow boat," the noun *boat* is slow. In the adverbial example, "the boat goes slowly," the verb *go* is modified. There are many such pairs of words, with the adverbial member ending in -ly. Occasionally, the exact same word can be an adjective or an adverb, depending on the usage. For example, "the tall man" vs. "the man stood tall."

12.7 The "fewer" vs. "less" Debate

For a long time now, these two words have been used as synonyms. However, there are those who argue that there is an important difference between the two. The issue has to do with whether the noun being modified is *countable*. For example, "There is less ice," but "There are fewer ice cubes." The noun *ice* is not countable while *ice cubes* is.

What about "The interest rate is less than 1%?" Should that be less be fewer? No. While one could count whole percentage points, interest rates are often quoted with one, two, or even three decimal places, the values of which are not, in any whole-number sense, countable.

By the way, *fewer* is classified as a determiner while *less* is an adjective.

For more details, click [here](#).

12.8 Conclusion

I do have one pet peeve regarding the use of adjectives: despite its extensive use by speakers of American English and claims by various (apparently inferior) dictionaries, fun is not an adjective. We did **not** have a fun time at the beach. Rather, we had a good/great time. Now, don't let me catch you misusing this again!

Annex A. Cumulative Index for Volumes 1–11

A.1 Postings in Reverse Chronological Order

Here are the essays posted thus far, with the most recent listed first:

A.1.1 Volume 11

- #132 November 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 22](#) — Switzerland
- #131 October 2020: [School Days: Part 2](#)
- #130 September 2020: [Travel – Memories of Russia](#)
- #129 August 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 21](#) — the Northern Neck of Virginia, USA
- #128 July 2020: [School Days: Part 1](#)
- #127 June 2020: [Travel – Memories of Chile](#)
- #126 May 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 20](#) — Edinburgh, Scotland; London, England; Beijing, China; and more
- #125 April 2020: [The REALLY BIG Picture](#)
- #124 March 2020: [Travel – Memories of the US Desert Southwest](#)
- #123 February 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 19](#) — Edinburgh, Scotland
- #122 January 2020: [Football, Aussie Style](#)
- #121 December 2019: [Travel – Memories of Yorkshire](#)

A.1.2 Volume 10

- #120 November 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 18](#) — Japan
- #119 October 2019: [Washington D.C.](#)
- #118 September 2019: [Travel – Memories of New Mexico](#)
- #117 August 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 17](#) — Texas and Utah
- #116 July 2019: [My Experience with Airbnb](#)
- #115 June 2019: [Travel – From Adelaide to Washington DC](#)
- #114 May 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 16](#) — St. Croix
- #113 April 2019: [Law Enforcement in the US](#)
- #112 March 2019: [Travel – Memories of Abu Dhabi, UAE](#)
- #111 February 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 15](#) — Norway
- #110 January 2019: [My Time in Maine](#)
- #109 December 2018: [Travel – Memories of Prague, Salzburg, and-Munchen](#)

A.1.3 Volume 9

- #108 November 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 14](#) — Croatia, Slovenia, and Italy.
- #107 October 2018: [Living in Chicago](#)
- #106 September 2018: [Travel – Memories of Puerto Rico](#)
- #105 August 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 13](#) — Croatia.
- #104 July 2018: [A Little Bit of Religion](#)
- #103 June 2018: [Travel – Memories of Sacramento, Tahoe, Reno, & Napa Valley](#)
- #102 May 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 12](#) — Vienna, Austria, and Seoul, Korea.

