A Walk Down the Garden Path

nos·tal·gia
nä'staljə,nə'staljə/
noun
1. a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past, typically for a period or place with happy personal associations.

Nostalgia is a great way to escape the present. And despite a few half-hearted attempts at addressing the latest episodes of state-sponsored violence and racial disparity, your Narrator finds that refuge irresistible right now. A sharp observer with keen understanding and insight could make sense of recent events playing large in the news. I'm not that guy, so if that's your desire, I recommend this recent piece from Ta-Nehisi Coates and this one from a year ago. He puts a bow on a package that too many people are afraid to unwrap.<fn>In fact, you really could just skip my meander down memory lane and deal with Coates. And I'll say again: that Coates is not twice-a-week at the NY Times while mendacious hacks like David Fking Brooks and Ross Cardinal Douhat are gainfully employed is a fundamental crime. Never mind the demented harpy Dowd. But I digress.</fn>

I spent last weekend in Atlanta, mostly in the neighborhood we called home for 17 years. The photo up top is a peek down the garden path to the side of this place, our last home in the 'hood before we decamped for the Swamp.

The Home of Aspiration! The CCA

This former Sunday school building was our home from 2002 to 2006. We lived upstairs in a gorgeous loft-style aerie. Downstairs was home to the Center for Creative Aspiration, a 501(c)(3) arts organization that we established to host a variety of fun, rewarding, and indescribable experiences. See that landscaping? We did that. After we left, the grounds fell into sad disarray, but recent new owners have reclaimed the beauty.

I love that little maple tree.

Also, too…the church next door, which closed right after its 100th anniversary celebration in 2003, has been resurrected<fn>See what I did there?</fn> and is now home to a vital, primarily Africa-American congregation. Even cooler: the downstairs of the church is now home to a 501(c)(3) arts and music organization called HealiUm.<fn>That alone ~~kind of~~ makes this a My Favorite World post.</fn>

Crazy Carl doesn’t come screaming at you from the darkness any more.

As much as I loved living at the CCA, it’s the Blue House that still has a hold on my heart.

I expected to leave this house feet-first. I really thought it was the last stop.

The Blue House is a classic Craftsman built in 1907. We lived there from 1993 to 2002. The first time I walked in, I felt like this house belonged to me.

Standing outside last weekend, I still have that feeling. The current owners are terrific friends who moved from three doors down, because they also love this house. It shows.

Note the little library. My Favorite World.

The library is their addition. They've also restored the floors and much of the original detail. The yard looks even better than when we left. But they had limits.

A few years ago when I drove by they were outdoors and invited me in. As I walked in, I was wondering (and dreading) what they had done to cover the 360° mural Judy had painted in the dining room. This was a very personal piece that featured idealized-but-recognizable versions of the two of us, our daughter (pre-Ben days), and our dogs Starr and Fira. So it was reasonable that the new owners would get rid of it.

Wrong. As they told me: "It's part of the house!"

As I was going all verklempt<fn>Like I'm doing as I write this.</fn>, Liz invited me to look at the kitchen. It was gorgeous, completely re-done the way we would have done it. She waved me over to the door to the basement. And there, with

a completely new and different paint job covering everything else, was the door jamb where we tracked the kids' height with pencil marks…unpainted and unchanged except for the additions of their kids' height markers and dates. They had re-painted everything…except for one side of one door jamb.

I said some quick goodbyes and thank yous and scurried out of there in time to save my meltdown for the inside of my car as I sat looking at this view of My Favorite House.

The view from the back. I love that maple tree.

They weren't home last weekend, but several of our old friends and neighbors were, and we held an impromptu street party, and while I was not wishing I still lived there, I was pretty well washed in the water and enjoying the warmth of both the memories and the present moment.

Both these houses represent some pretty significant moments in the lives of our little clan. Children arriving. Dogs

departing. Concerts played and recordings made. Musicians of substantial and lesser renown from all over the world stayed here while on tour. The CCA hosted 18 guitar players for a 3-month stretch in 2003, thereby guaranteeing Judy an aisle seat in Heaven. Shortly after that, the California Guitar Trio moved in for a 2-week writing and rehearsing retreat. We hosted some great friends and their gang who had to flee Katrina damage, up to a dozen at one point.

18 guitarists for 3 months. How cool is that?

Lots of good things happened there. And for a brief time last weekend, the memories of that time gave me a tremendous sense of comfort and understanding of my place in the world, both then and now.

And then I drove home, with plenty of time to reflect. And as I approached my current home of almost 7 years<fn>Ho-leee shit!</fn>, I realized that I couldn’t imagine a better place for me to live now than this one.

Mi Casa, protection provided by Maggie, the Wonder Dog of Wonderment

It’s no turn-of-the-last-century Craftsman. It does not boast a loft-style aerie with a 60-foot long and 10-foot wide central hallway.<fn>The kids kind of learned to ride bikes in there, and it was a great bowling alley.</fn> And it certainly doesn’t have room for 18 guitarists to visit the evening, much less bunk in for three months. But it’s a damned fine place to live a good life. Like anyplace else, whether that happens is pretty much up to me.

