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Table of Contents

<u>September song; Man bites dog; Oksana's birthday, conspiracy theories 20200831</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>Epistemology. How do you know what you think you know? And how to try to convince me. 20200901</u>	<u>6</u>
<u>Outings and Expeditions; Famous Ukrainians; Reputation mining 20200902</u>	<u>25</u>
<u>An outing to the farmer's market. Dinner with new and old friends. School and Covid19 again. 20200907</u>	<u>33</u>
<u>Old boys and Indians. Raising children on the fringes of Western civilization. Zoriana is three. 20200908</u>	<u>39</u>
<u>The ups and downs of electric power. The shifting Overton Window. Ukraine for Ukrainians! 20200909</u>	<u>42</u>
<u>I tried to avoid dealing with our electrical problems. No use. 20200911</u>	<u>44</u>
<u>Where are the good men? A birthday in the park. Always looking for input from you, and you came through. 20200915.....</u>	<u>49</u>
<u>Summer ends. September songs. First real-live Covid19 case. Waiting on the baby. 20200918</u>	<u>60</u>
<u>A trip to the zoo. A wrenching personal history. Bitchute for full disclosure left, right and center. 20200921</u>	<u>62</u>
<u>Marianna Pauline Seibert. 3:15 Today. Yet to be weighed and measured. Crying and eating normally. 20200923</u>	<u>68</u>
<u>The calm after the storm. Statistics and administrative procedures. A solution to our power problems. 20200925 .</u>	<u>71</u>
<u>Back to school night; Rainy day in the park; Electrical experts again; back to the exercise bike 20200930</u>	<u>74</u>

<u>Electricity problems resolved(?) We love our zoo. A speech on raising children. 20201007</u>	<u>80</u>
<u>Marianna's birth certificate; electricity update; pups-in-blankets; Toastmasters and the New World Order 20201017</u>	<u>84</u>
<u>Two wonderful Botanical gardens. Eddie's birthday. 20201019</u>	<u>88</u>
<u>Inborn wisdom of the young. Important book on human differences. Heat problems resolved. -20201024</u>	<u>95</u>
<u>Girls and cats, boys and dogs, exercise, perception of the US from a distance, and humor in politics 20201029 ...</u>	<u>99</u>

September song; Man bites dog; Oksana's birthday, conspiracy theories 20200831

Autumn is gently approaching. The sky is sunny and the temperatures in the high 70s to high 80s. Today 90. The air is clear, as always. It is been absolutely beautiful for swimming. I have made it to our lake almost every day for my 40-minute swim. With luck I have another three weeks or so before it gets too cold.

In a rather chaotic fashion, we celebrated Oksana's birthday on Friday. The kids from the summer camp were leaving as I was fixing dinner. It was garlic shrimp, just as Oksana had asked. I planned for six, including babysitter Anna and her daughter Sophia. We got eight: Natalia, camp leader and her teenage daughter Alisa.

Extra mouths are distressing for a chef. I had enough shrimp and corn for three adults, not five. It came off somehow satisfactorily. I ate bread instead of corn, and they made the shrimp stretch.

They don't use too many sauces here in Ukraine. My garlic/butter/olive oil/lemon juice concoction – with a few capers and some parsley – was new to them and they were happy to put it on everything. Thank goodness I had been generous with the butter.

Kids go through growth phases. Our Edward, our fair-haired boy, has been exceptionally rude and obtuse over the last few weeks. Yesterday he pushed me aside rushing upstairs. This morning he yelled at his sister for playing with his fishing rod, when the fault was 100% his own for not having put it away. I got a report that he curtly refused the request of a couple of fishermen on the beach to hunt for frogs down at the other end and not bother them. Suffice it to say that Rousseau was wrong. They are not born angelic, only to fall from a state of grace. They have to be civilized into being human. That is our job as parents. And it doesn't work with everybody.

I have been in a low-grade depression on account of all of the chaos in the United States – the rioting and the Covid19. It makes absolutely no sense. These affect me less than anybody I know. I have a kind of a dark foreboding that this will not turn out well.

It is an old journalistic chestnut that "dog bites man" is not news, but "man bites dog" is worth reporting.

If Kyle Rittenhouse a gotten killed by the armed mob in Kenosha, his name would have been forgotten immediately. "Dog bites man." The fact that, however improbably, he managed to kill his attackers is what makes it newsworthy.

There is outrage. Why was a 17-year-old kid on the street with a gun? Where were his parents?

Those are good questions. You could ask those questions as well of the rioters. Why were they there? Why were they allowed to be there? Where were the adults?

The adults in charge, at the state, county, city government and police department level, were nowhere to be seen. If they had been on the streets, imposing martial law or simply making their presence felt, there would have been no mayhem.

It was of course left to the alternative media to provide biographical data on the three guys who got shot in Kenosha. Three white guys, two with prison records and one with merely felonies. The odds of a white guy in the United States having been imprisoned are three in 100, a felony conviction eight in 100. Therefore, multiplying them

together, the combined probability of this Kyle Rittenhouse having shot random citizens with CVs like theirs is 7 in 100,000. Not to mention the ethnic aspect. It is whispered that none were Gentiles.

They were not random. This is reminiscent of the thugs that Vladimir Putin assembled in his attempt to set up people's republics in eastern Ukraine. Thugs he had gathered from all over. Some are recruited, some of them simply attracted to the chaos. And in the chaos in the United States, some of them undoubtedly paid by sinister forces.

There is little doubt in my mind that the intelligence community knows pretty much who the leaders of these mobs are. They have all the tools: facial recognition, voice recognition, cell phone tracking, license plate tracking and so on. Why don't they share this intelligence with the local police and prevent this chaos? For a wonderful conspiracy theory about the spooks' capabilities, which must be somewhat true judging from the alacrity and viciousness with which it was shut down, see Millie Weaver's "[Shadowgate](#)." For a theory on why, try [Tucker Carlson](#).

Some of you have criticized me for the sources that I choose. Millie Weaver, above, is hosted by InfoWars. I would've passed a link from YouTube, except that it was no longer available. One of you sent a link to a piece denigrating the McCloskey's of St. Louis, recounting how the rabbi next door called them bullies for wanting beehives that were being used to teach children removed from the property. I read it; it was rather balanced. In return, I asked him to watch an account of the various black men who have become causes célèbres after being shot by police, and of white victims of black murderers. He absolutely would not watch it because it came from [American Renaissance](#). Tainted from the start, he would not accept that it might contain an iota of truth.

It is a mistake not to listen to all sides of an argument. In the interest of time you have to be willing to ignore things you have heard before, or cut it off when it actually contradicts common sense, but one should never dismiss an argument out of hand.

A point on conspiracy theories in general. The term was invented by the US intelligence community to pooh-pooh suspicions about what they are up to. However, so many such theories, such as the suppression of HCQ (see [“Plandemic”](#)), the lack of demonstrated effectiveness of masks, the widespread data fudging on climate and such, that these days one is surprised to hear something from the media or official sources that actually rings true. Science has been corrupted; your research paper doesn’t pass peer review unless it is consistent with the narratives being pushed by the powers that be. It is reminiscent of the stories that were told about the Soviet Union. It is no coincidence that Ron Unz calls his column [American Pravda](#). It is a comedy, like commissars of old running in circles to keep up with Stalin’s latest pronouncements, working to forget the latest unperson and how history had last been changed.

Let me just project that the characterization of these “peaceful protesters” as thugs is probably right and the powers that be know it. I doubt there is much difference between these three random rioters in Kenosha and the average rioters in Washington DC, Portland or elsewhere. They are not drawn by the nobility the cause so much as by the opportunity for mayhem.

It raises some other questions. Part of America's sickness is that young men of all colors over the past several decades have had a hard time finding a place in the world. When my grown children face this problem, it was called "failure to launch." The combination of a lack of opportunity in society, and the incessant drumbeat of antiestablishment propaganda from schoolteachers and the media makes them antisocial. I heard it coming from my kids’ expensive private Episcopal schools. I encountered it in a very virulent form as I attended grad school in education at the University of Maryland 2003–2004. We pondered what might come of it. Now we see.

The New World Order is oppressing white men, increasingly favoring everybody else. This federal employee had enough and put together a [long video about it](#). He will almost surely be fired, but he is not going gently into the night.

I gave a Toastmasters speech on [Clarence Thomas](#). His autobiography, “My Grandfather’s Son,” is as inspirational an American story as you will find.

Clarence Thomas believes that an individual should succeed on his own merits. That is absolutely at odds with the reigning doctrines of this age. I concluded that Thomas and other Blacks like him are tragic figures. The events in modern America, and Europe as well, are forcing them to choose sides within their own societies based on color. This is antithetical to everything they believe, and profoundly uncomfortable.

My evaluator giggled me for having a conclusion that was not consistent with the story. She was right. I advocated that Ukraine strenuously limit immigration so that the problem of having diverse populations never arises. Diversity and multiculturalism are leading to chaos in North America and Western Europe. The lack thereof is one of the considerable strengths of East Asian countries, one which I expect will help them survive many other deficiencies. At any rate, Ukraine should avoid diversity until some country, somewhere proves that it can work over an extended period of time.

Last night we had the first meeting of an English conversation club. It is a project I've been talking about for years but never got underway. I was prodded by a member of Toastmasters. It included Charlie and Susie, recent expatriates from Brooklyn Heights who joined me, Alex, and a handful of other Ukrainians at a shashlk restaurant. More of an account in the next installment.

And that's the news from Lake WeBeGone, where the men are strong, the women good-looking and the children remain innocent. Wasn't it wonderful when we could all remain innocent, content to deal with our own small problems, unmoved by events on the other side of the world?

Graham

**Epistemology. How do you know what you think you know? And how to try to convince me.
20200901**

In my last issue I discussed how you know things. Epistemology. I suggested that you should be open to reading everything from every source.

“It is a mistake not to listen to all sides of an argument. In the interest of time you have to be willing to ignore things you have heard before, or cut it off when it actually contradicts common sense, but one should never dismiss an argument out of hand.”

However, being open to reading is not the same as reading. We simply don't have that much time. So how do you make a quick judgment whether something you receive is worth reading or not?

Here are my factors.

1. First, consider who sent it to you. Is this person well-informed in general?
2. Second, consider the link itself. Is it a reliable, unbiased source?
3. Third, does the sender have any thoughtful remarks about the piece? Or are they simply passing something on?
4. Fourth, what is my history on this issue with whoever forwarded it? Have we gone over these things before? Have we resolved anything? Have they previously changed my mind?
5. Fifth. How long is the thing? How much time will it take me?

Let's take a specific case in point. One of you readers have sent me a link to an article in [The Atlantic](#) saying that the national electric grid is not up to snuff, which we know, and that the Trump administration spiked a program to upgrade it. They claim it's too bad, supposedly because this upgrade would have reduced carbon emissions. Should I invest the time to read it? This time I will, just to demonstrate how one's instincts are usually right. I'm willing to have my mind changed, but I don't think it'll happen this time.

What do I like? I have known this correspondent for more than 40 years. He is one of the most talented professionals I worked with. Furthermore, he is a math guy; taught high school in retirement.

What puts me off?

1. First, it comes from The Atlantic, which I already know to be firmly on the side of global warming.

2. Second, the idea seems to be that our objective is to reduce carbon emissions and not to just improve the reliability of the electrical system. These are two distinct goals which are often antithetical. It seems to me perverse or unlikely that a single solution will address both.
3. Third, I already know the science and the technology of the alternative power sources pretty well. Solar energy and wind energy being the big ones because hydroelectric is pretty much maxed out.
4. My correspondent has not responded to material I have asked him to watch or read, most especially my video on climate change – link below.

Even progressives have come around to protect criticizing solar and wind. Arch-liberal Michael Moore's, [Planet of the Humans](#) does so. Longtime environmental activist Michael Shellenberger's book [Apocalypse Never](#). I have written to this correspondent about these and I have never heard anything. So far as I know he has never watched or read them. It raises the question, why should I read the stuff that he is sending me?

He never commented on my own video, [Global Warming on a Coffee Break](#). Let me recap my case against everybody dying of global warming.

Global warming is the theory of the greenhouse effect. Greenhouse gases are only one of many things that affect climate. The global warming crowd's focus has been mostly on only this single one.

Focusing just on greenhouse gases – carbon dioxide. We get into a question of arithmetic. How much carbon is there in the whole world? Where is it? Only a tiny fraction remains locked up in fossil fuels.

In my video I do a thought experiment. Suppose we were able to locate and dig up 100% of these fossil fuels. How much would it raise the temperature? The IPCC's estimates of how much a doubling of carbon dioxide in the air would raise the temperature are amazingly imprecise: 1.5 ° to 4.5 ° C.

Assuming we could burn all of the remaining fossil fuels, it would quadruple carbon dioxide and raise the Earth's temperature by between 4° and 13°C. But that could never happen. Among other things, nobody thinks we could

recover more than 35%-40% of what's there, over decades. The IPCC – structured to be alarmist – puts the maximum temperature increase at 5° C over the next 80 years, with CO₂ levels double today's.

As noted in my movie, carbon dioxide levels have been several times higher than that in geological history. That happen from massive volcanic activity five times in the last half billion years, leading to great extinctions. It could happen again – it is threatening in Mount Vesuvius, and especially in Yellowstone. We can't do anything about that. CO₂ in the air has been 15 times greater than it is today, far above what fossil fuels could possibly produce, due to factors over which we have no control. Life went on.

How about temperature? Paleoclimatologists are able to estimate what temperatures have been like in the Earth's history. They have been more than 5°C warmer than they are today. Life went on. Moreover, there has been almost no correlation between temperature and CO₂ levels over the past half billion years. Despite some very heavy thumbs on the scales, measured temperature has not increased much since 2000 despite a significant increase in CO₂. The models have all been wrong. Quite wrong.

Before anybody opens a discussion about global warming with me, I would ask them to please watch my movie and tell me where I'm wrong. Don't come at me with something new and wonderful from the Atlantic and tell me that it changes everything. The Atlantic is among other things, not a scientific journal. With regard to climate change and many other topics it is a journal of liberal advocacy. I am confident that I know as much about climate, and have read vastly more, than whoever wrote the article. See the bibliography in my movie and my Amazon reviews.

Climate change is an only slightly toxic topic. You are still (somewhat) allowed to cite people who disagree with Al Gore – denigrated as “climate deniers.” The differences among people – human biodiversity – is a much touchier subject. People who hold that the lineages of mankind might be measurably different for evolutionary reasons are farther off the reservation. Online publications such as [American Renaissance](#) and the [Occidental Observer](#) are strictly forbidden. The SPLC and all right-thinking (viz, left-thinking) people strongly exhort that you not poison your minds by reading them.

It is obvious that after four centuries of grappling with the race issue in United States, more than half a century since the civil rights efforts having made it a top priority, we haven't solved anything. Common sense would say that one should listen to all sides of the argument. The irony is that the above journals advocate what had been common sense from Herodotus' time up until the 1960s. There is no new science to disprove it. Quite the opposite – all recent science of which I know reinforces long held views. See [my Amazon reviews](#). It has become extremely unfashionable, and increasingly dangerous, to talk about it.

So here's a request for people who forward me things to read.

1. Tell me what is new, what information you think that I am not already familiar with.
2. If I respond, and give you something to read in turn, please do me the courtesy of reading and commenting on it.
3. This means, trust my judgment that I will not waste your time asking you to read pointless political screeds, even though my sources are widely disparaged.

I have completed this before opening the link to the Atlantic Article. After writing this, I downloaded and annotated the piece, which is attached.

What follows below are my brief notes on what I read.

With regard to the Atlantic article, the first thing I find is that the author is [Peter Fairley](#). He is a well-established climate change advocate. Looking over the list of articles on its website, I do find one that I might agree with – that the supposedly environmental benefits of cross-laminated timber have been overblown. He has a fairly predictable piece on healthcare workers leaving their jobs rather than face Covid 19. Another one goes on about the resurrection of the hydrogen fuel cell concept in an article in Scientific American. I am skeptical of that. In my opinion Scientific American and MIT Technology Review have sold out to the Washington narrative. I dropped my subscriptions to both over the past decade.

Therefore, before I start to read this actual piece I have a fairly good notion of what I'm going to find. I would ordinarily cut my losses at this point. I don't think I'm going to see anything new. But in this case I forge on...

And what I find it does not surprise me whatsoever. Peter Fairley assumes that the reader is on board with the notion that climate change is an immediate crisis, that the solution to climate change is alternative energy such as wind and solar, that Europe is paving the way (disregarding Germany's skyrocketing energy costs, grid problems and the like), and that any and all objections to alternative energy are based solely on the economic interests of the fossil fuels industry.

No, no, no! Read the guys on your own side, the environmentalists such as Stewart Brand, Patrick Moore and the above-mentioned Michael Moore and Peter Shellenberger. Then read the long-standing opposition. I have reviewed most of their books.

So the bottom line is, if you, dear readers, want me to take a look at an opinion piece such as this, please do your homework. Read it yourself. Get familiar with the science. Tell me what is going to be new. Don't waste my time.

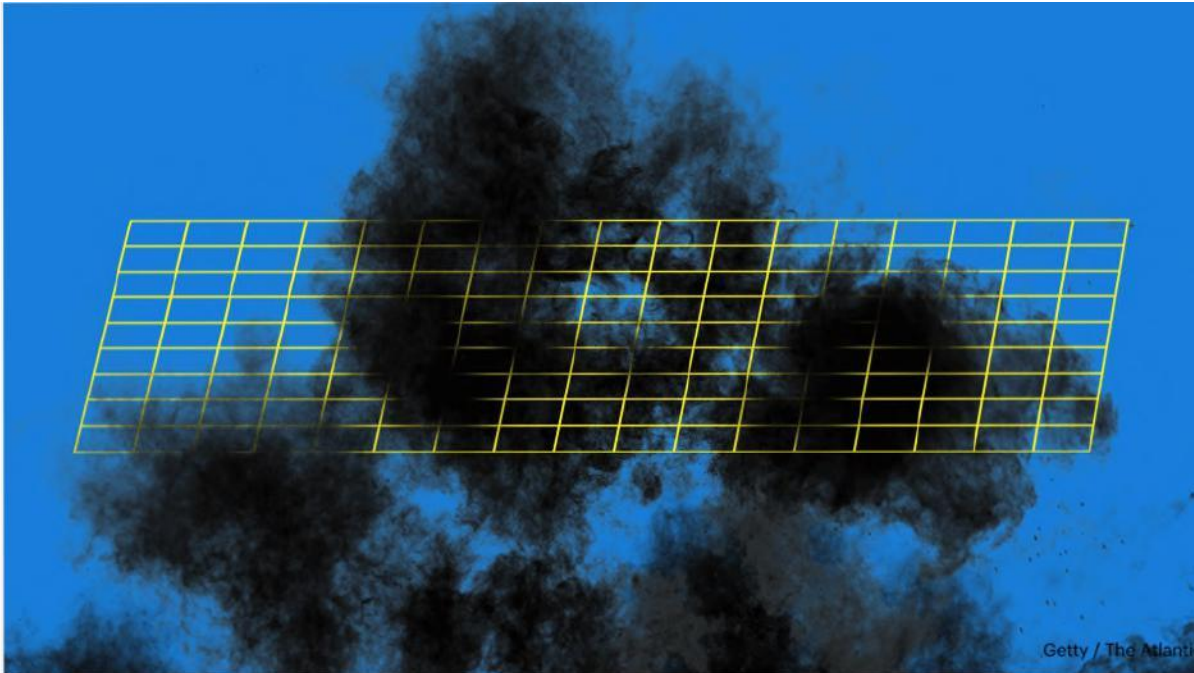
Graham

The ***Atlantic***

How a Plan to Save the Power System Disappeared

A federal lab found a way to modernize the grid, reduce reliance

on coal, and save consumers billions. Then Trump appointees blocked it. **Political bent obvious from first page - Trump**



Story by Peter Fairley

InvestigateWest.