Rex Jaeschke's Blog Postings: Volume 05 – December 2013 through November 2014

- #101 April 2018: [These United States](#)
- #100 March 2018: [Travel – Memories of The Dalmatian Coast](#)
- #99 February 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 11](#) — US states of Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana, and Korea and Japan
- #98 January 2018: [Having a Plan B](#)
- #97 December 2017: [Travel – Memories of The Hill Country, Texas, Y'all](#)

A.1.4 Volume 8

- #96 November 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 10](#) — Hawaii
- #95 October 2017: [English – Part 7: Adverbs](#)
- #94 September 2017: [Travel – Memories of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao](#)
- #93 August 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 9](#) — Barcelona, Spain
- #92 July 2017: [What is Normal – Part 10. Automobiles and Driving](#)
- #91 June 2017: [Travel – Memories of Jordan](#)
- #90 May 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 8](#) — France, Finland, California, Croatia, England, Korea, and Washington State
- #89 April 2017: [Oh, the Things that I have Eaten](#)
- #88 March 2017: [Travel – Memories of Southeast England](#)
- #87 February 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 7](#) — Italy, Jordan, and France
- #86 January 2017: [Travel – Airports](#)
- #85 December 2016: [Travel – Memories of Cornwall and Devon](#)

A.1.5 Volume 7

- #84 November 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 6](#) — Various countries
- #83 October 2016: [A Little Bit of Astronomy: The Moon](#)
- #82 September 2016: [Travel – Memories of Poland](#)
- #81 August 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 5](#) — Various countries
- #80 July 2016: [It's all Greek to Me](#)
- #79 June 2016: [Travel – Memories of South America](#)
- #78 May 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 4](#) — Australia
- #77 April 2016: [English – Part 6: Verbs](#)
- #76 March 2016: [Travel – Memories of Switzerland](#)
- #75 February 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 3](#) — London and Yorkshire
- #74 January 2016: [Accidents and Incidents](#)
- #73 December 2015: [Travel – Memories of Germany](#)

A.1.6 Volume 6

- #72 November 2015: [Signs of Life: Part 2](#) — London and Yorkshire
- #71 October 2015: [What is Normal – Part 9. An American in Australia](#)
- #70 September 2015: [Travel – Memories of Austria](#)
- #69 August 2015: [Signs of Life: Part 1](#) — London and Yorkshire
- #68 July 2015: [Confessions of a Canine Companion](#)
- #67 June 2015: [Travel – Memories of Mexico and Central America](#)

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- #66 May 2015: [What is Normal – Part 8: Public Holidays](#)
- #65 April 2015: [Travel – Memories of Asia](#)
- #64 March 2015: [A Little Bit of Royalty](#)
- #63 February 2015: [Travel – Memories of the Eastern Bloc](#)
- #62 January 2015: [Sockets, Plugs, and Cables](#)
- #61 December 2014: [Travel – Oh the Places I have Stayed](#)

A.1.7 Volume 5

- #60 November 2014: [English – Part 5: Adjectives](#)
- #59 October 2014: [Travel – Memories of the Benelux Countries](#)
- #58 September 2014: [Abbreviations and Acronyms](#)
- #57 August 2014: [Travel – Memories of Japan](#)
- #56 July 2014: [Technology, Revisited](#)
- #55 June 2014: [Travel – Memories of Australia](#)
- #54 May 2014: [What is Normal – Part 7: What's in a Name?](#)
- #53 April 2014: [Travel – Memories of Ireland and the UK](#)
- #52 March 2014: [A Little Bit of Mathematics](#)
- #51 February 2014: [Travel – Memories of Scandinavia](#)
- #50 January 2014: [The Cost of Bad Weather and Natural Disasters](#)
- #49 December 2013: [Travel – Memories of Italy](#)