It’s Always Something. Usually.

Last week left us with a thought experiment, predicated on the proposition that, given two pieces of looming news, only one can possibly turn out well.<fn>For me, that qualified as a burst of optimism.</fn>

Well imagine my surprise. The verdict on The Cancer is negative; the verdict on Daughter’s acceptance to first-pick U is positive. We have defied the odds. I will live long enough to be bankrupted by my childrens’ higher education expenses. And my allegedly data-based pessimism has taken yet another blow, maybe even enough to convert me into one of the smiling optimists of the world.

Ah, pshaw. Go on.

In the aftermath of all the shoes dropping, each in their preferred place, this weekend was an orgy of indolence and self-indulgence. Yeah, ok, I completed taxes and did some real work<fn>My Calvinist streak never far from the surface.</fn>, but we blew off and went to the movies and down to the shore and out to dinner and drank beer in the afternoon and took naps and let the dog hang her head out the car window.

I also stalked an egret for a short conversation, getting within about five feet of this fella.

He didn’t have much to say, but he made his words count.

This was part of a jaunt to St Marks Wildlife Refuge, a piece of paradise on this planet. Proof….

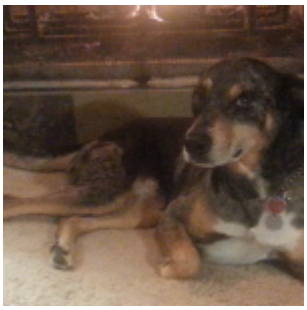
That post-bridge, thanks Clarence, George Bailey feeling is getting all up amongst me. Why, I’m downright ungrumpy.

Also, too…I may actually be able to play a guitar for the first time in about 5 months. Not quite, but the wrist seems to be trying to get better. And the guitar anxiety dreams<fn>Picture naked for a final exam, but more fraught.</fn> are kicking in with a vengeance. Dare I express optimism on this score? Dare I not?

Your regularly scheduled dyspepticism will resume next week. Or not. No promises. Maybe I’ll be Captain Fucking Cheerful from now on.

Bwahahahahahahahahaha.

My Favorite World #5



My Favorite World comes at a good time this week. Sometimes the whole MFW ethos can find itself smothered by *stuff*. But then you just open your eyes, and there it is. MFW.

I just spent a long weekend with extended family, an even dozen of us. A generally good time sprinkled with the occasional fraughtiness, not unlike most family gatherings. Yesterday, a long day of travel that began at 9 am and was capped by weather-socked airports and a short train ride from the airport to friendly local bed space. Good job Delta, you almost got us all the way home.

This morning, up early, back on the train to the airport. J and the kids stayed with the plane option. For reasons too tedious to recount,<fn>”Gadzooks,” cries the reader. “Too tedious for *this* blog? Unpossible!”</fn> I ended up driving home from ATL. Finally arrived here cold, smelly, and tired a mere 32 hours after departure.

Shorter: travel during the holiday season is not in any way part of My Favorite World. Humbug!

Ah, but then I arrive safely at home and hearth, and there reposes Maggie, the Wonder Dog of Wonderment, holding court at fireside. This fine beast, who chose us by wandering into our driveway 8 years ago while we lived in the uncharted swamps on the other side of Ponchartrain, discharges all hint of negativity with the slightest nuzzle and yawn.

Maggie is a Catahoula Leopard Cur, the state dog of Louisiana,

and a breed that remains unrecognized by the poncey toffs at the American Kennel Club<fn>Those blackballing bastards, too busy sitting on their loathesome, spotty behinds squeezing blackheads, not caring a tinkers cuss &c.</fn>. This breed is known for its acuity as a herding and hunting dog, and is often trained in packs of three to chase down and subdue wild boar. That’s one of these bad mammas:

This creature will fuck. you. up.

That’s some serious anti-beast right there. I sometimes ponder Maggie, the WDoW, and try to extrapolate her enthusiasm for chasing squirrels into something akin to the fervor it must take to undo a boar. To no avail. Because let’s be honest and ruthlessly so: Maggie the WDoW is more of an area rug than hard charging anti-beast killer, the gentlest of curs who wants nothing more than to get under blankets or snuggle with her favorite boy.

These creatures will not.

And then, too, also, too…I am back home with my fabulous wife and kids, our extra daughter, and my mom. It is pouring rain, the fire is crackling, and there is a cold IPA waiting for me to s(l)ink into the holiday season. With all that, what else could this be except My. Favorite. World.

And also, too, as well…thanks to everyone who stops by to read these rambles. The traffic has been much busier than I dreamed, and I appreciate the comments and likes and shares more than I should – but given my inherent shallowness, less than you might expect.

Merry Whatever It Is That Makes You Happy With What You Have To Be Happy With, and a Most Favorite Worldish New Year.