1 **AUGUST 20, 2020** | **POLITICS** *This article is a collaboration between The Atlantic and*

National
Renewable
Energy Lab.
Are they
unbiased?
Their
paychecks
come from
solar and wind.
Of course they
advocate

ON AUGUST 14, 2018, Joshua Novacheck, a 30-year-old research engineer for the U.S. National Renewable Energy Laboratory, was presenting the most important study of his nascent career. He couldn't have known it yet, but things were about to go very wrong.

At a gathering of experts and policy makers in Lawrence, Kansas, Novacheck was sharing the results of the Interconnections Seam Study, better known as Seams. The Seams study demonstrated that stronger connections between the U.S. power system's massive eastern and western power grids would accelerate the growth of wind and solar energy—hugely reducing reliance on coal, the fuel contributing the most to climate change, and saving consumers as an elegant solution to a complicated problem.

Start off assuming wind and solar work and are desirable. And

Democrats in Congress have recently cited NREL's work to argue for billions in grid upgrades and sweeping policy changes. But a study like Seams was politically dangerous territory for a federally funded lab while coal-industry advocates—and climate-change deniers—reign in the White House. The Trump administration has a long history of protecting coal companies, and unfortunately for Novacheck, a representative was sitting in the audience during the talk: Catherine "Katie" Jereza, then a deputy assistant secretary in the U.S. Department of Energy Office of Electricity.

Jereza fired off an email to DOE sources who viewed the email—
 Rather colored statement. Any bias here?
 ven finished speaking, according to findings. That email ignited an internal firestorm. According to interviews with five current and former DOE and NREL sources, supported by more than 900 pages of documents and emails obtained by InvestigateWest through Freedom of Information Act requests

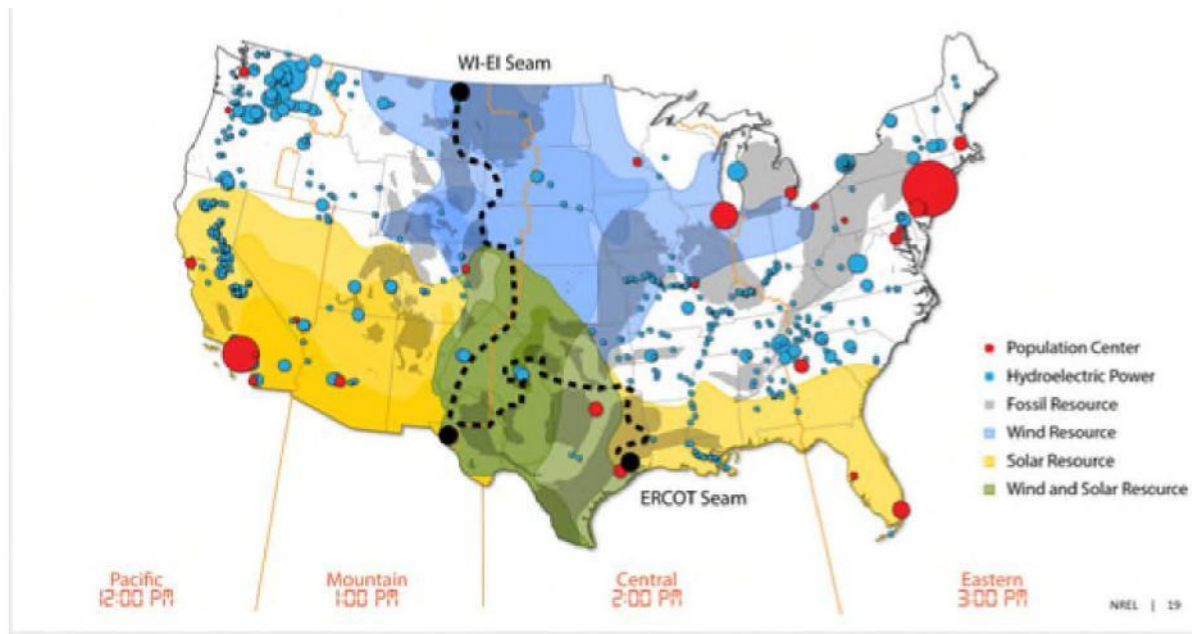
Projects like this have to be cost justified, among other things. What were the trade-

and by additional documentation from industry sources, Trump officials would ultimately block Seams from seeing the light of day. And in doing so, they would set back America's efforts to slow climate change.

A nearly impermeable electrical "seam" divides America's eastern and western power grids. These giant pools of alternating current on either side of the Rockies contain a total of 950 gigawatts of power generation by thousands of power plants. (A third grid serves Texas.) But only a little over one gigawatt can cross between

This part is correct. Renewable energy is unreliable. Solar depends on clear weather in the daytime, and wind energy depends on wind. Today's solution to these problems is to have standby natural gas powered generators, and even that solution has significant downsides. So, if we were to become dependent on renewable energy, having a better grade would be advantageous. Of course, fixing the overburdened, dilapidated grid would have many other benefits besides simply renewable.

1,000 miles away to California, for example, Nebraska. That separation raises the cost of naturally friendly wind and solar power. on them—overloaded and ill-prepared



The East-West seam divides cities, time zones, and energy resources (NREL)

The Seams study set out to determine whether uniting America's big grids would pay. Seven aging converter stations presently mediate the meager power flows across the East-West seam. Should power companies simply rebuild these electrical "stitches," or should they upgrade to longer or stronger links? Seams' working hypothesis had been that upgrading might create a more reliable, sustainable, and affordable U.S. power system. The study's results bore that hypothesis out.

But Jereza's email put the study in trouble: Her concern reached the top ranks at NREL and DOE, according to an August 22, 2018, email from NREL project leader, Aaron Bloom, to top researchers and planners at U.S. power companies and grid operators. "There was some significant political blowback at the most senior levels

of DOE as a result," Bloom wrote. "We hit a political trigger point." Bloom noted that the email had reached Dan Brouillette, who was second in command to then—Secretary of Energy Rick Perry at the time, and has since taken over his position.

The fallout was swift: The lab grounded Bloom and Novacheck, prohibiting them from presenting the Seams results or even discussing the study outside NREL. At the end of 2018, Bloom left NREL for the private sector. Dale Osborn, a retired grid-planning expert and a key adviser to Seams, says Bloom thought his career was over at NREL. "He told me, never get a decent project again," Osborn recalls.

And the \$1.6 million study itself disappeared. NREL yanked the completed findings from its website and deleted power-flow visualizations from its YouTube channel. An NREL document shows that Bloom and Novacheck expected to submit an article to a top grid-engineering journal within six weeks after the Kansas event. That paper remains blocked two years later.

Withholding NREL's grid research is an example of what experts such as Arjun Krishnaswami, a policy analyst at the Natural Resources Defense Council, calls the "deep politicization" of DOE and its national labs under Donald Trump. At a moment when Europe, China, and others are racing ahead with advanced long-distance energy-transmission technologies, grid experts say that technology has gone nowhere in the United States—thanks to a failure of leadership in Washington.

A FEW WEEKS AFTER THE SEAMS STUDY. ON JULY 26, 2018, BLOOM WAS CENTERED IN INVITATIONS TO THE EVENT, THE TRANSMISSION ENHANCEMENTS SEAMS DESCRIBED HAD BEEN BILLED AS A "TRILLION-DOLLAR ECONOMIC EVENT." BLOOM WAS ON FIRE,

It is true that Europe is "racing ahead," creating the highest energy costs in the world and making their system less reliable. The authors assume

speaking on his feet without notes for nearly two hours. "We've been imagining cleaner, bigger modern grids for about 40 years," Bloom expounded, "and now is the time to make it happen."

Bloom showed off his team's sophisticated methodology using high-resolution video simulations. One simulation showed a hypothetical heat wave in August 2038, causing air conditioners to drive up power demand. As the rising sun swept across the U.S., yellow circles representing solar plants expanded. Surplus power from solar plants in the West flooded eastward, limiting the need for pricier and dirtier midwestern coal power. And as the sun set, the Midwest's expansive wind farms began to spin, sending power westward and minimizing use of the West's coal- and gas-fired generators.

"This is a bold new world that we're seeing," Bloom told the Iowa conference. Indeed, the 20- to nearly 35-gigawatt flows he presented—at times exceeding New York State's peak power consumption on the hottest day of the year—are far beyond what America's existing grids can handle. But Seams presented a path to that future.

Grid operation was simulated for 2024 to 2038 because the simulated equipment would take several years to build—and would serve for decades. At the request of the study's technical-review committee, the core Seams scenario assumed a "carbon policy" under which power plants would be charged an increasing penalty for the carbon dioxide they released. The industry experts on the committee saw this as a rational way to test the system under higher levels of solar and wind deployment, according to NREL documents and emails.

As expected, the simulations showed that exchanging power across the Rockies enables generators on either side to serve a wider area, reducing the number of plants required, and trims operation of the remaining fossil-fueled generators. And

they demonstrated that the resulting savings in fuel and equipment more than pay for the added transmission. The benefits were particularly dramatic for the carbon-price scenario. It would eliminate up to 35 megatons of CO₂ emissions a year by 2038—equivalent to the current annual carbon emissions from U.S. natural-gas production and distribution. And it would return about \$2.50 or more for every \$1 invested in transmission.

The design that delivered the largest cost reduction linked up transmission lines to form a new transcontinental network: a "supergrid." Seams simulated a 7,500-mile supergrid that would ship bulk power around the U.S.—a network reaching from Washington State to Florida. Even in the study's less-ambitious scenario, the supergrid was saving consumers \$3.6 billion a year by 2038.

But there was a problem: Improving the energy grid would reduce America's reliance on coal. According to NREL's simulations, coal-fired power plants would shut down en masse over the coming decades, and they would drop even faster with upgraded transmission. That proved to be a very inconvenient finding.

IN THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL, Trump's promises to revive "clean, beautiful coal" spoke to both the blue-collar and anti-regulatory elements of his political base. After his election, he filled his administration with coal-industry veterans, withdrew from the Paris climate-change agreement, and rolled back coal regulations. Yet coal plants kept closing. In fact, coal shutdowns have accelerated during the Trump administration compared with Obama's. Then-Secretary Perry was under pressure to stem the bleeding in America's struggling coal industry, and his strategy was to frame coal plants as the grid's protector against extreme weather, cyberattacks, and other emergencies. Things weren't going well. That January, the federal commission that regulates power and gas markets unanimously shot down Perry's proposal to subsidize coal plants, as well as nuclear generators.

These guys are smoking rope. There is no way to quickly get rid of fossil fuel fired electric generation. Once again, see Michael Moore and Shellenberger for the details. For an example of a country that

Enhanced grid resilience was a likely outcome of the Seams expansions. That's easy to see from high-profile disasters where gaps in transmission led to otherwise avoidable blackouts. During Japan's post-tsunami grid meltdown in 2011, mighty generators around Osaka were unable to fill in for the troubled nuclear power plants northeast of Tokyo. And experts say power plants across the U.S. could be helping power California avoid heat wave-induced blackouts right now, if the U.S. power system was more interconnected. But Perry prioritized securing resilience by protecting coal and nuclear power plants, which store months of fuel on-site.

Trump officials were already seeking tighter control over all analysis from the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, which oversees NREL. In May 2018, EERE circulated an "enhanced" list of "Tier 1" topics requiring political sign-off before researchers could publish their findings, according to documents and emails obtained through a FOIA request and a lawsuit filed by the Center for Biological Diversity. Tier 1 topics included anything related to grid reliability or "projections of entire energy sectors," such as fossil fuels or renewable energy. NREL emails show that Seams was under scrutiny as early as June 2018. Novacheck wrote in one email that Seams' results were "extremely sensitive" and that the researchers were "not allowed to show any results without direct DOE approval."

Seams escalated into a major political problem after the Iowa and Kansas presentations. Career DOE employees had approved those talks but had not alerted EERE's political appointees; expanded disclosure requirements were supposed to exempt conference talks. Still, when DOE higher-ups had seen the news coverage from Iowa, they complained to Cathy Tripodi, then the acting assistant administrator running EERE. Insiders say she was livid.

Less than three weeks later came Jereza's email alert during the Kansas presentation. Jereza zeroed in on Seams' use of carbon pricing, according to insiders interviewed by InvestigateWest. They say the angst over carbon pricing in the

Seams study was baseless. "It didn't advocate anything. It just said, 'If this is the scenario we're dealing with ... then this is what happens,'" one former DOE official says. But the political danger arising from Kansas was immediately grasped by Tom Sloan, the state representative who organized the seminar. Sloan sought to assuage Jereza after Novacheck's presentation. He also emailed Novacheck with some advice: "It is not good when one works hard and the results are immediately dismissed because they are not politically correct."

Sloan, now retired, says the concern from Trump appointees such as Jereza went beyond the carbon tax. "The administration was committed to helping the coal industry," he says. And Seams showed that, with or without a carbon price, coal power would be adversely affected by a better grid. "The impact on coal is going to be there if you allow low-cost, renewable power to move," Sloan says.

After Jereza threw her red flag, Tripodi ordered a clampdown on Seams, insiders say. She delegated implementation to Alex Fitzsimmons, then EERE's 28-year-old chief of staff and chief policy adviser, who had previously worked with fossil-fuel-minded energy think tanks associated with the billionaire oil refiner and GOP mega-donor Charles Koch. Three months before he moved to DOE, Fitzsimmons was quoted as saying that coal-plant shutdowns and anti-pipeline protests threaten lives because fossil fuels keep the heat on during extreme cold snaps.

Fitzsimmons called Martin Keller, NREL's lab director, and Seams was swiftly locked down. NREL had a \$406 million budget in 2018, mostly through EERE. But it was in a precarious situation under the Trump team, which had repeatedly proposed cutting more than half of EERE's funding. Seams was expendable, because its funding made up less than a quarter of 1 percent of NREL's budget. "Keller is very smart and politically astute and doesn't want to piss off the administration," a former DOE official speculates. "He's going to figure out that he can slow that one study down and keep everybody happy."

Keller, Jereza, Tripodi, and Fitzsimmons all declined to comment after repeated requests from InvestigateWest. In an email sent yesterday, a DOE spokeswoman reiterated the agency's earlier statements, saying that Seams is "still under review" at NREL and that it "will be released upon completion."

THE POLITICAL FOOTPRINT ON Seams can be seen in the final report drafted by Bloom and his collaborators. Bloom shared version 14 of the paper at the Iowa conference, but a week after the Kansas talk, the drafts underwent a process of editorial ping-pong between Bloom and Novacheck, NREL leaders, and DOE officials. DOE heavily redacted documents it released through FOIA, but drafts obtained separately by InvestigateWest show how the edits evolved from August to November 2018.

Wordsmithing and euphemisms replaced direct references to carbon. The study's higher-renewables "carbon policy" scenario, for instance, became a "VG," or variable-generation, scenario—a reference to wind- and solar-power output that shifts with the weather. The "carbon price" became an "emissions price." Other elements simply vanished, such as a statement that CO₂ emissions were projected to drop to 30 percent of their 2024 levels by 2038. The phrase "coal plants were retired" similarly disappeared, along with colorful bar charts that had shown how Seams' added transmission shrank coal's share of power generation to a thin black line.

By the time the editorial exchanges ended in early November, the corrections appeared to be stretching the authors' comfort zone. After the Kansas conference, emails show that Bloom was instructed not to share drafts beyond NREL. But he ran what would be the final draft by Jay Caspary, a co-author and the Southwest Power Pool's research and development director. Elements of that final draft concerned the authors, according to a November 7 email from Bloom to Douglas Arent, an NREL lab director: "I reviewed these edits with Jay Caspary, we can live with this revision, but there

are some caveats." In his same-day response, Arent focused instead on further appealing NREL's political minders: "Here are my suggested refinements to hopefully avoid DOE 'over reactions."

Over the next year, the administration promoted Fitzsimmons to deputy assistant secretary, and Tripodi stepped up to head the department's Office of Policy. Jereza left for the industry-affiliated Electric Power Research Institute, where she is now a vice president. The Seams study, in contrast, went nowhere. Its final report remains unpublished.

Nearly a year after Arent's November 7 reply—the last substantive discussion of Seams in the FOIA documents—a group of grid experts publicly called out the DOE at a transmission conference, saying that Seams was completed and that DOE had "bottled" it up. DOE communications staff insisted that the study was ongoing. A statement issued in September 2019 asserts, "DOE career staff reviewed preliminary results and saw an opportunity to strengthen the study by expanding the project to model and analyze additional scenarios." DOE suggested that Seams would be released in 2022.

An NREL media-relations person responded to InvestigateWest's queries to NREL officials, providing a statement "on behalf of the laboratory" that parroted DOE's. NREL's statement added only that "all information that is currently available" on Seams is on the project's website. The site claims that more than 30 industry organizations "are helping guide" the study via the technical-review committee. Caspary, that panel's co-chair, says it has not met in more than two years.

ACCORDING TO SUSAN TIERNEY, a former assistant secretary of energy who chairs NREL's External Advisory Council, national labs have operated with considerable independence in the past: "There was an understanding that the labs

have a duty to perform quality research. I was not familiar with situations where there was an editorial thumb on the scale.”

But under Trump, political appointees have made unprecedented moves to regulate how science is conducted, according to a historical analysis and warning by experts in science and the law in the journal *Science*. And other scientific studies—especially those related to climate change—have been similarly slow-walked or buried. One of them was a DOE-commissioned study on grid resiliency, completed in April 2018. Michael Webber, an energy expert at the University of Texas at Austin and the study's leader, notes that his conclusion—that increased transmission, not just fuel-storing generators, helps grids respond to extreme events—conflicted with statements made by DOE leaders. "I never got a message from anybody saying 'Please do a study that concludes coal is magical,' so there was never direct pressure on me for that. But I could sort of read the winds," Webber says.

In the case of Seams, DOE's interference has had a real and practical impact. Caspary says he has been waiting for access to Seams' simulation tools to do follow-up studies for the Southwest Power Pool. There's a growing backlog of wind and solar projects seeking to use the Pool's lines.

And by labeling the study incomplete and blocking its publication, DOE has diminished the credibility of Seams' findings. One power-sector trade journal, noting what it called "a lot of hype" after the Iowa meeting, said Seams wasn't even a study: "It actually was a slide deck describing some future real study."