A.1.8 Volume 4

- #48 November 2013: [English – Part 4: Pronouns](#)
- #47 October 2013: [Last Writes](#) — Leaving an audit trail for your executor and/or loved ones
- #46 September 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 4](#) — Gardens, Theme Parks, Parliament Houses and Capitals, National Parks and Historic Places, and some Odds and Ends
- #45 August 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 3](#) — Museums and Art Galleries, Libraries, and Aquariums
- #44 July 2013: [English – Part 3: Nouns](#)
- #43 June 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 2](#) — Royal Hangouts and Military-Related Places and Things
- #42 May 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 1](#) — Ancient Civilizations and Old Sites, and Religious Places and Artifacts
- #41 April 2013: [Standards – The Secret Life of a Language Lawyer](#) — A look at some everyday standards and conventions
- #40 March 2013: [What is Normal – Part 6: Weights and Measures](#)
- #39 February 2013: [The Big Move](#) — preparing and selling a house, finding another one, and moving.
- #38 January 2013: [Starting your Own Non-Profit](#)
- #37 December 2012: [Symbols and Marks](#)

A.1.9 Volume 3

- #36 November 2012: [English – Part 2: Pronunciation](#)

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- #35 October 2012: [A Little Bit More American Civics](#) — The Congress, Presidential Succession, The Supreme Court, and the Flag
- #34 September 2012: [A Little Bit of American Civics](#) — The Constitution, Presidency, Vice Presidency, and Cabinet
- #33 August 2012: [What is Normal – Part 5: Numbers and Counting Systems](#)
- #32 July 2012: [Are You Getting Enough Vacation?](#)
- #31 June 2012: [English – Part 1: A Potpourri](#)
- #30 May 2012: [Shooting and Editing Home Video](#)
- #29 April 2012: [Electronic Mail Etiquette](#) — Some of my pet peeves and observations about people who use email
- #28 March 2012: [How Committees Work](#) — My take on 40 years of committee participation, and how successful committees can and should work.
- #27 February 2012: [Living in Utopia](#) — Life in a planned American city.
- #26 January 2012: [Travel – Packing and Preparing](#)
- #25 December 2011: [Making Good-Looking Documents](#) — Some tips on how to take advantage of a word processing program.

A.1.10 Volume 2

- #24 November 2011: [A Little Foreign Language Goes a Long Way](#) — The advantages of having some basic foreign language skills when traveling.
- #23 October 2011: [Starting Your Own Business](#)
- #22 September 2011: [What is Normal – Part 4: Dates and Times](#)
- #21 August 2011: [Teaching English as a Second Language](#)
- #20 July 2011: [A Walk along the River](#) — A look back at my 187-mile hike along the Thames Path in England.
- #19 June 2011: [Just Me and MiniMe: Traveling with Technology](#)
- #18 May 2011: [Planning for Success](#)
- #17 April 2011: [Travel – FAQs](#)
- #16 March 2011: [What is Normal – Part 3: Money](#)
- #15 February 2011: [Talk is Cheap. Write it Down](#) — I explore what I perceive to be the four stages of turning a dream into reality and why many people don't have what it takes to go beyond the first one or two stages.
- #14 January 2011: [Waiting My Turn](#) — A look back at all those times I'd stood in line or taken a number and waited my turn.
- #13 December 2010: [Technology, Unplugged – Part 2](#) — I discuss automobiles, still and video cameras, the written word, a digital data preservation strategy, and my right-hand gadget.

A.1.11 Volume 1

- #12 November 2010: [Technology, Unplugged – Part 1](#) — I discuss the telephone, television, the internet, and recorded music.
- #11 October 2010: [Books by My Bed](#) — My love of books.
- #10 September 2010: [Making Allowances](#) — My experiences in setting up an allowance for my son.

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- #9 August 2010: [Confessions of an Obama Volunteer](#) — My involvement in the 2008 US Presidential election.
- #8 July 2010: [What is Normal? – Part 2: Writing Systems](#)
- #7 June 2010: [Australia and the U.S. – A Contrast](#) — A comparison of the following: politics and government, law enforcement, taxation, education, and changing light bulbs.
- #6 May 2010: [Travel – Fly Me to the Moon](#) — My flight log after 40 years of air travel.
- #5 April 2010: [The Road to US Citizenship](#)
- #4 March 2010: [What is Normal? – Part 1: Getting Started](#)
- #3 February 2010: [Where's My Damn Gold Watch?](#) — A look back at my first 40 years in the workforce.
- #2 January 2010: [Travel – Home Stays](#)
- #1 December 2009: [Hi Ho, Hi Ho, it's Off to Blog We Go](#) — The introduction to my blog.