That loss of credibility hinders the chances of jump-starting large-scale power-grid planning in the United States. The power-industry expert Peter Fox-Penner, who runs the Boston University Institute for Sustainable Energy, says the U.S. is falling behind other major economies when it comes to creating the big grid links that make a transition to renewable energy possible. As Fox-Penner writes in his 2020 book, *Power After Carbon: Building a Clean, Resilient Grid*, "Without better

integrated planning, we can't even guess at the amount of transmission we need and where and how it should be built. Europe, Australia, and other countries are starting to get a good handle on these questions while the United States lags well behind." The International Energy Agency has estimated that China's growing interregional transmission could save its consumers and industries \$9 billion a year.

Meanwhile, the nationwide report on grid congestion that DOE is required by law to update every three years—a crucial component of grid planning—is two years behind schedule. (DOE's website still anticipates a 2019 update to the Obama administration's 2015 study.)

And there are more signs of trouble at NREL, where two more grid-modeling studies are now missing in action. Tierney says the three studies were planned as a trifecta: Seams was the prelude; a North American—wide study adding in Texas, Mexico, and Canada was the main event; and an analysis of electrifying energy demands primarily met by coal, gas, and petroleum would be the closer. The last study's final phase explores how U.S. grids could supply extra power to replace fossil fuels, face the same political sensitivities as Seams, and has yet to surface. Tierney says NREL told her last year that it was "awaiting sign-off" at DOE.

NREL's continental-scale study, meanwhile, is far behind schedule. Until early July, the North American Renewable Integration Study's project website was still promising **final results last year. NREL now says results could be out later this year, but a Canadian official tells InvestigateWest that 2020 is unlikely. Osborn, the retired power planner, is a member of the study's technical-review committee and speculates that NREL officials put it on hold in hopes of a more receptive administration come 2021.**

If NREL researchers are able to work unencumbered by political concerns and release Seams in its entirety, it could help point the U.S. toward a greener future, in which a robust economy runs on renewable energy. But for now, Seams is demonstrating an unintended finding—that when administrations stick their hands into scientific research, politically inconvenient truths are in peril.

Outings and Expeditions; Famous Ukrainians; Reputation mining 20200902

I have been talking about getting together a English language conversation group for several years. It took a prod from Toastmaster Alex Krisky to get it going. We met in the Limpopo restaurant, an indoor/outdoor shashlik place in Hydropark that Oksana and I like.

It was Sunday night, and we were the only people in the place. Coronavirus has had an impact. Not, however, on us. Nobody bothered with masks. The group included Alex and me; our new friends Susie and Charlie who have recently arrived, having sold their house in Brooklyn Heights, and are considering relocating here; Greek diplomat Yannis from our Toastmasters club, and four other people that I did not remember having seen before.

Ukraine had just celebrated Independence Day, which involves military parades, though not nearly as big as they were when I first got here 13 years ago. Alex and Max, the guy next to me, were pretty well-informed on the history of World War II. Here it is called the Great Patriotic War. Alex had some off-the-wall conspiracy theories about how America had led Churchill into the war in order to exhaust Great Britain and take over as the number one hegemon. Max was more down to earth. I was pleased that he had read Patrick Buchanan on the subject. Buchanan believes that Hitler really didn't want a war, but the bellicose Churchill, pushed by financial interests, made it impossible to avoid.

At any rate, we were there from 5:00 until 8:00, had a wonderful dinner washed down with an adequate amount but no excess of beer. We will do it again.

An added plus was that we have a new babysitter. Dasha, whom I taught two years ago as a sixth grader, is now a ladylike eighth grader and her mom proposed that we use her to watch Eddie, Zoriana and Charlie and Susie's son Luca. I gather that she didn't have too much to do. The three kids played well together. But that is neither here nor there – you need to have somebody watching them, and she seems to be pretty responsible.

Our talk about going to the zoo the next day with Charlie and Susie turned into a comedy of errors. They couldn't do it in the morning. Oksana said it had to be morning because Zoriana naps in the afternoon. Well and good.

We took half an hour longer than we should have to get organized. The difference between an outing and an expedition is a standing joke in our house. It's an outing when daddy leads it. It's an expedition when mommy comes along. There must be food, drink, changes of clothes, hats to protect against the sun, and bathtubs. Only the last one is made up. It takes forever.

Daddy suggested taking the bus and the Metro. The Metro is a straight shot – it goes right through the high bluff on the right bank of the river, runs under downtown, and goes right out to the zoo. Mom is however concerned about exposure to coronavirus on public transportation, masks or not. So we had to walk 15 minutes to where the taxis will meet you in this time of coronavirus.

The taxi driver first asked if he could drop off a bouquet at Lva Tolstova. That's the Metro station only a block away from the street that leads to the zoo. I said, okay.

Then it got complicated. Instead of going to the closest bridge, the logical bridge, the one that any other driver would use, he headed north toward the Moscow bridge. I mistakenly gave him the benefit of the doubt, figuring that he was listening to traffic reports and knew how to avoid the traffic jams. Nope. Not only was his route about 50% longer than it should've been, but there were traffic jams all the way.

We then got to the Lva Tolstova Metro, where I expected he would drop off the bouquet. Wrong again. We drove several miles along Lva Tolstova Street, a long way out of our way, until he double parked outside of a huge office building. We waited five minutes during which I prayed that nobody would rear end us, and then proceeded to the zoo. The half-hour trip had taken an hour and a quarter. The taxi driver strongly hinted that I should give him a tip. I

should have given him a tip in the form of strong advice, but I refrained. I was damned if I was going to give him a monetary tip.

And... the zoo was closed. I knew that the zoo operated from nine until five. Oksana, who was planning the expedition, asked me as we were pulling together the bathtubs and the ski jackets to confirm the hours. I glanced at the Cyrillic information and saw 9-to-5 on their site. However, upon returning home, I find that in the fine print it said "except Mondays – 12 until 5."

Kyiv Polytechnic University is across the street, and there is a fair-sized park there. We went to look for squirrels. A lot of oak trees, but no inhabitants. However, walking a bit further, through the campus, we found some things of interest. This is the premier technology university in the country. There were statues to great engineers, including Sikorsky, who emigrated to America and invented the helicopter.



We also found some artifacts, including this old locomotive. Looking at it, I guessed late 19th century. Wrong! 1954. If I had given it more thought I would've noticed that it was diesel instead of coal powered. However, the heavy, angular construction appeared to be from an earlier era.



At any rate, the kids loved it. Zoriana has no fear. She climbed clear to the top, 15 or 20 feet up, without the slightest concern about falling. Eddie followed her. We turned around after we coaxed her down, and darned if she wasn't back up there again.

They exhibited other Soviet firsts, such as the first lightly armored utility helicopter. Whatever that means. It dated from 1960. And we saw a Yak40 airliner, a crude knockoff of the Boeing 727. I had flown on one of these to Crimea in 2008. I have been on some pretty primitive airplanes before, such as the DC3 and C-130 military transport, but this one had them all beat for lack of civilized comforts.

After our tour the campus we caught another taxi for home. This fellow really knew the city, figured out how to skirt traffic jams when he encountered them, and made it in just over half an hour. Nice tip for him.

Things are quiet on the home front. Eddie started school on Tuesday. This is the year he is old enough to bicycle on his own. Most days. Today I went along, lugging a suitcase full of zucchini, apples and grapes, a gift from Oksana's

garden for the kids' lunch. The weather remains warm – 90° today – and we will savor the last few weeks of swimming.

In my yesterday's blog I asked that you readers be willing to read posts that are out of the mainstream. Not approved by the ADL or the SPLC. These liberal organizations have seized the societal high ground and attempt to tell you what Internet content is not fit to read.

The same thing has happened with academic credentials. Many of the books that I review are written by scholars from second-rate institutions. Right off the top of my head they include Victor Davis Hanson, of Fresno State; Kevin McDonald of Long Beach State; J Philippe Rushton of the University of Western Ontario; Edward Dutton of Oulu University, Finland. Michael Woodley of Menie of the University of Utrecht, Netherlands.

There is nothing wrong with these guys' minds. It is simply that they are not conforming to the mainstream of intellectual thought defined by Harvard, Princeton and Yale in the US and Oxford/Cambridge in the United Kingdom. The gatekeepers at these elite institutions find them dangerous, somewhat heretical. They are not invited into the courts of the mandarins.

Robert Ploman, author of [Blueprint](#), and Richard Haier, author of [The Neuroscience of Intelligence](#), are at the forefront of research on human intelligence. They are at, respectively, King's College, London and the University of California at Irvine. Richard Lynn is at The Ulster Institute. None of these are in the top tier of universities by reputation. Yet, these are among the most influential writers alive today.

People who are at the top universities like Steven Pinker are for the most part my contemporaries. They rose to fame despite political correctness, over the resistance of the cultural Marxists such as Stephen Jay Gould who wielded disproportionate power. E. O. Wilson, who founded sociobiology at Harvard, was loathed by Gould. Gould

and other academic Marxists did their best to kill that baby in its crib. Some brilliant scientists, such as Pinker, had the advantage of being Jewish, which in my anecdotal observation is a fair leg up in academia.

Let me also venture the opinion that the top-tier universities have been coasting on reputation. The more Harvard, Yale and the others put ethnicity and social justice ahead of academics, the quicker they will forfeit the reputations they have built up over centuries.

The fall will take some time. There is an interlocking system of rich benefactors on the Boards of Trustees, the businesses these trustees run, the scholarly publications that would publish academic papers, and the governmental bodies that control the flow of research money to the institutions. On top of that, they all work in the English language, which is the sine qua non in science, rather like Latin of three centuries ago. However, the rot has set in and there are few countervailing forces to remedy it.

Who comes next, and when, will be interesting to observe. My guess is that the physical University will diminish in importance as ideas can be easily exchanged over the Internet. Scholarly communities are already starting to become virtual, so the University campus is no longer needed to bring fertile minds together. Scholars do, however, need access to certain physical resources such as laboratories.

In the past few decades, grant money has become a significant force in scientific research. A pernicious force, because the donors usually have a vested interest in the research findings. A global reset, in which money becomes scarcer, could lead to a resurgence in honest scholarship. Other powers such as Russia and China are unlikely to support pure, unfettered scientific research. They are, nonetheless, not encumbered by the social justice notions that dog Western universities. China, for instance, hosts leading researchers in the area of human intelligence.

The same kind of rot has already deeply set in at newspapers, such as, for instance, the Washington Post and the New York Times. Trading on their hard-earned reputations to push dogmatic agendas, they have ruined them. Their credibility is gone. The grey lady is a laughingstock.

I'll add that this also happens to companies. Half a century ago, when I worked for IBM, it was the most widely respected computer company in the world. They leveraged that reputation to win and retain clients who would have been better off buying computer equipment from somebody else. They have used it in a similar way in the computer services business. They retained employees with the expectation of promotions that wouldn't come and retirement benefits that didn't fully materialize. As the Americans were displaced by Indians on H1B visas. The process is called "reputation mining," and it is not at all unique to IBM. Unfortunately, it seems to have affected most of the major American manufacturing companies and quite a few of the marketing and distribution companies as well. It has as of yet hardly touched the FAANGS, but it will; it is just a matter of time before their attention to agendas other than providing great service, and recognizing employees solely on the basis of merit, turns around to bite them.

Lastly, such changes affect countries. Quite a few people here in Ukraine still want to emigrate to the United States, the supposed land of opportunity. However, the number is dropping rapidly as the magnitude of civil unrest in the United States becomes evident. People are quite familiar with the draconian lockdowns imposed in the name of coronavirus; the fecklessness of the elected officials and police in the face of mob violence; the political correctness; jailing for free speech and the like. Ukraine doesn't look so bad by comparison.

The Anglosphere – Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Great Britain itself – seems to be especially hard-hit. Within the past couple of years it has become forbidden to ask any questions with regard to the chaos caused by parasitic, destructive asylum-seekers. There are hefty fines for questioning the wisdom of the interests of coronavirus lockdowns and for not wearing masks.

Yesterday a correspondent wrote to say that at the rate at which world trade is collapsing there will certainly be increasing food shortages throughout the world. Nevertheless, individual English citizens can be found guilty of "food hoarding" if they react logically and fill the pantry. Moreover, police in all of these countries increasingly have the right to simply walk in and check for themselves to see whether you are wearing masks indoors, hoarding food, homeschooling your children or whatever.

The Anglosphere authorities have been pretty much able to suppress voices raised in resistance to this oppression. These countries are being quietly scratched from Americans' "Plan B" lists. What countries will replace them is a good question. Martin writes that the Southern Cone countries of which I had written favorably have changed significantly. Not only do they have traditionally corrupt governments, but they have been invaded by impecunious refugees from their north. My bet would be central Europe, where things are getting better, and the former Soviet republics which look increasingly good if only by comparison.

That's the news from lake WeBeGone, where the men are strong, the women are good looking, and the children can still experience a normal childhood. If "normal" can be stretched to mean something that seems to be no longer normal anywhere else in the world.

An outing to the farmer's market. Dinner with new and old friends. School and Covid19 again. 20200907

Instead of our usual Sunday outing to the park, Oksana suggested that we go to the farmer's market. Oksana particularly wanted to buy raspberries. She wanted to make jam for the winter.

I wound up carrying 15 kg – about 33 pounds – of groceries a mile back home. See photo below of me laden like an elephant. Note the Trader Joe and Burke School bags. Also –the kids at breakfast.



The prices were fantastic. Here you see pictures of tomatoes at 15 hryvnya kilo., That's 25¢/lb. You see eggplants and peppers at 13¢. And you see the raspberries at a \$1.26. All of it extremely reasonable, and hence the 15 kg. My guess is that Covid19 has thoroughly tangled customs and border crossings, so produce grown for export must be sold locally. Not a good portent for the long run, but great for us now.



And here's a picture of Eddie, immediately put to work making the raspberry jam.



Oksana and I have been busy the past couple weeks making other stuff. Here's a picture of some tomatoes and some pickles. The tomatoes are one jar of four so far. After today's haul there will be more. And the pickles are one jar of three. We are pretty much set for the winter. The sauerkraut is something that we make all the time. Cabbage is available year-round, and we just do it as we need it.



Last night we had company over for dinner. Susie and Charlie arrived about three weeks ago on a very unusual mission. They had arranged a surrogate parentage. It turns out that they had two fertilized eggs, so they'll have fraternal twins born of different mothers. They already have one child, Luca, just turning five years old. Luca is a delightful kid. He was at our house a couple weeks ago. If the new ones turn out to be as sweet tempered as he is, they will really have a wonderful life.

We had not seen our friends Gary and Alyona Goble since Christmas on account of coronavirus. Everybody's been kind of hunkered down. We invited them too, as they have a similar story.

Charlie and Susie's story is this. As they were planning to come over and pick up the kids, they looked at the prices. A nanny in New York costs \$25 an hour. That is a ridiculous expense that they simply could not afford. Inasmuch as Charles can work from anywhere in the world, why Brooklyn Heights? They sold their apartment and committed to staying here for the three months of paternity leave, to see how it works.

It turns out that on account of coronavirus his company will not be operating from a physical office in any case, at least through the end of the year. They're happy to let him work remotely, and it rather looks like it'll be an ongoing deal. This could be the best of all possible worlds. Earning a decent New York salary and living in Ukraine.

Gary's story is somewhat similar. He is a Sybase database engineer. Sybase is a competitor to Oracle, which is how I made my living until retiring 23 years ago now. His clients are mostly in Germany.

Both he and Charlie have been squeezed by Indian immigrants. It's interesting how this diversity thing works. We foundational Americans are all told to celebrate diversity, to appreciate having people of different nationalities in the workplace all around us. And above all, never to discriminate.

The Indians, however, are a rather parochial bunch. They discriminate like mad. They seek to bring in as many other Indians as they can, and to hell with the native-born Americans. Gary feels the pressure more than Charles does, but everybody notices that the Indians have been brought in throughout both Europe and the EU. Nobody finds them to be generally as competent as those whom they replace, but they are docile and they work cheap.

This is reminiscent of what the robber barons did in the latter part of the 19th century. They would bring in immigrants, at times setting them up working in groups together where they had internal cohesion so that they would form a group of people who understood each other, or they would purposely mix the nationalities so that they could not get together and unionize. They were very diversity conscious, whether promoting it in one instance or thwarting it in another. When it comes to white people, diversity has been very one-way. It is used to squeeze guys like Gary and Charles. They don't have any bargaining strength. They are on the outside looking in. That's the way the powers that be seem to want it.

As I have reported, the handwriting was on the wall back in the mid-90s, but I was ready to retire, always one step ahead of the game. It has not been pleasant for those who remained.

Gary and Alyona lived in Germany for several years. They and their kids speak German. They moved out because multiculturalism in

the German schools meant that the quality of education was sinking and they were surrounded by children who were neither German nor like them. It was unpleasant. Since Alyona's roots are Moldovan/Russian, it was easy for them to relocate here. They are building a house.

Susie is from Basel. It turned out that everybody at dinner, with the exception of Charlie and Eddie, and of course babysitter Anna and her daughter Sofia, spoke a little bit of German. We ricocheted around with German conversation for a while before settling back to English.

Susie and Charles had an interesting experience Saturday at the hospital. The first baby was born of the surrogate mother last week by cesarean section. Ukrainian law requires that if there is a cesarean section, both mother and child remain in the hospital for a week. That certainly made no sense, inasmuch as the child is not going to belong to the birth mother but to Susie. However, their agent didn't display much strength in dealing with the authorities and caved rather readily to the arbitrary decisions of the hospital administration.

Thus, we had Charlie and Susie sans baby for our barbecue. Yes, I had invited them for barbecue. They had both been here for barbecues and they were a bit disappointed to find that this time was not on the grill. The weather report said that it would be kind of cold and perhaps rainy. It turned out to be absolutely wrong. It was a beautiful day, good enough that I went swimming in the afternoon. However, we had already cooked moussaka and prepared tabbouleh the night before.

Here's the leftover tabbouleh and the moussaka. The tabbouleh still looks pretty inviting. I wish I had taken a before picture. The cold and jumbled moussaka looks like a dog's breakfast. You'll have to take my word for the fact that it still tastes good, at least to Oksana and me.



Luca remembered the sausages from last time and he asked, with a long face, where they were. Anna got a couple of act couple out from the freezer and put them in the microwave. We are mindful of the fact that everybody likes our barbecue and next time whatever the weather, come rain or shine we will have a barbecue again. I appreciate the vote of confidence.

Yesterday was our first face-to-face Toastmasters meeting since early March. There were only 13 people. We had just two speakers. As I recently reported, we had also had a speech contest in a face-to-face format, so this wasn't absolutely the first time we'd seen each other. The meeting came off well and we will have another such next week.

I should add, patting myself on the back, that I won the best speaker in table topics - impromptu speaking. Usually the award goes to either a new speaker, because we like to encourage new people to join, or to one of our truly outstanding speakers such as Vitaliy Rulov or Vera Oleneva. I don't often win, and I have to say it's a thrill to do so. The question I got was on who I would like to meet if I could meet anybody in the world. I said, the guy who put together the Covid 19 bug in a laboratory, wherever he did it, Wuhan, China, or Fort Dietrich, Maryland, and strangle him in person.

I had an interesting contretemps. As I was getting on the bus coming back from the Toastmasters meeting the bus pulled up and there was a car parked where the bus needed to get, with the driver chatting obliviously on his cell phone. A couple of other waiting passengers were pounding on the passenger-side window trying to get his attention. I walked around to the driver side where I could see an open window and started to shout at him. I had two objectives. First, to make it so loud that he couldn't talk on the phone, and second to let the other party on the conversation know that he was being an absolute boor by squatting in a bus zone.

I don't do that kind of thing very often. I have had mixed experience in the past. But to shout at a guy in a car one has a bit of an advantage. He is hostage to his machine. And in this case, I had half a dozen allies ready if he wanted to mix it up. He moved and the bus driver let me on. I was rather hot under the collar and forgot to put my mask on. Probably a quarter of riders don't wear masks and nobody gets worried about it.

Let me add a note about Gary Goble. He is the only other guy that I know who has taken measures against Covid19. He has put together some hydroxychloroquine, azithromycin and zinc, and he plans to use them immediately if he or anybody in the family get symptoms of Covid19. I'm one step ahead, taking it as a prophylactic. But it's pretty much the same deal.

I repeat for anybody interested; the cost is only \$30 for the entire course of treatment. Cheap insurance, especially given the fact that in the United States people are unable to order hydroxychloroquine when they need it. I had expected some of you to let me know that you had ordered it. So far nobody has.

The mother of Eddie's best friend Yarema is concerned about his English education. Oksana tells me that the English teacher that the Sunflower School has hired comes with pretty good recommendations. I'm bit skeptical. However good the teacher, the school needs a culture of hard work supported by the administration. I don't have high expectations. As I have previously written, when I taught sixth and seventh grade English the kids simply didn't do their homework. I will wait and see if Eddie feels any pressure to do his.

I had suggested that we might teach English songs to these kids. Music is a different approach. I remember the French songs I learned in the eighth grade pretty well, and of course know the vocabulary that went with them. Many people learned English from learning Beatles songs and German from Ramstein.

Mom was not terribly interested in that. I made a second proposal. I read daily to Eddie, the last three books being from Mark Twain. I proposed that I might find some books that would be a little simpler. Interesting to Eddie and Yarema and leading to some English conversation. What I have in mind is a Smithsonian book of natural history written for children. The vocabulary is simple and the topic matter engaging for boys. We'll see if we get a take on that.

That's the news from Lake WeBeGone, where the men are strong, the women are good looking, and the kids are all above average. At least in homework avoidance.

Graham

Old boys and Indians. Raising children on the fringes of Western civilization. Zoriana is three. 20200908

My piece about Indian H1B visa holders in the United States touched a nerve. Several of you shared similar observations. And a few cuss words I can't repeat here. I offer a few anecdotes from my experience before leaving the United States.

In 1979, the year I worked for Booz Allen, one thing I never understood was why they tolerated an employee named Lachman Balchandani. The standing joke was that he was always assigned to two projects at the same time, and whenever you looked for him he was "at the other project." You hated to give him any assignment, because it would be more work to untangle than it would be to do it yourself in the first place. Little did I realize that he was the tip of the iceberg.

Back then I was a landlord. At the peak I owned six rental properties with a total of 12 units. As a good citizen I did not discriminate by race. Experience quickly showed that doing exactly that would have been in my economic best interest. While I can't give the particulars of every group in a family blog, I think it is safe to relate a story about Indians. I developed a maxim. When the number of Indian tenants went up, it meant that I had set the rents too low. They have an absolute genius for sniffing out bargains.

In 1996, shortly before folding our company, I had a project in Tysons Corner, Virginia, with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, a bureaucracy akin to government. We were one services provider among many – the others increasingly Indian. John Rodman of our company adopted the name Jonni Roddiman, with an Indian inflection. At the time it was funny. The two of us were kept pretty busy fixing things that the Indians had screwed up. I doubt he is laughing as much these days.

As a consultant, I developed another maxim. You have two types of clients – those that will make you famous, and those that will make you rich.

You get famous by solving difficult problems for appreciative clients. You get rich by working endlessly on meaningless problems for clients who have deep pockets but no ability whatsoever to discern quality. That is a pretty good definition of the average government client. They can understand the dollars and cents of hiring an Indian. They have little means of figuring out whether he is producing anything of value.

Charlie and Susie, Gary and Alyona, Oksana and I are doing several things unusual for foundational Americans (normal white folks who identify as American rather than with the countries from which their ancestors emigrated). And we are facing several unique difficulties worth talking about.

The first thing odd that we are doing is raising kids. Not many of the 100 or so of you to whom I'm writing are raising children. Of those with grown children, a striking percentage don't have grandchildren. So, the three of us here, old enough to be grandparents and then some, are rather unusual in that we are raising children.

We are raising our children in a culture other than our own. Throughout history the best place to raise children has generally been among people like yourself – people from whom the children would absorb the culture. Gary and I have very consciously decided that the culture where we come from is too poisonous to take that risk. We are consciously raising children in a culture significantly different from that in which we grew up.

We are rearing children in a materially poor society, not renowned for its educational system, healthcare or job opportunities. We are essentially trusting to the fact that a poor but honest child will be able to make a better life in this world than one who is materially well off in a society so corrupt that a person living there cannot afford to tell the truth. In my case, I am betting that the status quo in the West is unsustainable and that the discrepancies in wealth will shrink sooner rather than later.

The most significant of our difficulties is that we are not embedded in communities of like people. We don't have mutual support from church groups, babysitting cooperatives, Boy Scout troops, PTAs or any of those sorts of things. Those props were immensely useful to my parents as I was growing up. They had become hollow and useless as I was raising my first family in Washington DC. The social capital for people like us has been thoroughly gutted, enough so that in abandoning it I am losing almost nothing.

The logistic difficulties we face can be kind of daunting. The most significant is language. Gary and I get along pretty well with Russian. It came easily to him; he had learned German while serving in the military. I had learned several languages through the course of my work overseas.

The systems are different. Plumbing and electricity work differently. You don't find the same things in our Epicenter store that you do in a Home Depot. The sizes are all metric; sometimes they even express sizes differently. We use electronic banking in place of checks, debit cards in place of credit cards and so on. Nobody sends invoices – you have to go online, figure out how much you owe, and pay it yourself. When you forget – the phone or the Internet simply stops working.

Most legal work is done through notaries instead of lawyers. The legal system is not based on traditional case-based English law. It seems more similar to French law, the Napoleonic system in which everything is written and the judge applies the written law without recourse to precedent. There are different hierarchies of courts handling different kinds of law. On top of all this, as you have read elsewhere, the system is arbitrary and corrupt. Until recently (get out of jail free for BLM rioters, Jussie Smollett, Assange, Snowden, Flynn etc.), we savored the notion that justice was more fairly administered in the United States.

The K–12 educational system has been deteriorating since Soviet times. Teaching used to be a better paying, more highly respected profession. Now, as in the United States, less well prepared teachers are dealing with classes of 25 or more students. Gary and our babysitter Anna report that there is quite a bit of bullying. The teachers, not having the resources to squelch it, either don't see it or turn a blind eye. Thank goodness they don't have to deal with the issues of diversity! Thank goodness also that homeschooling remains an option.

The "nuclear family" of an expatriate living in Ukraine is truly nuclear. We have to do almost everything ourselves. The tragedy is that the nuclear family back in the United States also finds itself all alone as a function of the deterioration of American social capital. Those

of us here in Ukraine, unlike most in the United States, recognize our situation and take measures to cope with it. Part of the coping mechanism has to do with maintaining connections back in the United States. That will be a topic for another blog.

Zoriana turned three yesterday. We had shrimp in garlic sauce, the same as we had had for Oksana's birthday. This time there were only four of us, and we became quite sated with the delicious shrimps and two side dishes, spinach and rice, that go well with the sauce. Followed by apple pie. I chose to make another one, as there had been none left for me on Saturday night.

That's the news from Lake WeBeGone, where the men are strong, the women good-looking, and the children are all above average. In their own minds, of course. We encourage them to grow into those expectations.

Graham

The ups and downs of electric power. The shifting Overton Window. Ukraine for Ukrainians! 20200909

Oksana is downstairs with a guy dealing with the electrical problem. Our voltage regulator cuts out when the voltage on any of the three phases falls below 180 or goes above 255. That happens fairly regularly. When it does, usually we are without electricity for a few minutes until it stabilizes. However, it can be as much a 20 minutes before things settle out.

Why is it unstable? This appears to be a widespread problem for the electric company. As I have written previously, they have promised Oksana it would be fixed. I have my doubts. My attitude has been, let's be thankful we have electricity and simply live with it. Her attitude is that I'm just being lazy.

At any rate, to this point she has invested a couple of weeks working on the problem, occasionally glowering at me for not having gotten involved in fixing it myself. Br'er Fox, he lay low. If she wants to drive herself crazy, I'm not going to get in the way.

We have learned a little bit about the problem. First, as mentioned, it is widespread. Secondly, what most people do is to widen the tolerance on the voltage regulator until it stops cutting out. My guess is that that defeats its purpose. Third, we have heard from a couple of sources that a voltage stabilizer is the real trick. That's a device that takes whatever electricity you get and converts it to the proper voltage.

Since they apparently use a lot of them in India, it is easy to read about them in English. They have two size ranges, one for an individual appliance, most often mentioned being a refrigerator. The other would be for a whole house. That I have found a supplier that specializes in them tells me something.

Looking at the bright side, I'm glad that Oksana is taking the lead in learning something about how the house is put together and how to deal with contractors. While this problem may be something that could be ignored, there are many that cannot. Given the actuarial likelihood that she will have to deal with them on her own someday, this is probably as good a time as any to get started.

The "Overton window" of permissible punditry is moving somewhat to the right. Here are links to articles on Black Lives Matter written by a [Jewish guy on a Gentile](#) website, and a [Gentile on a Jewish website](#). They are inching closer to the truth, which is that there is no way to satisfy the protesters and there will be no end to the chaos short of a radical explosion.

At the heart of the matter is the tension between facts and dogma. The fact is that evolution has made the populations of mankind quite different. The dogma is that differences don't exist. As indicated by the links in my [blog of September 2](#), the science more and more strongly confirms the hows and whys of the differences. Events this summer have made it clear that the dogma is simply not tenable. At any rate, I commend the two linked articles above as good samples of the (rapid) drift of contemporary thinking.

The last couple of blogs I did on Indians working in high-tech inspired me to finish an article I have been tinkering with for a couple of months. [It advocates that Ukraine rigorously limit immigration](#) before the elites of this country decide to agitate in favor of it. Ukraine is still in a position to protect itself. The United States and Western Europe can no longer do so, and the tragic collapse of both is increasingly evident.

Unfortunately, I can't think of any place to send this article for publication. In the first place, it is somewhat long. Secondly, Ukraine simply doesn't have an organized alt-right looking out for the interests of the ordinary citizen. I will be grateful to any of you who read it. In the meantime, I suspect it will remain an orphan article on my website. Alas. However, having once formulated the thoughts I am sure I will find ways to use them here and there.

And that's the news from Lake WeBeGone, where the men are strong, the women are good looking, and we are waiting for the school to send the first grades home to find out how far above average the kids actually are.

I tried to avoid dealing with our electrical problems. No use. 20200911

Let me repeat the history. We have had some quirks. Our fresh water pump and fecal pump have failed more than they should. Last time the fecal pump died, the pump guy said it looked like it'd been blasted by lightning. He had never seen that kind of damage to a pump before.

Our heating system needs constant attention. The guys who handle it, Valery and his son Alexi, are not terribly expensive. We just put up with it. However, Valery suggested that unstable electricity might be contributing to the problems we had with the boiler. Taken altogether with the pump problems, it made sense.

He installed a device that is in Russian called a "relay." I haven't been able to locate the proper English term. I'm calling it a voltage regulator, that's probably wrong.

What it does is cut off the electricity when the voltage gets out of spec – too low or too high. Our contract with the electric company says they will deliver $230\text{ V} \pm 10$ percent in each of three phases of our 380 volt system. We have the tolerances of this device set at 180 volts at the low end and 255 at the high-end. The electricity is still unstable. The voltage on each of the three phases is different, and from time to time one of them goes out of spec and the system shuts down the electricity to the whole house.

When the "relay" was first installed the electricity would go out for five seconds and come back on. However, the electrical glitches were not mere transients. The thing would switch the lights off and on like mad. We adjusted it to wait a minute before retrying. Even at that it often takes quite a few tries before it comes on and stays on.

Of course, everybody has an opinion. We have too much illogical stuff going on, but some opinions simply could not be true.

The problem solving technique to this point is what I call folkloric. Everybody involved making a different guess, nobody writing their guesses down or doing any analysis to see if they might be right. I have initiated the radical measure of attempting to draw pictures and write things down. You can't eliminate an option unless you thoroughly understand it, and you can't thoroughly understand it unless you do a written analysis.

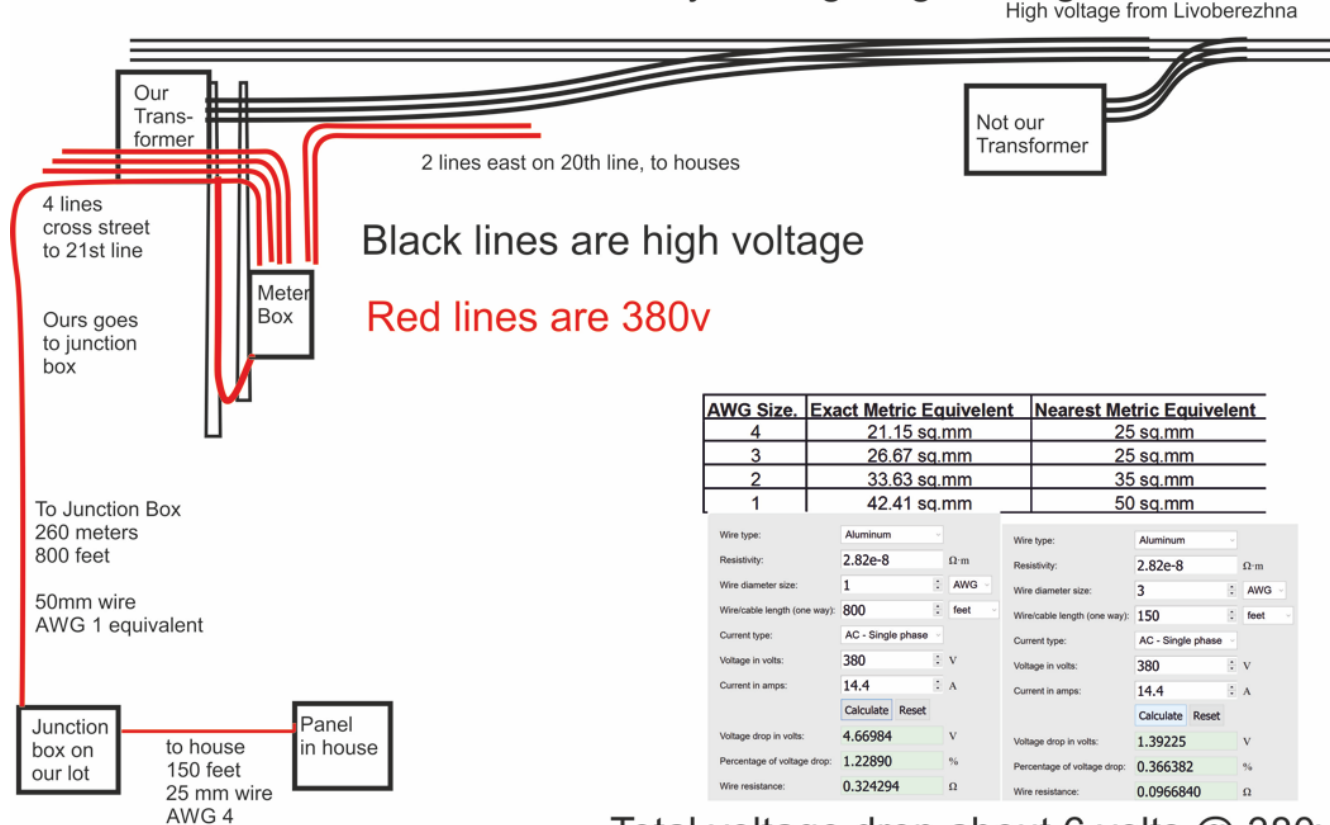
Wire size theory

The last guy we talked to, Sasha, opened up our junction box and said that we had two sizes of wires. That was probably the problem.

That was a theory I could research. They rate electrical wires by their cross-sectional area. When Oksana pressed him, Sasha gave us actual numbers. He said we had 50 mm wire coming into the junction box and 25 mm going out. More than that, the wires are aluminum. Should be copper. There would be too much of a voltage drop.

This was something I could work with! As shown in the attached diagram, the 50 mm cross-sectional wire corresponds to American wire gauge one (AWG 1) and the 25 to AWG3. Wire diameters of 1/3 and 1/4 inch, more or less. That's what I see. We know the lengths of each wire run: 800 feet and 150 feet. The total voltage loss from the transformer at 380V would be only about 6 V. It would be constant, and figured into the 230 figure they said they deliver. That's not consistent with the problem we had. Besides, we have to assume that the power company knew what they were doing. Sasha was blowing hot air.

Schematic of connection from Kyivenergo high voltage to house



Total voltage drop about 6 volts @ 380v

Overloaded Transformer

Another theory was that other people on the transformer were overloading it. We talked to them, and that seems unlikely. Most didn't even know there was a problem.

My guess is that the transformer has some mechanism to protect itself if aggregate demand exceeds 75 A @ 380V. Otherwise I expect that the windings would overheat and it would destroy itself. I would like somebody to confirm that. If this is true, the transformer itself could probably not be the cause of a drop in voltage.

I read that a transformer operates at a fixed ratio of input to output voltage. In other words, if the voltage going in is low, the voltage coming out will also be low. If this is the case, the reason for our low-voltage would be that the high-voltage lines leading into our transformer are below their rated voltage. It is a systemwide problem. The fact that lots of people seem to have this it would suggest this may be the issue.

There are six people on the 380 V, 75 ampere, transformer. Each user should thus get 12.5 amps at 380 V, or 4.75 kilowatts. Oksana heard, and I'll go with, the idea that we get 12.5 amps on each of three phases at 240V. We read that the circuit breakers on each line or 40 A.

My guess is that the transformer is too dumb to restrict any individual user. The transformer would only be overloaded if the aggregate demand exceeded 75 A at 380V, or $3 \times 12.5A = 225A$ at 240V. I don't understand the arithmetic, but that jibes with the total load we place on the system. I'll go with it.

I looked at our historical usage. The maximum is about 3000 kWh in midwinter. Figuring about 720 hours per month, that would mean an average load of 4.1 kW.

You calculate Kw as volts times amperes divided by 1000. That would be either $380 \times 4.1 / 1000$ or $240 \times 4.1 \times 3 / 1000$, depending on which formula is correct. However you do it, we are well within spec. More than that, assuming the transformer doesn't have any intelligence to allocate power among the six users, and given the fact that nobody else uses all that much anyhow, we should not be overloading the system.