A.2 Series: Travel

- #130 September 2020: [Travel – Memories of Russia](#)
- #127 June 2020: [Travel – Memories of Chile](#)
- #124 March 2020: [Travel – Memories of the US Desert Southwest](#)
- #121 December 2019: [Travel – Memories of Yorkshire](#)
- #118 September 2019: [Travel – Memories of New Mexico](#)
- #115 June 2019: [Travel – From Adelaide to Washington DC](#)
- #112 March 2019: [Travel – Memories of Abu Dhabi, UAE](#)
- #109 December 2018: [Travel – Memories of Prague, Salzburg, and-Munchen](#)
- #106 September 2018: [Travel – Memories of Puerto Rico](#)
- #103 June 2018: [Travel – Memories of Sacramento, Tahoe, Reno, & Napa Valley](#)
- #100 March 2018: [Travel – Memories of The Dalmatian Coast](#)
- #97 December 2017: [Travel – Memories of The Hill Country, Texas, Y'all](#)
- #94 September 2017: [Travel – Memories of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao](#)
- #91 June 2017: [Travel – Memories of Jordan](#)
- #88 March 2017: [Travel – Memories of Southeast England](#)
- #86 January 2017: [Travel – Airports](#)
- #85 December 2016: [Travel – Memories of Cornwall and Devon](#)
- #82 September 2016: [Travel – Memories of Poland](#)
- #79 June 2016: [Travel – Memories of South America](#)
- #76 March 2016: [Travel – Memories of Switzerland](#)
- #73 December 2015: [Travel – Memories of Germany](#)
- #70 September 2015: [Travel – Memories of Austria](#)
- #67 June 2015: [Travel – Memories of Mexico and Central America](#)
- #65 April 2015: [Travel – Memories of Asia](#)
- #63 February 2015: [Travel – Memories of the Eastern Bloc](#)
- #61 December 2014: [Travel – Oh the Places I have Stayed](#)
- #59 October 2014: [Travel – Memories of the Benelux Countries](#)
- #57 August 2014: [Travel – Memories of Japan](#)

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- #55 June 2014: [Travel – Memories of Australia](#)
- #53 April 2014: [Travel – Memories of Ireland and the UK](#)
- #51 February 2014: [Travel – Memories of Scandinavia](#)
- #49 December 2013: [Travel – Memories of Italy](#)
- #26 January 2012: [Travel – Packing and Preparing](#)
- #17 April 2011: [Travel – FAQs](#)
- #6 May 2010: [Travel – Fly Me to the Moon](#) — My flight log after 40 years of air travel.
- #2 January 2010: [Travel – Home Stays](#)

A.3 Series: What is Normal

- #92 July 2017: [What is Normal – Part 10. Automobiles and Driving](#)
- #71 October 2015: [What is Normal – Part 9. An American in Australia](#)
- #66 May 2015: [What is Normal – Part 8: Public Holidays](#)
- #54 May 2014: [What is Normal – Part 7: What's in a Name?](#)
- #40 March 2013: [What is Normal – Part 6: Weights and Measures](#)
- #33 August 2012: [What is Normal – Part 5: Numbers and Counting Systems](#)
- #22 September 2011: [What is Normal – Part 4: Dates and Times](#)
- #16 March 2011: [What is Normal – Part 3: Money](#)
- #8 July 2010: [What is Normal? – Part 2: Writing Systems](#)
- #4 March 2010: [What is Normal? – Part 1: Getting Started](#)

A.4 Series: English

- #95 October 2017: [English – Part 7: Adverbs](#)
- #77 April 2016: [English – Part 6: Verbs](#)
- #60 November 2014: [English – Part 5: Adjectives](#)
- #48 November 2013: [English – Part 4: Pronouns](#)
- #44 July 2013: [English – Part 3: Nouns](#)
- #36 November 2012: [English – Part 2: Pronunciation](#)
- #31 June 2012: [English – Part 1: A Potpourri](#)

A.5 Series: A Little Bit of ...