I can see five of the six meters in the box where I read our meter. None of them have rolled over since the transformer was installed in 2014. Our total usage in six years has been 154,000 kWh. The total of all five is 330,000 kWh. We have taken almost half of it. We can't blame the neighbors or an overloaded transformer. Even if I'm wrong, and the total capacity is 75 not 225 amps, the aggregate load remains below that. Another theory shot.

Fluctuating High-Voltage into the Transformer

Oksana had bugged the electric company enough that they replaced our electric meter with one of their own devices for three days. Their device maintained a log of the voltage over time. That was exactly what we needed. Unfortunately, they keep giving Oksana the runaround as she asks them what they figured out. Hmmm.

Diagnosing the problem

I can open up our junction box when our voltage is low and put a voltmeter on the leads coming from the electric company. This will confirm that the problem is with the electric company and not in our house. This is the most likely situation. My RadioShack voltmeter won't handle that voltage, but it appears that for five dollars I can buy one at the market. That's my next step.

A Voltage Stabilizer?

I don't have much faith in the electric company. Our neighbor, the one who recommended Sasha, had him install a voltage stabilizer. As best I can tell that amounts to a variable transformer that takes whatever input voltage you get and moves it within spec.

These things are fairly expensive. From what I've seen of Sasha, I don't trust him to come up with the right specification. But there is a store that specializes in selling them. I think that's where I'll go if I need to.

We don't have much room in the house. However, since the thing would sit right in the middle of the electric line, obviously you don't have to plug it in for power. It could go anywhere. Since it incorporates a transformer it probably gives off heat and is better off sitting outdoors anyhow. Without investigating the matter, my guess is that we would put it out by the junction box and it wouldn't take any space in the house.

Before I invest in a voltage stabilizer, I want to understand how damaging low-voltage is to our heat system and our pumps. I'm perfectly willing to believe that it can be problematic, but I'd like to hear it from somebody who knows.

Switch to gas?

We had planned to have natural gas heat from the start. However, the gas company took two years (!?) to get it hooked up. In the meantime we had installed an electric boiler. The gas boiler is installed and waiting to be connected. I do not know how much plumbing would be involved in rerouting the hot water pipes from the electric boiler to a gas boiler.

The gas pipe ends right outside the kitchen wall. Every month the gas company sends around two lovely ladies to read the gas meter. The reading is always the same – absolutely zero. At the moment they are trying to bill us for the labor involved in coming to read the same thing every month.

There would be some advantage to getting gas heat. The belt and suspenders approach – rely primarily on gas heat, with electric space heaters if the gas went out. But gas service is a good deal more reliable than electric.

I prefer a gas stove top to electric. The heat is instantaneous and you can see what you got. The downside is that little kids can mess with it. They have improve the safety somewhat, but it is still inherently more dangerous than electricity.

Countertops are a related issue. We got relatively cheap countertops, and they are chipped. Oksana doesn't care. I'd like to get something better. There are a few small factories in the area making granite and marble countertops. In my mind it would make sense to get them installed at the same time.

Where we stand

That's my analysis. I seriously doubt that the electric company will fix the problem. We will wind up throwing money at it. We will have to agree on what the problem is, and then agree on a solution.

My bet is that we will tolerate electrical outages for a while to come.

Where are the good men? A birthday in the park. Always looking for input from you, and you came through. 20200915

The weekend started out inauspiciously. I went out Friday to buy groceries for the weekend and on my way to the market I rode over some gravel. The bike went out from under me and I went down. I have a patch of skin about 3/4-inch square gone from the palm of my hand and a bang on my ribs. I figured that the market wouldn't refuse to sell me things because I was bleeding a bit. I went on made my purchases and came home. That was a cold day. I would've quavered about swimming, and I used this excuse not to. The three days since have been better. The water is getting colder, but there is still some sun.

The second face-to-face meeting of our weekly Toastmasters group was a success. We had about 25 people,

including some new men. That is, in my opinion is what the club most needs. Give the club some balance.



We had three excellent speeches. I evaluated one by Timor Berezhnoy entitled “36.5,” intended to be intriguing. As he hit a half-year birthday he reflected on the collective wisdom of his age. He had good observations on education, the fair sex, and what is success in life. As an evaluator I had to tell him I doubt that his observations will be much more profound at twice his age.

Timur’s advice was that you should never chase a woman. In my evaluation, I stated the same principle another way. We men have a tendency to take a woman for what she thinks she's worth instead of for what her true value. We need to be careful.

The other piece of advice that I would give to any man is to stay free. Don't remain in a relationship just because it's comfortable. Once you can see that it won't last forever, cut your losses and make yourself available for something new.

I reflected on the girls in the club. They are beautiful, each in their own way. Kate has amazingly good moves. She spoke about tango at the meeting, and I can readily see that she knows what she's talking about. Anna has absolutely beautiful smile and the most pleasant manner. One Yuliya has perfect proportions, the other is smart, competent, pleasant to be around and gets things done. Inna is intelligent and inquisitive.

All women have their good points, but yet there is no ideal partner. Expanding on that thought, the holy grail of our age seems to be ideal sex, a very ephemeral goal. Every girl makes love differently, differently even every time, and individual tastes may vary. To make the quest for an ideal lovemaking session your life's goal is a fool's errand.

It is only a small, almost inconsequential part of a complete relationship, and that relationship, one appreciates more as one is married, encompasses raising kids, supporting one another in a household, just being good company. We have in this modern age have allowed ourselves to adopt false and, unattainable goals.

The perfect is the enemy of the good. There is no ideal mate. At some point you have to make a commitment and get on with the business of life. Benjamin Franklin said a man should keep his eyes wide open before marriage and half shut afterwards. Nothing will be perfect, but you can make it pretty good. The key factor is you, not the other person.

Sunday we were going to meet our babysitter Anna and her daughter Sophia in the park to celebrate Sophia's birthday. Our present was the hour-long combination of three zip line courses through the treetops.



Oksana wasn't feeling good so I took Zoriana and Eddie. We all had a good time and I'm sure that Oksana enjoyed being by herself. We all agree that the ice cream in the park is good, but one of the real attractions of the European Union is that they have the world's best ice cream in Hungary in the Baltics. As it was Ukrainian father's day, Anna took the following photos.



One of the pleasures of being a very minor Internet personality is that people write to me and I still have time to respond. Sunday I got an email from Greg who lives north of Seattle. He is retirement age, married to a Ukrainian, and is looking for some peace and quiet and a place where his money will go farther. He wrote to ask about Ukraine. I was able to write back that his instincts are perfectly correct. This is a cheap place to live but most of all, it doesn't have any of the types of chaos that are enveloping the United States now. He asked reasonable questions about the threat of a Russian invasion, cost-of-living, medical care, and the language. Language is really the most difficult problem, but I have seen people survive here for decades without learning it. With a Ukrainian wife, it works.

John confirmed that a transformer is a simple device. The ratio between input and output is the number of coils wrapped around the iron core on the input side versus the number wrapped around the same core on the opposite side. The amperage adjusts automatically as a function of the voltage, so the wattage out equals the wattage in, minus of course, the conversion loss which is not that great.

John also writes that he had a voltage stabilizer in Vietnam. You had to manually move a contact up or down to change the number of wiring wraps on the input side of the transformer in order to produce the desired voltage on

the output. My understanding about modern voltage stabilizers is that they automatically move the contact for you.

Denny confirmed that low-voltage damages electric motors. Makes them run hot and eventually burn out. We do need to fix this. He writes, in fact he shouts, that I need to hire a qualified electrician. He goes on to say that he can guarantee that they exist. I totally agree with both points. Now the question is, what is a qualified electrician?

Things work differently here than in the United States. In the US we have the successor to the guild system in old Europe. US unions have apprenticeships. An apprentice spends a certain amount of time working with masters to learn the craft. After he has served his apprenticeship, there some sort of a qualifying exam, and he becomes recognized by the guild or union as a journeyman. After more such he is recognized as a master. Therefore, what I want is a certified master electrician.

However, I know of no independent Guild or union system here. Unions were part of the political structure. In the Soviet Union you were simply assigned a job by the state and you did it. So all workers were the same in theory, and levels of expertise would probably not have been designated with quite the same rigor.

At any rate I know of no apprenticeship programs here and have never seen or heard about any certification of expertise (until today – see below). You get what you get.

Another complicating factor is that the most talented plumbers, electricians and such have gone to the west to look for work. I don't know how they integrate themselves in with the existing union organizations in the West, but the stories of Polish and Ukrainian plumbers in Great Britain are legion. So not only do we not have consistent credentialing systems, but there has been a strong incentive for the best and brightest among ours to go West.

So we have done what we can. We use experts in several areas:

- Electric, obvious
- Heating system

- Plumbing
- Septic systems
- Well pumps
- Landscaping

That's just to name six. I should also say that these questions apply somewhat in medicine. Here, to the best of my knowledge, a person graduates from medical school and can be hired someplace and work as a doctor. Obviously the employers recognize the difference between the new ones and experienced doctors, but not all go through anything as formal as internship and residency here.

We see the upshot in this in medicine in the flood of foreign doctors going west. The English National health service is overrun with doctors from India and Pakistan. They are credentialed, whatever that means, in their home countries, and those credentials are for the most part taken at face value by the NHS. It seems unfair to British and American-trained doctors who have gone through the whole rigorous system, but that's how it is.

Even back when I was a kid, as Denny will remember, my neighbor Joe Lozano, a Mexican doctor, was working for the Kaiser Permanente system. Whether his credentials were comparable to an American, who knows? He was probably relatively inexpensive. It wasn't a typical doctor's neighborhood.

So that's where we are. Without credentialing, how do you know if a professional knows what he's up to? Fortunately, I know a little bit more than the average citizen about most of these things, but certainly not enough to qualify as an expert. So I will listen to these guys talk, and judged on the basis of what they say, whether they know what they're talking about. It is a hit and miss system.

The guy who installed our septic system was a very convincing talker. His septic system has had to be reworked two times until it finally seems to work. By other supposed experts, by the way. The electrician who wired our house, Sasha, was an alcoholic. When I called the builder's attention, several times, to the fact that the electricity was shaky, he never once mentioned Sasha's credentials. I doubt he had any. Had this been the United States, he

would have needed to have been a credentialed electrician, and there would've been some sort of a state inspection of the job to make sure he did it right. Here, there was none of the above.

I mention that Gary, who is also building a house, has had problems similar to mine. It comes down to the question of who can you trust? What you have to go on is your own assessment of whether a guy knows what he's talking about, recommendations from friends, and whatever organization the guy is associated with.

Let's talk about a case that worked – third time around. We have a water filter system in our house. I got it from an outfit that sold the Eco-Soft brand but didn't really know about it. The system they installed didn't work and they didn't want to stand behind their work. I went online and I found a Dr. Water (Доктор Вода) who wrote articles about this stuff. And it turns out that he is the owner of the whole Eco-Soft franchise in Ukraine. So we hired his firm, they changed some of the components, and things have worked ever since. I think we finally have our water filter system in order.

After going through about four, we finally have a plumber who seems to know his stuff. Dima is a guy about 30 who rides a fancy BMW motorcycle and is quite quirky, but he fixes everything we need. His prices are reasonable, and he will do things that most plumbers wouldn't. Last time he was here we had him deal with non-plumbing issues such as getting the toilet seat straight, fixing the rod that holds the showerhead to the wall, putting the skirting back on the bathtub, as well as fixing a leaky drain. He did a good job and didn't charge too much. Most usefully, he tinkered together a device that you can use to hook the hot water directly to the drainpipe to clear a blockage. I blessed his name as I used it this morning. Of course, if the guy who installed the plumbing in the house had ensured that the pipes were the right size and the drop on each run of pipe was the right distance, we probably wouldn't have the problem in the first place.

We are reasonably happy with the six experts we have on call for the areas bullet-pointed above. The only one with any credentials of which we know is Andrew, the landscaper, a young guy who just graduated from college in Poland. Valery, who does the heating, appears to possess only about 75% of the knowledge to which he would pretend. My eye is out for somebody who gives us more confidence – quite likely the electrician, when and if we

find him. But, on the other hand, Valery reliably comes when we call and gets things working again.

There is a different balance here between capital and labor. Labor is cheap. The labor to fix broken pumps and so on is not exorbitant. Our solution to the problem that pumps burn out has been to keep spare pumps up in the attic. When one of them craps out, we call the repairman to put the other one in and get the broken one fixed. True, it is an annoyance. But this approach is not nearly as expensive as it would be in the United States.

It has been two weeks since Oksana last bugged the electric company about providing the results of their measuring our power by replacing our electric meter with their own, which included a recording device. They have not given us the results, and the problems continue.

I have an appointment tomorrow night with a Sergei from the outfit that sells voltage stabilizers. He has posted this license from a government inspection agency on his website. Although the website looks professional, on the phone he comes across as “just a guy” who will come by when he can. We will see.



I hope I understand the situation well enough now not to get whiffle-dusted.

Last week I bought the voltmeter and have been experimenting. Here is a chronicle of my observations, which I am sure anybody who knows electricity could have told me. But they didn't. And I kind of enjoy the learning.

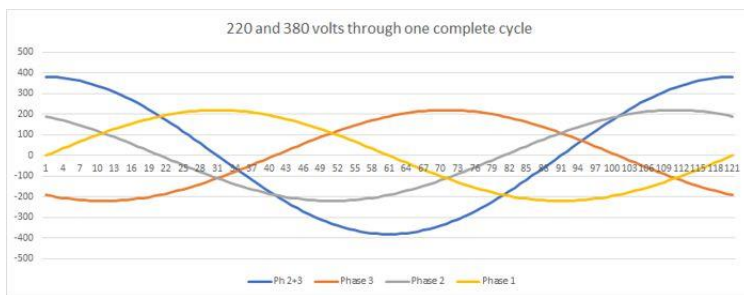
The voltage between any two of the three leads of the 380V power coming from Kyivenergo is just over 400. The voltage between any of the three leads and the wire fence, in electrical terms, the ground, is 230 to 240.

Conclusion number 1: my RadioShack voltmeter didn't work because it only goes up to 400 V. I was measuring the voltage between two phases at almost 240 each, which would be just over 400..

Conclusion number 2: 380 V is the potential between any two of the three leads coming from the power company, individually rated at 220 or 240.

Conclusion number 3: characterizing it as a 380 V system makes sense, because no electrical appliance takes three input leads. Since you would never use all three, there is no need to express the combined voltage of all three.

Diagrammatic approach: I use Excel to create a graph of a three phase systems. I have it add up the distance between the curves (any two of the three phases out of 380, in this case Phase 2 and Phase 3) to confirm that they are in the proper ratio to the potential between any single lead in the ground. Seems to work. The three phases (red, yellow, grey) are at 220. The combination (viz, distance between) orange and grey shows 380 volts. Hallalujah, I think I somewhat understand European electricity.



And that's the news from Lake WeBeGone, where the men are strong, the women are good looking, and the

children promise to grow up to be like them.

Summer ends. September songs. First real-live Covid19 case. Waiting on the baby. 20200918

Summer ended abruptly yesterday. I paused for five minutes entering the lake, basking in the 85° sunlight before embarking on a 40 minute swim. By the time I got out it was winter. Threatening clouds, strong winds, and much cooler. On my return lap I had waved to Oksana and Zoriana, at the beach halfway to the end of the lake.

By the time I finished my shower, warming up from the cold breeze, rain was pouring down. First thing I did was to see if they were home yet. Just as I opened the front door they dragged in, soaked to the bone. I got Zoriana undressed and hustled into the bathtub. Today is dreary and overcast; it will not break 60.

I am at that point in life where the songs that come back to tickle my memory are ones that most people around me have never even heard. In September they are the Fantasticks' "Try to Remember," and an even older standard from the 1930s' Knickerbocker Holiday musical, though sung more recently by Frank Sinatra and Ella Fitzgerald, "September Song."

Both reflect the wisdom of old age. The first is a song of mellow reflections of youth, love and pain. The second is an older guy addressing a younger woman, lyricizing on the advantages of a May and December marriage. They date back to the epoch when great songwriters, great singers and great dancers were three separate categories. Not surprisingly, each pursuing their own specialty, they produced wonderful results. Better, IMHO, than today's offerings.

We are marking time, waiting for a daughter who is due tomorrow but will, of course, arrive when she will. I had a bit of a preview Monday, when I met Susie, Charles and their baby Mila for lunch. Newborn babies are incredibly small,

delicate, helpless things. How they change! Zoriana jumps all over me, not content simply to be held, but wanting to scale me like an alpinist, use me like a trapeze, run at me as if I were a tackling dummy.

Last week I printed out an article on potty training and put it under a refrigerator magnet. I absolutely insist that with this new girl we will not even try to start until she gives good indication that she is ready. We have spent the last two years frustrating ourselves trying to make something happen that simply didn't want to. Now that she is three, Zoriana is ready. She and I often go together on two hour walks and she never even mentions that she wants to pee. However, when there is a woman in the party asking her every 10 minutes if she wants to go, she of course does.

This is a quiet time, the calm before the storm. There is nothing I really have to do, so I'm taking care of all of the odds and ends that have been put off. Replacing light bulbs, renewing Oksana's tax ID, following up on this interminable voltage stabilizer problem and the like. The arrival of a baby requires a lot of bureaucratic steps – getting the birth certificate, seeing the pediatrician, getting that counselor certificate of birth abroad, getting a passport and so on. I'll be busy enough.

One of Oksana's preschool music students had to cancel. Her father has Covid 19 – the first case among people I actually know. Mom is somewhat concerned. They have a one bedroom apartment, so dad is sleeping in the corridor. Hardly isolated.

We had an exchange on measures dad can take to keep from getting seriously sick, and mom can take as a preventative measure. I found that the [prophylactic protocol](#) has been broadened. People at low risk levels don't require hydroxychloroquine – everything they need for protection is available at health food stores. Just by virtue of my age I am at high risk, so I'll keep on doing what I'm doing.

And that's a slow news day from Lake WeBeGone, where the men are strong, the women good-looking, and the latest child is taking her own sweet time arriving in this world.

A trip to the zoo. A wrenching personal history. Bitchute for full disclosure left, right and center. 20200921

It turns out that bitchute.com is a convenient vehicle for everybody, right and left alike, to circumvent Internet censorship. Also for viewers to avoid paying to watch.

If they think about the question much at all – and they certainly don't get as wrapped around the axle as Americans do – Ukrainians usually have a party line point of view on global warming. A woman who recently joined our Toastmasters club did a very predictable YouTube video English lesson on global warming.

She is an open, smart young woman. I wanted to send her a spectrum of opinion on global warming, from the extreme left – Michael Moore – through the center, Michael Shellenberger, to the conservative point of view from Marc Morano of CFACT.

Their three videos are each on the order of an hour long. Before any of them came out, I did my own 15-minute video on the subject. Not only do I think it has held up remarkably well, but my graphics are better than theirs. I put mine at the head of the list.

[Graham Seibert – Global Warming on a Coffee Break](#)

[Michael Moore – Planet of the Humans](#)

[Michael Schellenberger - Apocalypse Never](#)

[Marc Morano – Climate Hustle](#)

A number of acquaintances write books, and as it's well-known that I am a top Amazon reviewer they ask me to review them. Fiction is not really my thing, so I approached Darian Diachok's "[Escapes](#)" with some trepidation.

It turns out not to be fiction – it is the history of his own family, centering around his father, simply told in the format of fiction. An absolutely gripping tale of a Western Ukrainian family living in what was then Poland as Poland was

dismembered via the Molotov – von Ribbentrop treaty of 1939 and the subsequent invasions from both East and West.

It was a dismal time, well chronicled in Timothy Snyder's "Bloodlands." Diachok's book has the virtues of being extremely personal and apolitical – Snyder is a dyed in the wool liberal Atlanticist, Ukrainophile and Russophobe.

We are all attracted to reading biography. Other people's lives inform us about our own. This book focused me once again on how incredibly lucky, ahistorically lucky my family has been. All of the ancestors of whom I know for the past two centuries led tranquil lives, unmarred by war, and died in bed. The last to die a violent death was the victim of an Indian attack at Fort Seybert, now in West Virginia, in 1758. None that I know of fought in America's wars; I am the only one that I know to have ever worn a uniform.

The Diachok, Wozniak and other families in this family tree had experienced disaster after disaster in the Tsarist period of Russia, the First World War, the holodomor, the Polish domination of Western Ukraine, and now the Second World War. The protagonist, the author's father Theo, was a lucky survivor of events that wiped out vast swathes of his family, kinfolk and ethnicity.

And here is a paradox. I write this as the father of the only natural great-grandchildren on my mother's side of the family, and the only ones to have been born in wedlock on any side. For all of our good fortune, our line is dying out. Committing suicide would not be too strong of a term. Another sense that comes from a book like "Escape" is a savor for life and children that has dissipated over the tranquil years of my family's last century.

Oksana, one day past her due date, wasn't up to our Sunday excursion yesterday. Not surprisingly, she doesn't feel like walking a lot.

With just three of us, our options open up. We don't take as much stuff and we don't have to take a taxi. We decided to make the jaunt to the zoo that had fallen apart, as I reported on September 2.

We took the bus into Livoberezhna to catch the Metro. This single photograph tells you a lot about Ukraine. First of all, the bus is old and rusty. In a Western country it would no longer be in service. In fact, it would have been sold to... Ukraine. A lot of the buses and trucks in service here are still painted with the logos of Western European organizations. This one, however, was made in Ukraine using an Isuzu motor. Still probably 15 or 20 years old. Ukrainians are mechanically talented and the buses are perfectly reliable.



You will also notice, from the inset enlargement of the rearview mirror, that the driver is relaxed about the mask mandate. About two thirds of the passengers had a mask on one way or the other, the rest simply didn't bother.

The two numbers at the top of the picture, 160 and 8, represent the fine if you don't pay the fare and the fare itself. Those would come to about \$6.00 in the first case, 30¢ in the second. As a senior citizen I pay only about 20¢.

Here's a picture of the kids waiting for the Metro. You notice that Eddie got out of the house wearing only a Hawaiian shirt. Mom wasn't watching. It turns out that he does have a jacket in the backpack, though he didn't need it.



It is nine stops to the zoo, about 20 minutes. When we arrived, I put Zoriana on my shoulders to keep her from dawdling and we got there about 9:30. Admission was \$3.50 for the three of us.

The significant renovation of the zoo over the past year affected the part closest to the entrance. As you walk in, the first thing you encounter is a huge outdoor cage for gibbons. It displays them in all their glory, hanging, swinging, scratching, chasing each other up and down. It seems like a new concept in zookeeping. Fewer animals, but kept in better conditions and more entertaining to the visitors. The kids were transfixed for 15 minutes.

The zoo was made for kids except in one particular. There are signs everywhere that you shouldn't climb on the fences, but the fences are ideally designed to invite climbing. Zoriana loves to scale anything she sees. It was a constant battle to keep her from joining the animals.

The modernized fishpond is equally inviting, with this little platform from which you can look down and see a huge variety of koi. The kids spent another 10 minutes easily watching the fish. The visit was interrupted when Zoriana announced she had to go to the bathroom. I have recently written she can go two hours between restroom calls. Not yesterday! We hurried to an un-renovated part of the zoo and found the old men's room delightfully unrenovated. I knew what to do, and we did it.



This was only Zoriana second trip to the zoo, the first so long ago she certainly doesn't remember it. However, after the gibbons she seemed only mildly interested in the displays of wild horses, camels, bison, deer and such. The bears were interesting. Two cubs born three or four years ago are now 7 feet tall. They were playing together, hitting each other just like in some Disney movie I remember from childhood.

I proposed that we go see the apes, which had been relocated from the west to the east side of the zoo. As we meandered, we came across a playground where the kids demanded that we stop and play. It was a convenient place to finish the Coca-Cola. For them the high point of any outing with daddy is an otherwise forbidden sugary drink.

As always, Zoriana played comfortably with the other kids. Playground equipment seems to be pretty standard, but this is a new wrinkle on a spinner. You hang on standing up. It is always a delight to find one that is well-balanced and well lubricated so the kids can get up some speed.



The ape display was kind of a disappointment. They had moved from one set of old, cramped cages to another. The animals did their best in the limited space they had. Zoriana amused herself by fiddling around with the empty Coke bottle, stuffing it through a cyclone fence and passing it from hand to hand on the other side. I reasoned incorrectly in figuring that if she dropped it I could reach underneath and retrieve it to throw away. No – she somehow managed to flip it 5 feet from the fence, to a flat place where it simply stayed. It's the zookeepers' problem now.

As it approached time to head for home, I suggested going to visit the turtles and crocodilians. Eddie, however, steered us to the ferris wheel in the direction of the exit. It turns out, however, that you have to be 3'1" to ride and Zoriana was just a little bit too short. We walked past where the raccoons, skunks and bobcats live, only to find that they are in other quarters for the duration of that renovation.

Leaving the zoo, we headed for a street beside the Polytechnic University where I remembered several stands selling traditional Ukrainian street food such as shaurma. It was a disappointment – 1/3 of the stalls are down, and the rest have been replaced by European-style fast food. Hamburgers, Belgian potatoes and coffee shop cuisine. It may be more sanitary, but it is certainly more expensive. I've been here 13 years, and already I am nostalgic for the old Kyiv we used to know. We split two hamburgers three ways and went home.



And that's the news from Lake WeBeGone, where the men are strong, the women are good looking and the children feel very much at home in the presence of other animals.

Graham

Marianna Pauline Seibert. 3:15 Today. Yet to be weighed and measured. Crying and eating normally. 20200923

Marianna Paulina Seibert was born at 3:15 this afternoon. Mom's moans stopped coming through the door, and there was the cry of a baby voice. I knocked and Oksana said to come on in.



Childbirth is a woman's thing. This is Oksana's third, babysitter Anna has her own child and has been a surrogate three times, and God knows how many Sveta has delivered. Men are superfluous. I was glad to be useful in the kitchen making pizza dough, quiche, and other stuff to keep the family fed. All the women have more important things to do.

The process is incredibly natural. It evolved to be absolutely free – women just did it. For us it has been close to free. Oksana is scandalized by the inflation because Sveta is charging €2000 this time. The whole pregnancy has cost probably \$4000.



It is incredible how modernization has made the business of raising children so expensive. I and my siblings were born in hospitals, but I cannot imagine that the cost was more than \$1000 pre-inflation. Raising kids was a matter of food, clothing, dues to organizations such as the Boy Scouts, occasional outings to the movies and the swimming pool, presents on birthdays and Christmas, and not much else. Working families could afford to have kids and they did. The public schools – attended by people like us, taught by people like us, paid for by taxes on people like us – were pretty good.

My understanding is that it costs somewhere between \$50,000 and \$100,000 to have a baby these days, what with all of the prenatal care, tests, hospital stays and so on. I am sure that these measures reduce risk somewhat. The other side of the equation doesn't get measured. What other risks does the family assume in order to come up with that amount of money? Working overtime, neglecting the kids that are already there, bearing the stress of a hurried existence?

The kids of my first family, now all in their 30s, grew up among well-to-do children and attended what were nominally the best of schools. The downside was that their families were in many cases occupied with things other than children. They got shuttled from pillar to post by Latin Ladies. As I have written, my informal, long-distance surveys don't reveal that their classmates have turned out to be terribly successful by most measures.

Getting back to Mariana Paulina, in my mind, the midwife makes sense. There will be a marginally higher incidence of infants dying. Even that may not be a bad thing – those that don't survive will be disproportionately the ones with some organic problem that would have handicapped them in life in the first place.

This baby cannot avoid a few risk factors. As a function of paternal age she stands a higher likelihood of inheriting some deleterious mutations. A good many of those would have worked themselves out through spontaneous abortion, but there are some that could manifest themselves later in life. That's the chance she takes with a daddy like me. The simple fact that I have survived to this age and am still having children is evidence that my genetic makeup is fairly robust. The fact that a woman still wants me as the father of her children is a good voucher. On the other hand, you can't deny statistics. Life is a crapshoot.

Is it better not to throw the dice at all? That is the option that a great many people of my generation, and even more the baby boomers, Gen X, and millennial's who followed, have taken. It is the people who are able to think these things through who are most determined not to take the risk, not to have kids. That mitigates their individual risk, but collectively they are putting our whole ethny – people like us – at risk. Fewer people to nurture, protect, and marry the children that we do have.

So here she is. Launched into a turbulent world, on the cusp of a worldwide economic downturn, amidst both domestic and international turmoil. But this has been the fate of man through the ages – the notion that it was otherwise has been a uniquely American delusion through a fortunate couple of centuries. Perhaps an unfortunate delusion. My Ukrainian family seems to have a better appreciation for the preciousness of life itself. Being born into hard times may make better people out of my children. That's what I hope. It is what it is.

And that's the news from Lake WeBeGone, where the men are strong, the women are good looking, and the baby looks normal. Thank God for such a miracle.

The calm after the storm. Statistics and administrative procedures. A solution to our power problems. 20200925

A newborn demands feeding and changing every few hours. No sleep will be a fact of life for Oksana for the next few months. She asked babysitter Anna to stay the last couple of nights. I have been cooking, although our eating schedule is rather irregular.

Zoriana is fascinated by Marianna. Oksana has let her push her around in her toy baby buggy. Zoriana is right there, drinking it all in, as she nurses the baby. Zoriana is fully involved and she hasn't been demanding any more attention than usual. Which is, I have to concede, a great deal. She is not what one would call an easy child.

The pediatrician came today to set things in motion administratively. He first told Oksana how much easier it would have been (for the administrators!) had the baby been born in the hospital. Oksana quite firmly told him that this was the third homebirth in the family and the hospital wasn't even a consideration.

That settled, they developed a pretty good relationship. Oleg chose to move out of Donetsk on account of the war. Most professionals did. Oksana gave him high marks for thorough and conscientious execution of what he had to do. He weighed the baby, measured her, felt her all over to make sure everything was the way it ought to be. She weighs 3.3 kg – 7 ¼ lb. The midwife had said 3.8. It is normal that they lose a little bit of weight right at the beginning, among other things when they poop the stuff that was in their tummies when they were born. She is 55 cm long – 21 inches and a bit.

I have to go down Monday to pick up Oleg's report. Next come several administrative steps to register the birth with the civil authorities. As a third time mother Oksana is in line for some benefits. Ukraine needs babies.

Once we get the Ukrainian birth certificate, I go to the US Consulate to apply for a Certificate of Birth Abroad and a passport. There are no benefits available upon the birth of a third child to a Social Security beneficiary, so I am spared that hassle.

It is gratifying to hear from as many of you as I have. As with every mailing list, I'm not even sure that the email addresses are still alive. Thank you for your cards and letters sending your best wishes.

Off on a totally different tangent, I am keeping my eye on real estate in our neighborhood. Now is not the time to buy, but my spider sense tells me that the powers that be will not be able to sustain the American stock market for much longer. They want to keep it looking good through the election. After that, look out below. Prices in Ukraine usually echo those in the United States. There will be bargains shortly, but not now. This is the time to research the market and have a list ready.

The first house I looked at might be a bargain. It is a small two-story house – 1000 feet altogether, built with love by an old couple. It is quirky. Only about half of the thousand square feet consist of living space. The rooms are small – most of them about 10 ft.². There are not many windows. On the other hand, the finish is first rate, the appliances are good, and all of the systems are in working order.

They sent me the floor plan. I'm far from an expert in this, but it seems to me that it would be possible to almost double the usable space by knocking out walls, enclosing the two-story notch out of the rectangular form taken by a high ceilinged porch, and converting the attic into living space. The asking price is \$140,000. My guess is that for another \$20,000 you could have something worth \$60,000 more.

There is a second consideration. Eddie's school does not have a good permanent location. It is conceivable that we might be able to expand this house to serve the purpose. It has, among other things, a well-built, fireplace-heated summer house of about 250 ft.² in the yard. Easily another classroom. The yard and the plantings are also in good shape.

In real estate you should never fall in love with the first thing you see, but it is probably a good thing to get my mind in gear. The long-term objective would be to have a piece of rental property that would provide Oksana some income, and Eddie some management experience over the next decade.

On to another subject, I think we have a solution to our electric problems. Seeing this house reconfirmed what we were in the process of discovering. The power we get from the electric company isn't reliable. We need a voltage stabilizer. Last week I mapped out our fuse box, identifying which phase powered each outlet in the house. I concluded that each of the three phases of our 380 V power drives something essential.

The "just a guy" I wrote about a couple of blogs back came by to look at our situation. He is more impressive in person than on the phone, and his proposed solution – independent voltage stabilizers for each of the three phases – appears to be exactly what we need. With input from you, neighbors, Sergei and articles I found on the Internet, it was not difficult to make the decision. They are putting it in next week.

Tomorrow we have another face-to-face Toastmasters meeting. Eddie asked to come along again. The impression I have from the powers that be here in Ukraine is that the country simply cannot afford another lockdown. If lockdowns are even effective – the evidence on that seems to remain mixed. We will probably continue to meet in person. I look forward to it. We simply cannot afford to be interminably held hostage by this quixotic virus.

Sunday I am getting together for lunch with new friends Charlie and Susie Spell. The shape of the meeting isn't yet final – I proposed that I take Eddie and Zoriana and meet them and their five-year-old son Luca for morning in the park beforehand. It will give their three week old baby Milla a bit of air on a day that is supposed to go up to 75°. And, it will give Oksana time to be alone with Marianna.

That's the news from Lake WeBeGone, where the men are strong, the women are good looking, and the children are above average. Ours at least, numerically speaking.

Back to school night; Rainy day in the park; Electrical experts again; back to the exercise bike 20200930

Tonight wasn't your usual back-to-school night. For one thing, every family in the fourth grade was represented. Along with a few younger siblings. We fit comfortably in the converted attic of the modest size home we rent as a schoolhouse.

Nadia, the English teacher, talked to every parent in turn via a Zoom connection. All of the conversations went in Ukrainian. I got a laugh when I asked if I could talk to her in English – most of the other parents understand it. She expressed appreciation for Eddie's help in class. She told me something I love to hear – that he writes quite a bit. I hadn't seen any evidence of that. Of course, she loves having somebody with a native speaker's accent in class.

The whole thing was conducted in Ukrainian except for once, when another parent reminded a teacher that I usually speak Russian. That teacher switched effortlessly and kept the conversation going. Thereafter it was still all Ukrainian. I understood the gist of it. After all, what gets discussed in a back-to-school night? Kids and schoolwork. Somebody else's kids in most cases – you don't have to listen carefully.

Ukrainians are more matter-of-fact than Americans about differences in talent. I heard two mothers talk about tracking, giving assignments of different levels of difficulty to different kids. It was pleasing to hear Eddie mentioned as one of the two culprits at the right end of the bell curve in math. The matter-of-fact answer was that the more talented kids can help the others, but that they have to move the class as a group.

There are some ways in which Eddie doesn't get it. Natalia the music teacher had the kids play some numbers on the recorder. Eddie seemed always to toot out of turn. I'm glad he's enthusiastic about it. He plays the recorder around home, his first musical instrument in this supposedly musical family.

With beautiful weather forecast, Eddie, Zoriana and I invited Charlie, Suzy, Luca and baby Mila to join us for a Sunday in the park. The forecast changed. Suzy said we would go anyhow, repeating a bit of Swiss folk wisdom that there is no bad weather, only inappropriate clothing.

We met on the Metro platform and walked to the park, stopping at the closest playground, where the kids goofed around a bit. It was overcast and drizzling so we had the place to ourselves. We leisurely made our way along the major alley up to where the Cold War era tank and tank retriever are stationed. The kids never tire of playing on those.



After brief detours for some ice cream and a toilet break, we made our way to the boat rental. We got something called an altanka, a huge craft that would easily seat 10. Eddie and Luca did most of the rowing. There is no way you could make a barge like that go fast, but that's not the point. They had a good time. Under a steadily increasing drizzle on our way back to the rental place we shared some ham and cheese that Suzy had brought. Pressed by both the weather and the clock, I took over the rowing as everybody else finished their snack under the umbrellas.



We had tried three times previously to get a seat at the park's shashlik restaurant. It had been either too early or the wrong day of the week. This time we made it. It was good, but not up to the standards of Hydropark.

The conversation, of course, centered around children. Suzy spent her career as a bank officer managing trusts. She has a lot of experience with trust fund babies and what can go wrong. She immediately appreciated our situation as I described it, but was circumspect enough not to offer any immediate solutions. I respect that – I don't think that there are any easy solutions. It is nice to have somebody off of whom I can bounce elements of a solution.

We got home at about 3:30, well past Zoriana's naptime. She went right down, slept an hour, and was right back on schedule.

Valery our electric heat guy came yesterday. I had asked him to get the heater ready for winter. He did, but he had a bigger agenda. He wanted to change the heating element in the water heater. That needs to be done every year or so, and he's our guy.

But his major interest seemed to be the electric system. I had called him to tell him that we were getting a voltage stabilizer. He was noncommittal over the phone, after which I said we were going ahead. But yesterday he tried to show me why the problem was within

the house and we didn't need it.

I showed him the diagrams I had done of how the electricity got to the house from the street and I showed him the diagram I had done of the wiring panel, identifying which phase fed each electrical outlet in the house. It would have been politic to express appreciation, admiration or something. He didn't.

I explained that the problem did not behave as if it were in the house. The electricity would frequently cut off in the middle of the night, when nobody was using anything. The heat was off for the summer. There was never any correlation between the power going down and us switching anything on. Other neighbors have installed voltage regulators because the electric company juice is unstable – it's the same symptoms we had. Valery would only concede that these were perhaps contributing factors.

He told me that the appliances were connected all wrong. That we had too much load on phase 3. I have not confirmed his calculations, but it seems to me not to be the case. In the kitchen, we have the microwave and oven on one phase, the stove on another.

Valery took the stovetop apart to make his point. He first told me that it should be wired at 380V – using two phases. When he lifted up the stovetop to take a look, I discovered that it was labeled on the back 220 V. It had a two prong, one-phase plug, totally appropriate for what the label said.

For some reason he detached the plug from where it was connected to the stovetop to the plug in the wall. He said that the wire gauge was too small. He said that it was 2 1/2 mm² - AWG 14 it should be 4 – AWG 12. That's interesting to me because the wire was provided by the manufacturer of the stovetop. It is a cheap stovetop. He also showed me that the electrical connections could be pulled off by hand. Yes –it's got a spade on one end and lug on the other. And that's the way it's made. It's cheap but that's the way it is.