- #104 July 2018: [A Little Bit of Religion](#)
- #83 October 2016: [A Little Bit of Astronomy: The Moon](#)
- #64 March 2015: [A Little Bit of Royalty](#)
- #52 March 2014: [A Little Bit of Mathematics](#)
- #46 September 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 4](#) — Gardens, Theme Parks, Parliament Houses and Capitals, National Parks and Historic Places, and some Odds and Ends
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- #43 June 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 2](#) — Royal Hangouts and Military-Related Places and Things

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- #42 May 2013: [A Little Bit of Kulcha – Part 1](#) — Ancient Civilizations and Old Sites, and Religious Places and Artifacts
- #35 October 2012: [A Little Bit More American Civics](#) — The Congress, Presidential Succession, The Supreme Court, and the Flag
- #34 September 2012: [A Little Bit of American Civics](#) — The Constitution, Presidency, Vice Presidency, and Cabinet

A.6 Series: Autobiographic Essays

- #131 October 2020: [School Days: Part 2](#)
- #128 July 2020: [School Days: Part 1](#)
- #122 January 2020: [Football, Aussie Style](#)
- #110 January 2019: [My Time in Maine](#)
- #107 October 2018: [Living in Chicago](#)
- #89 April 2017: [Oh, the Things that I have Eaten](#)
- #74 January 2016: [Accidents and Incidents](#)
- #68 July 2015: [Confessions of a Canine Companion](#)
- #41 April 2013: [Standards – The Secret Life of a Language Lawyer](#) — A look at some everyday standards and conventions
- #39 February 2013: [The Big Move](#) — preparing and selling a house, finding another one, and moving.
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- #13 December 2010: [Technology, Unplugged – Part 2](#) — I discuss automobiles, still and video cameras, the written word, a digital data preservation strategy, and my right-hand gadget.
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- #5 April 2010: [The Road to US Citizenship](#)
- #3 February 2010: [Where's My Damn Gold Watch?](#) — A look back at my first 40 years in the workforce.

A.7 Series: Signs of Life

- #129 August 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 21](#) — the Northern Neck of Virginia, USA
- #126 May 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 20](#) — Edinburgh, Scotland; London, England; Beijing, China; and more
- #123 February 2020: [Signs of Life: Part 19](#) — Edinburgh, Scotland
- #120 November 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 18](#) — Japan

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- #117 August 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 17](#) — Texas and Utah
- #114 May 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 16](#) — St. Croix
- #111 February 2019: [Signs of Life: Part 15](#) — Norway
- #108 November 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 14](#) — Croatia, Slovenia, and Italy.
- #105 August 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 13](#) — Croatia.
- #102 May 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 12](#) — Vienna, Austria, and Seoul, Korea.
- #99 February 2018: [Signs of Life: Part 11](#) — US states of Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana, and Korea and Japan
- #96 November 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 10](#) — Hawaii
- #93 August 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 9](#) — Barcelona, Spain
- #90 May 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 8](#) — France, Finland, California, Croatia, England, Korea, and Washington State
- #87 February 2017: [Signs of Life: Part 7](#) — Italy, Jordan, and France
- #84 November 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 6](#) — Various countries
- #81 August 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 5](#) — Various countries
- #78 May 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 4](#) — Australia
- #75 February 2016: [Signs of Life: Part 3](#) — London and Yorkshire
- #72 November 2015: [Signs of Life: Part 2](#) — London and Yorkshire
- #69 August 2015: [Signs of Life: Part 1](#) — London and Yorkshire