The stovetop is labeled 7 kW for four burners. We experimented to find out for sure which phase it was on. Then we experimented to see how much voltage drop would be caused by this stovetop. As Valery watched the voltmeter on his relay, I turned the four burners on one at a time on high. Valery said that with all four burners on the voltage dropped 25 V. That indicated to him that the wiring is through the walls was insufficient.

He tried several times to demonstrate to me, but I didn't see it. I don't trust Sasha, the drunk electrician who wired the house. It could well be that the wire in the wall is too small. But Valery didn't prove it. Anyhow we never use all four burners at once. The stove isn't big enough. That could not explain the problems we are seeing.

Valery tried to tell me we should rewire the kitchen. I told him that the wire that we have ran under the concrete slab of the heated floor.

There's no way we could pull it up. He said yes, we would have to do it by running the wire outside along the exterior of the house.

The common sense argument that this thing has worked fine for six years didn't wouldn't have fazed him. I didn't even bring it up. But I certainly do not intend to rewire the kitchen where there isn't a problem. Somehow whenever we solve problems that aren't there we get more problems. This relay he installed is a case in point. I don't know whether or not it has protected our pumps, but its cutting out for long periods certainly got Oksana in a dither. Valery has been involved in a couple of others. We tried to fix imaginary ventilation problems and it is now worse than before.

Valery raised the concern that the boiler and the pumps that take the hot water to the radiators might be on different phases. If we have a voltage stabilizer that could cut out a single one of the phases. It could lead to problems of the boiler keeps going, but the pumps don't work. That seems to me to be rather far-fetched. We were not able to have a good discussion about the range of input voltage that the voltage stabilizer will handle, which I think is between about – 150 and 300 V per phase. In other words, he didn't acknowledge that if a voltage stabilizer does what it's supposed to do there will be, many fewer outages and they will be momentary. I think he is blowing smoke. He doesn't seem familiar with the concept of a voltage stabilizer.

And that is the problem that we have with a lot of experts in this country. Even asking directions on the street, people will tell you 150% of what they know.

So where do we go from here? As I've said before, I like Valery. He does a good job keeping our heating system going, and he doesn't charge too much money – about the \$70 for a full day's work yesterday. So that's what we are living with. And the radiators are hot, which I could not have done myself. I wanted to record this to get all my thoughts down here in the diary share with you, dear readers, and also to remember for my own record.

I write this in a dark house. Electricity has been out now for about seven hours, an unusually long period. The guys who were supposed to come install the voltage stabilizer will come tomorrow. Eddie is in school, Zoriana off with Anna to a play date, and I'm catching up doing what can be done without electricity or the Internet.

I'm resuming the stationary bicycle program I gave up three years ago. Summer is over and I'm not swimming anymore, and Eddie is old enough to ride to school by himself.

Up to the age of 75 my program was to push my heart rate up to 140 for 30 minutes, generating a pool of sweat. The hard breathing more and more frequently brought on strep throat, so I decided to make do with street bicycling and swimming.



Neither of those exercises are as strenuous. I am having to rebuild my endurance. It is coming back reasonably well, all things considered. I am back to the point of having pretty good sweat on my brow, but only a few drops collecting underneath the bicycle.

On a related note, I'm three months into the exercise regime for back pain. I have to say that "Treat Your Own Back" is a real success. I'm able to do more of the exercises they recommend, and I have less back pain and less sciatica, which I learn is related. Since the book already had well over a thousand reviews, I felt no need to write one immediately. I can do a better job of it now that I give a testimony to the effectiveness of the program.

That's the news from Lake WeBeGone, where the men are strong, the women are good looking, and the children are generally spared the problems of trust fund babies.

Graham

Electricity problems resolved(?) We love our zoo. A speech on raising children. 20201007

Last week was a big week for having workmen in the house. Valery hung around like Eldon in Murphy Brown. He had 1/2 hour work to do on Wednesday, and he stretched until Friday and charged more than \$100, which, considering all the aggravation, was too much. He somehow screwed up the rubber gasket in changing the element on the electric boiler for our hot water and had to get a replacement, and seemed to just take forever both figuring out the problem and solving it. So the verdict is in on Valery.

The guy sent to install the stabilizers was a simple workmen. Honest face but not very smart. He spoke only Ukrainian and not much of that. I had a hard time making myself understood. But -- there was not much to be understood. With one little exception. Valery was in the house. He insisted that his voltage relay be wired in the circuit with the stabilizer. All things considered, I gave in. If the stabilizer works as advertised, there should be no need for it, but go for it. So it got wired in for another \$20 or \$30 of labor. There is peace all around. Valery feels vindicated. If it causes problems we will take it out.



Friday was Anna's day off. I took Zoriana to the zoo. It was a cold, overcast day and we had the place to ourselves. This visit validated the logic of the new zoo layout. Zoriana was transfixed by two exhibits.

First, the Koi. You walk out over the Koi pond and you can spend endless minutes watching them go back and forth. Zoriana was fascinated by all the different colors, saying blue blue blue for the blue ones, but there were also orange, yellow, white, red, black and mixed. She was not supposed to climb on the fence. With me behind her and nobody around to complain, she climbed on every fence there was a couple of times.

We next went up to visit the gibbons. When we didn't see them in their outdoor enclosure, we thought we'd missed them. But then we went around back and found that there is an indoor cage which is really quite big. They were playing just as happily as ever swinging amazingly gracefully through the rope branches. That was good for another 10 or 15 minutes. Now every time we come home Zoriana wants to watch this short video clip of a [gibbon teasing tiger cubs](#) in a link sent by Rob Moore. Thank you Rob.

After the gibbons we went to the part of the zoo Zoriana had never seen before. One of my favorite exhibits, the reptile house, was closed for remodeling. So the huge alligator snapping turtle, the Nile crocodile and the Amazon caiman were not available to see. I always like to tell the story of how I swam in a river with an Amazonian caiman when I was with the Kayapo Indians. Zoriana will get to hear it later.

The lions were there. Rather, one of them, a lioness who looks as if she's pregnant. And the big male Siberian tiger was there. An impressive beast. But most of the lions and tigers were taking the day off.

We went to the children's petting zoo, which has changed for the better. It used to be that for 80¢ you got a few carrots to feed the goats, sheep and donkeys. Now it's up to \$1.10 but you get much more. The container that they come in now is edible and there some bird feed in the bottom. It was enough to keep Zoriana going for 15 minutes.

Kids are different. Eddie was always cautious about getting his fingers nibbled by the goats, so he would hold a carrot out tentatively and, when a goat came near for a bite, drop it.

Zoriana has no fear. She happily fed every goat and sheep in the place. She wasn't, however, quite up to the birdseed. I held my hand out flat, and the chickens pecked at my fingers.

We went to the Ferris wheel. When we were there a couple weeks ago the ticket seller had said that Zoriana wasn't tall enough. This time, with just us there, I stood her up next to the ruler tied to the wall. Yes she is. You have to be 95 cm to ride. She is 96.

On a cold day, only the concessionaire was there. This guy, who sees thousands of kids every year, asked me how Edward was doing.

How in the world can he remember a single boy like Edward? Needless to say I was impressed. We told him that Eddie was in school because this was a Friday. And told of our school plans for Zoriana. It's a decent size Ferris wheel, probably 200 feet in diameter. A five minute ride that takes you high enough to see all of Kyiv.

Zoriana had never seen the big animals: antelope, zebras, rhinoceros (who wasn't home) and hippopotamus. Next the giraffes and the elephant. But these guys don't do anything very interesting. They just stand there. They are what they are. It's the gibbons that are really fascinating. On our way out of the zoo we stopped and spent another 10 minutes looking at them as they swung back-and-forth, chasing and teasing each other.

We stopped on our way home to pick up my old Windows 7 computer which had crapped out. Repair cost \$100, but since it has a bunch of photographs and other stuff on it that I hadn't backed up, we needed to get it done. Besides that, it's the only computer I have with the VGA outlet on it, and the new digital light processing projector would cost a whole lot more than getting this computer fixed.

Babysitter Anna was sick on Saturday, as I was scheduled to give a speech at our ArtTalkers Toastmasters club. Oksana said she absolutely could not take care of both Mariana and Zoriana. Well and good – I took Zoriana with Eddie and me to the meeting. One of the objectives in in speechmaking in the Toastmasters system is to make effective use of visual aids. My talk was entitled Raising Children, and I introduced Eddie and Zoriana as my visual aids. This is how you do it. Zoriana got into this post-meeting group photo.



As the senior speaker, I was third on the agenda. The kids were really very good and attentive through the first two. When I got up to give mine, Zoriana came up with me, and as she loves to do, came up in my arms and climbed all over me.

In my speech I was talking about the need for discipline. The need to be able to say no. I referenced Edmund Burke, writing on what raising children is about. We in this generation are trustees, carrying the expectations of generations before us that we will carry on in their tradition, and the expectation of generations to follow that we won't screw it up. I emphasized King Solomon's wisdom in the book of Proverbs on raising children. Honor thy father and mother. Spare the rod and spoil the child.

My evaluator, Vitaliy Rulov, got a laugh out of how good of a game I had talked on the subject of discipline despite the fact I was letting this child climb all over me. I was, however, able to deliver the talk, so it worked out well in the end.

Eddie was really a wonderful trooper. After my talk. He took Zoriana out for half an hour. It turned out that the two of them found their way to the front door, where there is a receptionist without much to do, who wanted to practice her English. So she practiced with Eddie while amusing Zoriana by feeding her pretzels. It kept the kids occupied. When they came back they were really very good citizens sitting through the rest of the meeting. We enjoyed some ribs, one of the specialties of the house, and then went home. Quite a satisfactory outing, I will bring Zoriana with us next time if she wants to come.

I have written about how tolerant the Ukrainians are. However, there are limits. Oksana got a call complaining that I was burning trash in the backyard. That struck me as odd. The neighbors on both sides of our back lot burn stuff all the time. They are building and they have construction residues. However, the complaint was that we shouldn't burn plastic. How they can tell us plastic. I do not know. Considering, however, that garbage service is so cheap, we are going to let ourselves be browbeaten and stop burning it.



Another bit on community consciousness. The mask issue has gotten more serious. Ukraine's Covid 19 infection rate is gradually rising instead of leveling off. And people are taking it more seriously. As we were on the bus the other day, we wore our masks properly, as

we always do. But there was one guy up in the front of the bus who had his down around his mouth. An old lady started giving him a hard time. He gave her crap right back. He essentially told her to mind her own business. The irony is that there was a woman sitting across from this guy wearing absolutely no mask at all, and even the bus driver was not wearing one. So there you have a snapshot of Ukraine. The busybodies are at it, minding other people's business. It's just not as serious or as effective as in the United States or Germany. Thank goodness there isn't any community association to remind me to mow my lawn.



That's the news from Lake WeBeGone, where the men are strong, the women are good looking, and the children don't give me that much time to write. This chronicle is through Saturday, October 3. Sunday we went to the park again, and Monday, still without a babysitter, I brought Zoriana along on a lunch engagement downtown. I may give a bit of a recap next time I write.

Graham

Marianna's birth certificate; electricity update; pups-in-blankets; Toastmasters and the New World Order 20201017

Sergei, the government doctor who came to the house to attest to Mariana's birth, said that homebirth involves a whole lot of paperwork. We thought he was talking about work for himself and the bureaucracy. Wrong. Work for us.

He had left us an official document testifying that he had seen her. I had to take that to the Boulevard of the Enthusiasts 19 to get some other document. I still don't know what that was about.

Whatever it was, I had to take that one to Proriznaya 19, a block from where Oksana and I had lived downtown. The woman there absolutely terrified Oksana over the telephone. She warned me I would have a terrible time with her. Thus forewarned, I was appropriately humble when I approached her.

I showed her the document. I had to fill out some sort of an affidavit in longhand. She had an original from which I should copy. Noting that I did not understand Ukrainian, she wrote it out for me and I signed it. Then I went back to Boulevard of the Enthusiasts with that in hand.

The lady at the Boulevard of the Enthusiasts was satisfied that she had everything she needed. She also needed me to fill out some sort of an affidavit in Ukrainian. She gave me the original in handwritten Cyrillic. I do moderately well reading printed Ukrainian. Handwritten? It might as well be Greek. I told her as much. She gave me no sympathy and made me do it.

I'm sure it was quite comical. The sample she gave me was from another client. I copied the whole thing as best I could, understanding perhaps 80% of the written letters. Whereas the original was handwritten, I printed my copy. I can't even do handwriting in English. After hinting broadly that it was going to be a disaster, I gave it to her.

She looked it over and had me write my name and address in the place where I had mistakenly copied the name and address from the original. Aside from that she left all the errors intact. There must be 100. I signed the thing and she accepted it.

Each of these dragons in turn had done their best to assail my self-esteem, but they also needed to get rid of me without wasting too much of their time. I got what I needed.

The next step, the final step with the Ukrainians was to register the birth with the vital statistics office. They had five telephones, a legacy of the Soviet era, before they had modern PBX equipment. None of the five answered. Since I had Zoriana for the day in any case, I figured I might as well simply go there and ask. It involved a bus ride, a metro ride, and a long walk on a rainy day. Kids see things differently than we do. Zoriana loved the opportunity to splash around in her boots. She took her hat off and let her head get wet. I caught hell about that when we got home, but she had a good time. It was worth it.

The receptionist was cool but could hardly turn me away. She took my documents, disappeared for about 10 minutes, after which another Dragon lady came out and listed all the deficiencies in the documents that I had. She was thorough in what she did. I needed a

notarized translation of my passport in addition to the documents I had brought. She helpfully gave me a sheet of paper with the hours and phone numbers of the birth records department.

From that point on it was downhill sledding. There is a translator in the center of Livoberezhna I have used for all the sort of work. I brought my own translation – there is no way they would have known how to properly translate the Cyrillic for Marianna's and my names into English – and for \$11 I had a notarized translation.

Friday, yesterday, Oksana phoned the vital statistics office first thing in the morning just to reconfirm that we had everything in order. We gave the pile of papers to the receptionist who told us it would be about 20 minutes. It turned out to be 40, in which time we saw three young couples come in to get married and Oksana told me that there were two in to get divorced. Modern times. We got the birth certificate.

The next step is the consular report of birth abroad with the Americans. We need another translation – the birth certificate into English – and another stack of documentation including my old passports (thank God I for some reason still have them, dating back to 1968) to establish that I have lived in the United States for at least five years.

In another wrinkle of bureaucracy, Oksana needs to renew her ITIN (Individual Taxpayer Identifying Number) so we can file a joint return for 2020. The IRS says that any of the big four accounting firms will serve as an Authorized Agent to accept and certify the validity of her documentation. All four of them have refused. Therefore we have to send Oksana's documentation to someone in the United States. It is not the way it should be, but the way things are.

We needed to renew her foreign passport anyhow and she won't be using it for a while. She has an appointment Friday to submit her documentation for a new one. When we get it we will send it by Federal Express to some middleman in the United States who will charge us \$200 for the vast labor of making a copy of her new passport and submitting the renewal form to the IRS.

As I go through all this, I reflect on how miserable it has to be for somebody who doesn't have my degree of education, facility with languages, time as a retiree, luxury of living in the capital city, and experience dealing with bureaucracy. It is amazing to me that more people don't simply go postal in the face of all such nonsense.

I went to Toastmasters alone this morning. Eddie has a light case of snuffles and Anna the babysitter was here to take care of Zoriana. Our club is getting more potential members than I can remember in our history. Beautiful women especially. I'm sure the Lord had a good reason for saving them until I am safely married and approaching 80.

Just as I am planning to adapt my [article on immigration](#) as a speech for Toastmasters, the Gallup organization tells me that the Ukrainians are already quite [skeptical of immigration](#). Wonderful that they recognize the downside. Ukrainians have long memories, and there is not a single near neighbor that has enriched Ukraine by contributing immigrants. The Poles enslaved them as serfs, the Tatars sold them into slavery, the Russians were brought in to replace the Ukrainians killed in the Holodomor, and Jewish overseers kept them in alcohol and penury. Probably the best of the lot were the German settlers around Zaporozhia brought in by Catherine the Great. At least they minded their own business. Ukraine can certainly benefit by borrowing ideas from their neighbors, but it is unlikely to gain much by admitting other peoples.

We had a speech today on “Emotional Intelligence.” The 1995 book thus titled by Daniel Goleman promotes the thesis that we are each smart in our own way and that each snowflake should be appreciated for its individuality. I lump it with “Multiple Intelligences” as a way of sidestepping the difficult issues raised by the fact that not all people or peoples are of equal ability. A very useful [book review](#) appeared on just that subject this week.

I cynically conclude that Toastmasters has been co-opted by the New World Order into replacing a program that used to teach people public speaking with this kind of calm-the-proletariat pap. I resent their indoctrinating the naïve Ukrainians, and have already drafted a speech to this effect. Were I to schedule it in a United States club I’m sure they would already have selected a firing squad, erected a pole and found me a blindfold. Maybe a repurposed Covid mask would be appropriate.

Two days after the workman finished installing our voltage stabilizer, I got a very unexpected letter in the mail. The electric company says that the problem was theirs and they had fixed it. I could look at it as \$2,000 down the drain, but I am enough of a cynic to believe that the problem will recur and that we are probably just as well off with the protection.

Covid 19 has migrated eastward. When Nadia, Oksana’s mother, was here a couple of months ago I gave her a bunch of pills to take back home. My expectation was that she wouldn’t use them but she would have them on hand if they got sick. Sure enough, she didn’t start taking the prophylactic course. But now that enough fear has been instilled by the media she was getting around to do it. She asked me again what pills to take when.

On the subject, I note that the prophylactic routine is not an absolute preventative. It claims to reduce but not eliminate the likelihood of getting sick, and reduce the impact of the infection if you do. Which seems to be exactly what happened in the spate of cases that struck the White House. I am amazed that nobody is claiming that’s the case.

Riding the Metro today, I took a tally of the number of people who were wearing masks correctly. Something less than 50%. One woman was boldly barefaced. Although the case numbers here are rising, people still don’t seem to be galvanized to wear them right.

Even Joe Biden was photographed with his mask awry. I'm sure there will be some wonderful books written about this episode of Covid 19 madness. May we all live to read them.

Children love novelty. Thursday night I let the kids make their own dinner. I made some whole-wheat bread dough, rolled it out thin, laid out sausages, sauerkraut, cheese, strips of bell pepper and mustard and invited them to roll their own.

It was only halfway successful. The kids were playing upstairs and I wound up rolling the pups- in-blankets myself. However, there was some mystery in the fact that every one of them was unique. The kids liked them that night, and Zoriana asked for one for breakfast in lieu of cereal. I think we'll do it again.

Eddie is in the fourth grade in his loving, supportive but chaotic Sunflower School. What comes next? There is a private school here with the pretentious title "Intellect." I had talked to a couple of parents about it, and as I mentioned, when Eddie, Zoriana and I were shopping a few days ago, a girl who attends that school came up to me and offered to help me negotiate with the fruit and vegetable lady. I was impressed with her manner and her level of English, although I will say that she was slow to recognize that I in fact knew what I was doing. I wrote the school an email and got no response. I called and it turns out that the headmaster is the only person who speaks English. However, I have an assurance that when he returns to Kyiv he will talk to me about school. Stay tuned.

That's the news from Lake WeBeGone, where the men are strong, the women are good looking and the children have a surprisingly good attitude toward school.

Graham

Two wonderful Botanical gardens. Eddie's birthday. 20201019

The lack of sleep drives Oksana crazy. The upshot is that babysitter Anna and I wind up taking care of Eddie and Zoriana. We both welcome it. Anna loves children and would like to have more of her own when and if circumstances permit. With my first family I chafed a bit at the fact that between mother, babysitter, and multiple institutions I didn't wind up spending as much time as I would have wanted. We would have very satisfactory outings on the weekends, but during the week they belonged to somebody else or were allowed to hole up in their rooms and avoid being sociable.

Thank you, Rob Moore, for introducing us to Charles and Susy Spell, who are in Ukraine for three months receiving twin daughters born of surrogate mothers. It is a pleasure to show them the city, a double pleasure given that they are such good company and such devoted parents.

Tuesday Zoriana and I went with them to the new botanical garden to revisit that wonderful play area. Their son Luca was in school, and their second daughter Sophia wouldn't be born until Thursday, so we had just two kids.

The play area was just as delightful as before, but we pushed on to see the other attractions. There wasn't any exhibition going on at the Orangery and the small zoo was closed for the winter. We pushed up the hill to the church and monastery, where we found this old lady in this very picturesque setting.



She was slow to open up, but once she did there was no stopping her. She went on and on about kids, and pulled an endless stream of candies out of her pocket. I thanked her for the first one, told her after the second one that mommy didn't allow Zoriana too many sweets, and tried hard to put on the brakes for the next 20 pieces of candy. Not much luck. You see Zoriana here with a lollipop in her mouth. I managed to get hold of most of the excess and we threw it away when we got home.

Zoriana has warmed up to Charlie and Susie just as if they were her parents. She runs enthusiastically into Charles' arms to be picked up, swung around, and generally entertained. He loves it. It's a good thing, because with two baby girls he is certainly and for a lot of it in the next couple years.



On the way out of the park we stopped to smell the dahlias and chrysanthemums. This resonated with Susie, whose Swiss father raises dahlias in their village home.



The bus pulled away just as we got to the bus stop, so we took advantage of the 15 minute wait to have a sandwich. We got home about 3 o'clock, well after Zoriana's naptime. She was hyper, as three-year-olds will get, and went to sleep easily. The upshot was that Oksana had Marianna to herself for most of the day.

Sunday, Anna's day off, is a great day to get the kids out of the house. We rendezvoused with Charlie and Susie on the platform of the University Metro stop at 9:15, just behind which is the old botanical garden. A temperature in the 40s didn't deter the kids. As insurance against being called a negligent father I had put a hat, gloves, and a pair of jeans to go over Zoriana's tights into my backpack. There they stayed – the challenge was to keep her from taking her jacket off.

The kids had a good time on the play equipment, but climbing the trees was a bigger attraction. This mature garden, adjacent to Shevchenko University, has been around for a century and the plantings are well-established.

Charlie and Susie's second daughter Sophia was born on Thursday, Eddie's birthday as well. We had to visit St. Sophia, the oldest Cathedral in Kyiv. I had been there before but hadn't realized how much of the elaborate sculpture and art work on the altar dated to the 11th century. It's very impressive in the context of what was going on in Western Europe at the time. Though it is still active as a church, it is also a major tourist attraction. They have removed portions of the modern flooring to reveal mosaics dating back to the original

construction. There is a beautiful diorama of Kyiv as it existed under Yaroslav the Wise, who planned the construction of the walled city. I was pleased at how much Eddie remembered of the history he has learned in school.

Zoriana got a bit antsy. She is a very energetic and willful child, always tugging at her leash. She protests mightily when I hang onto her hand, but she gets in trouble quickly when I let it go. After getting lectured a couple of times by the docents I took her outside to play on the lawn and trees while everybody else enjoyed the Cathedral. Some trees she can climb herself, others she needs to be plopped into a low fork as a head start.

I don't know how mothers deal with kids like this. It takes physical strength and a strong will. When we are on the Metro or waiting for a bus she plays the little kid trick of going limp and making me drag her. Which I will do, or else I will pick up one of the dragging legs and make it as uncomfortable as I can as I carry her. She tries to break loose. If I hold her tight enough to simply restrain her she screams bloody murder, inviting the world to witness this horrible instance of child abuse. Whereas I have to convince Eddie to walk down the Metro escalators to save a little time, with Zoriana I have to chase her up so she doesn't get lost.

As we were walking from the Cathedral to the restaurant, she separated herself from daddy and walked with other people. As we were halfway across the busy intersection at Artema I looked to see who had her. Nobody! She was standing resolutely on the curb all alone as everybody else crossed. I ran back to her, grabbed her by the hand, and crossed the street shortly after the light had changed. Memo to self: keep tight control over this kid.

We went to a traditional Ukrainian restaurant at the top of Andreivskii Descent, where we shared two portions of the specialty of the house, a smorgasbord of Ukrainian delicacies. Charles the brave had bees cooked and honey, which he shared with Luca and Eddie. Suzy and I passed

We got home too late for Zoriana to take a nap. I read to her for a while as she reverted to her normal tempo. Dinner, a bath, and we all went to bed early.

We had a festive dinner Thursday in honor of Eddie's birthday – salmon with a chocolate mousse cake for dessert. He had been asking for his birthday present for more than a year – a Monopoly set. I had balked. I bought something two years ago called "Grab and Go Monopoly" for about \$12. It was so incredibly cheaply made that I vowed never to do business with Parker Brothers/Hasbro again. But for Eddie's birthday I relented.

Those guys know what a monopoly is – they own the copyright, and they charge dearly for it. We paid \$25 for something that probably cost them one dollar at most to produce. It is, however, pretty much real monopoly. For some obscure reason they upped the luxury tax from \$75 to \$100. Otherwise it looks like a faithful reproduction.

They did not, however, proofread their translation well. The board and the property deeds all name places and things that we know in Ukraine. However, the chance cards for Advance Token to Illinois Avenue and Take a Ride on the Reading are merely transliterations of the American names Illinois and Reading. I can imagine Eddie's confusion if I had not been there to read things through. Another shortcoming: the rules of monopoly are four pages in English, half a page in Ukrainian. Cyrillic is simply not that succinct. They are leaving something out.





Marianna is doing what a baby should do: eat, sleep, pee, poop and exercise her lungs. I have been bugging Oksana about getting a baby picture to share, but so far no progress. I get to hold her more and more often. Correct that: I hear “Hold her, she’s yours” while Oksana takes a break to eat, bathe, brush her teeth or whatever. It’s a deal so long as she doesn’t spoil things by attempting to tell me how to do it. I’m not that bad, actually.

You don’t really want to hear my opinions on the upcoming elections. The mayoral election at the end of the month here in Kyiv is a free-for-all. I can’t count the number of candidates. If I ventured any opinions about the United States election Twitter, YouTube, Facebook or Amazon would be sure to find some way to muzzle me. I will keep my views to myself.

That’s the news from Lake WeBeGone, where the men are strong (I pick up and drag around 35 pounds of dead weight many times a day), the women are good looking (getting her figure back amazingly quickly) and the children are all above normal, at least in terms of their expenditure of energy.

Graham

Inborn wisdom of the young. Important book on human differences. Heat problems resolved. -20201024

It is fascinating to watch how the older children are accepting Marianna into the family. Eddie enjoys holding her and does it very gently and responsibly. Zoriana loves to spend a lot of time next to her. Although she pokes and prods unnecessarily, she seems to be gentle.

I get the same mixed treatment. She loves to be picked up, carried on my shoulders, and to get in bed and snuggle with me at night. Nonetheless she will also hit me, argue, scream and yell. She is the kind of girl known in fiction as Peppermint Patty, Eloise, or Matilda.

I contrast this with my millennial family. When Suzy arrived in December 1988, Jack (6 ½) and Naomi (5) made it abundantly clear that two children were enough. There wasn't any need for this third one. Suzy has remained forever the fifth wheel in that family.



Zoriana's treatment of Mariana is in sharp contrast to her treatment of Raccoon. She used to be the one to feed this stray cat. Now she lets me feed him while she picks him up and carries him to his food bowl. Not whatsoever gently. Like every youngster, she loves to chase pigeons in the park. For their part, they are all expert at staying close enough to tease her but far enough away not to get hurt. Which they would, if Zoriana were only able.

Raccoon has a built-in tolerance for children. He knows she is a kid, and he puts up with having his tail pulled and being carried all over creation. He rarely complains and only once used his claws to tell her to back off.

Last year a skinny newcomer joined our welfare roll. We haven't even given her a name, but she comes in after Raccoon to pick up what he leaves behind, before the magpies swoop in and clean the place out. If Raccoon is too picky to accept a piece of four-day old fish, it will nonetheless be gone by morning.



Though she looks like a kitten herself, she is already a mother of three. They live somewhere in Gennady and Valya's property next door. While I am sure they get fed there from time to time, the people live in the city and are simply not around during the week. The pussycat family comes to our yard to eat and play.

The kittens' favorite retreat is a baby stroller that sits on our front porch. They are still little bit shy and hightail it whenever I come out. Although they fascinate Zoriana, she can't ever get close to them. She does pet mama cat, but somehow knows not to subject her to anything like the treatment she gives Raccoon.



To demonstrate her appreciation of our hospitality, it looks like mommy cat chose to make a contribution to the betterment of our household. As I went to the shed this morning to get the ladder to go read the electric meter, I found this lovely offering just inside the door



A large, handsome fellow, so fresh that he bent limply as I picked him up to throw him away. Good work, cats! I brought Eddie out for a look and a discussion. Why had he probably been killed and not simply poisoned? First, he was right out in the open and hadn't crawled off to hide someplace to die. Second, cats often like to display their value by showing you what they've killed. Another observation – he had died so recently there was no sign of rigor mortis. The kind of facts a nine-year-old mind will readily absorb. It was garbage day, so he joins his ancestors in the great garbage heap in the sky.

Two weeks ago Dennis Krentz recommended a book entitled “The WEIRDest people in the world.” It appears to be one of those revolutionary books that will change the nature of the discussion in the social sciences. It advances so many new theories that while some of them are bound to turn out to be wrong, there is enough substance that the very nature of the discussion must change,

Evolutionary psychologists have contributed more useful insights over the past half-century than any other branch of science I can think of. The sociobiologists (EO Wilson, Daniel Dennett, Richard Dawkins) led us to investigate how body structure, behavior and culture

coevolved. Philippe Rushton, Helmuth Nyborg, Richard Lynn, Tatu Vanhanen, Edward Dutton, and Michael Woodley among others traced the evolution of the human mind, especially behavior and intelligence.

The nature-versus-nurture, genetics versus environment division has underlain all of these investigations. There are significant vested interests within the political realm: people who want to attribute homosexuality exclusively to genes, transsexuality exclusively to environment, and racial differences in life outcomes exclusively to malevolent forces such as racism. Jared Diamond attributed a lot to the luck of the draw. He theorized that mankind made more progress on the Eurasian continent than others because cultural advances such as agriculture could diffuse themselves along similar climates falling on an east-west axis and along the course of advantageously located rivers such as the Rhône, the Rhine, the Danube and the Dnipro to the west, and the Ganges, Mekong, Yangtze and yellow Rivers to the east.

This new book by Joseph Henrich navigates adroitly between them. It promotes the theory that our differences are not purely genetic, but rather more attributable to the way our brains develop in response to the culture into which they are born. He attributes much of the differences between us Western Educated Industrialized Rich Developed (that is, WEIRD) peoples and others to literacy, the Christian religion, monogamy and other cultural practices. It has long been known that for several years after birth our brains wire themselves. Henrich's theory is that much of the differences among people's can be explained by such self-wiring.

In the much more extensive review of the book that I plan to write, I will give a lot of credit to this insight while continuing to support the arguments that would give heavier weight to genetic theories. Scientific progress is made by comparing the merits of alternative explanations of how measurable phenomena came to be. I am confident that the explanations that Henrich provides will be incorporated to some significant degree in future explanations.

One final note on our heating/electrical situation. First of all, since the power company supposedly fixed the fluctuating voltage, and we installed the (probably now redundant) voltage stabilizers, we haven't had any problems with the heat. After, of course, making the proper settings on the thermostat. Why it took five experts to figure that one out is a good question. I took yet another pass at trying to scan, recognize and translate the Ukrainian reference book, but had no success. I may not need to.

I thought we might want to switch to gas heat in any case. The builder of the house came by today and (1) showed me that the gas boiler is already fully integrated into the system – all we would need to do is to turn it on, and (2) that the gas boiler depends on an

electric pump. We are dependent on electricity whatever we use. Circulation in my house in Washington DC, built in 1938, depended on hot water rising and cold water descending. No pumps. Such a design is archaic today.

One of our long-time, reliable tradesmen came by to shut off the water in the garden so the pipes don't freeze over the winter. We are ready to go.

And that's the news from Lake WeBeGone, where the men are strong, the women are good looking, and the children treat each other pretty nicely.

Graham

Girls and cats, boys and dogs, exercise, perception of the US from a distance, and humor in politics 20201029

A cat's meal ticket involves certain indignities. Here are some pictures of Zoriana carrying Raccoon to his breakfast.





There is a metaphor here. How much indignity do we put up with to win our daily bread? A more probing question. How much do we put up with now for the promise of a future security that we can see vanishing before our eyes, on account of the vast money printing by the Federal Reserve and corresponding federal deficit? It has been a good deal for the Baby Boomers who wrote the legislation. It has served me as a member of the silent generation, piggy-backing on their self-serving legislation. How it can possibly be worthwhile to Generation X, the millennials and beyond I cannot comprehend. Why do they acquiesce?

Edward Kinney wrote that I am doing my son, his namesake, a great disservice by not having a dog. I reflected on that. Dogs are part of the American tradition, the Norman Rockwell portrait of the American typical American home.

How far back in time does that go? I do not recall that my neighborhood friends, David Baker, Ricky Baker, John Fitzgerald or Mike Weaver ever had a dog. We had cats; Mike one named Shoes. I don't recall that Denny Krentz had a dog either. So there we were, back in Norman Rockwell times without the obligate Norman Rockwell family pooch.

There were a couple of dogs in the neighborhood. The McKillips across the street. Sandra Sitton, the comely widow next door, had dogs. With her equally comely daughter Marsha she invited me over to dock the puppies tails. It involved a knife and a hammer. It seemed like an unusual thing to do, but cocker spaniels should have short tails, and so they did.

Only two of Eddie's playmates have dogs, Nikita has a big husky mix called Ari, and Andrew, who recently moved to Lviv, has a chow mix named Smile. That's it. These are family dogs, whose relationship with the boys is no stronger than with anybody else.

Most of the dogs that we see in the neighborhood fall into three categories. There are big dogs like this Caucasian mountain dog that people keep for protection. Those poor dogs live their whole lives out-of-doors barking at everything that comes by and getting no affection.



Many like this one stick their noses out under a gate and act as fierce as they can. My first instinct is to throw a rock at their snarling maws, but when I consider the miserable lives they must lead I reconsider and have some compassion.



There are what my firstborn Jack, called dropkick dogs. Little yippy things that you could easily boot into the next county. They've gotten even smaller in the 30 years since he made that observation. These are usually alert breeds like Yorkies, silkies, pugs, or maybe Jack Russell Terriers. That seems a cruel fate for a spirited dog, but there it is.



The third category would be street dogs. Yurii in our neighborhood is an odd duck, a handsome guy, doesn't appear to be a drunk or have any of the standard disabilities. He seems to be fairly well educated by bits and scraps, but he is an inveterate bore. He does not work, has never worked, lives in an old shack probably inherited from his family, and will latch on to anybody who walks by to engage in conversation.



One of the benefits of conversation with Yurii is that my Russian doesn't matter. I never get a word in edgewise. He will talk to me about everything from Einstein's theory to Bolshevik history, with gaping lacunas in his knowledge that even I can recognize, but he goes on without a pause. Poor as he is, and with a little help from his friends and neighbors, he sustains a pack of street dogs.



What I don't see are dogs chasing sticks and balls, dogs running and frolicking with boys. I'm sure that's what Edward has in mind when he says that boys should have dogs. I fear that that is a largely lost part of American culture, like Boy Scout camps, loud firecrackers, and playing hooky to go fishing. Our kids' childhoods are not as rich as our grandparents, and dogs aren't the whole of it.

There is a profound difference between the right and the left in American politics. To most people on the right the upcoming is just an election. To the left, it's a religious crusade.

When I dare to touch the tender tenets of that religion, such as expressing an ounce of credence with regard to the Hunter Biden story, the faithful are sure to come at me en masse to correct the error of my ways. Conversely, everybody easily accepts it when I acknowledge Trump's faults. Nobody would imagine he's even close to perfect.

The progressives long ago adopted the motto that all's fair in love and war. They give Trump no quarter and accord him no sense of fair play. Yesterday the Trump campaign released a spate of satirical advertisements. Yes, they are vastly unfair. But fairness went out the window before the time of Robert Bork, and the ads are delightfully on target. Excuse me for laughing. Find some [here](#), and [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#).

I stayed in shape by running 4 miles a day until my knees gave out in about 1984. Since then I have bicycled, swum, and used an exercise bicycle when those weren't available.

My objective was to maintain a heart rate of 140 for 30 minutes. Measuring it became a problem 15 years ago when I developed arrhythmia. My yardstick became the size of the puddle of sweat that accumulated underneath the exercise bike.

The chief problem with this regime was that all the heavy breathing led to strep throat about twice a year. I gave it up three years ago, rationalizing that biking to school with Eddie twice a day, with outings on the weekends and shopping trips to town would make up for it.

The flaw in the logic becomes clear now that Eddie is old enough to bike to school by himself. I got back on the exercise machine and found that I had lost considerable ground. It was a month before I could work up to even leaving one drop of sweat on the mat underneath the bike. Even now the puddle isn't terribly big.

This physical exercise is a good complement to the "Treat Your Own Back" exercises that I have mentioned before. After arching backwards, flexing forward by touching my toes, then hanging for a minute to stretch everything out, I get on the exercise bike for 30 minutes. I don't know why it doesn't bother my throat the way it used to... maybe it's the zinc that I'm taking as part of the Covid 19 prophylaxis. At any rate I'm building back up, though I'm still a fair way short of the 80 revolutions per minute I was able to manage three years ago.

It is a delight to find an article online that clearly expresses my point of view, and a double delight that when I said as much in a comment [on this one](#) the author, Israel Shamir applauded it. The essence of the story is that Russians, who for decades looked to the United States as the fount of progress and enlightenment, are appalled at the way it

is unraveling. Ukrainians are still ambivalent. Many still want to immigrate to the United States, but they are increasingly aware that the country has huge problems that most of its citizens refuse to see or mistakenly blame on traditional Americans such as me.

And that's the news from Lake WeBeGone, where the men are strong, the women are good looking, and the children are happily playing with each other giving me time to write.

Graham