

Part 4

I often wake up here to the sound of hoof beats, as horse riders amble past our door. This is horse country, with regular riders as well as new learners in abundance. It doesn't just add to the ambiance. It has confused the heck out of me a couple of times when, following a night of burning coal in this converted carriage house, waking to hoof beats in my morning dreamlike state leaves me wondering which century this is. Eventually I remember, and decide to crawl back under the covers seeking the past.

As I write this, it is 40 degrees and raining. Thus, comparatively, it is gorgeous! Spring has sprung. The signs are everywhere... flowers blooming, inevitably doomed by the coming freeze later this week. It wasn't even raining yesterday, so Nancy and I went for a walk and she actually spotted my long-lost glove, lost amid the stampede that accompanied me on a prior outing. A few weeks buried in snow and muck, yet the biggest risk to the glove's survival may yet be the wash it needs. When I washed my oh-so-comfy fuzzy-lined leather slippers to remove the dog poop a few weeks ago, my size 13s curled into what most closely resemble a pair of baseballs, with roughly the same consistency. Maybe I can soak them and stretch them enough to eventually fit Nancy's size 4½ feet.

Meanwhile, I have been doubling up on socks.

Of course, living in small quarters where it is nearly or literally freezing and raining 6 days a week – oh, excuse me, Nancy insists that I am exaggerating. It has not actually rained here 6 days a week. Some of those days, it was snowing.

As I was saying, being cooped up in this joint has led to some degree of cabin fever. One tends to notice small things. Like the creaking floorboards that respond to nearly every late night or early morning step with a raucous chorus that might as well be a car alarm in its effect on a slumbering spouse. One day, Nancy postulated a classically American solution to anything that squeaks: WD-40.

The squeak wasn't actually due to the century-plus old boards, she explained. It must be due to the boards rubbing against the nails that held them down. My scientific skepticism to this theory was disregarded, and the next thing I knew, we were spraying WD-40 onto every nail head of every squeaky board, right over the paint that covered them. Yes, applying a lubricant to historic (at least by American standards) wooden floor boards.

It worked. I cannot quite believe it, but it worked. It did not leave a stain, and it almost completely eliminated the noise. I can now sneak to the bathroom (or sneak into bed ridiculously late) without alerting my beloved. Well, sometimes at least.

The dogs are gone – off to Dubai. Yea! Unfortunately, so is our daughter. ☹️ It really was wonderful to spend so much time with her, albeit a busy period, with her mostly working and with various preparations for everyone’s emigration to the UAE. Juniper has for the last time imprinted good English mud prints upon every article of clothing I own. Ahh, the greetings left by jumping up upon my shoulders, leaving paw prints all over my shirt. Following one such occasion, I ventured out to scoop the myriad loose poops in the yard, and found several with paw prints squarely in the blobs of poop. I looked down again at the “muddy” paw prints on my shirt, and back at the paw prints in the poop. Then back at the paw prints upon my shirt.

But I digress. The dogs are gone, but so are Anthony and Dawn. The happy family is adjusting well to their new home, while Nancy and I are now adjusting to figuring out what to do with ourselves.

We’ve been taking in more of our local environs as well as the occasional trip into London. We have delightful next door neighbors. We went to see our neighbor play bass with his buddies at an open mic night. This involved Nancy driving at night for some 20 miles to reach our destination 5 miles away – thanks to my expert navigational assistance. During this hour-long adventure, we were within blocks of our destination probably a half-dozen times.

But we arrived intact. Physically, at least. And still married for the moment.

Open mic night was a hoot. The “theater” was a roomful of folding chairs behind a small bar, with tickets sold at a table in the back. We were welcomed by an acapella version of Strawberry Fields, then a Leonard Cohen tune, “sung” in part spoken-word, part hum by a septuagenarian. We were then treated to original tunes from a young Bob Dylan wannabe folksinger, but without even Bob’s vocal range, accompanied here and there by an occasional, random few bars of harmonica practice from the ticket seller in the back of the room. All of this was absorbed by an audience, exclusive of the various musicians waiting for their turn, of perhaps 8 of us.

But our friend’s group was actually really good, as were some others, including a first-timer, a shy but bluesy Dobro player. And a room full of mostly aging hippies still clinging to their music gives me hope.

England is incredibly cosmopolitan. Oh sure, more so in London than outside it, but even out in the ‘burbs and elsewhere. On a recent trip to Brighton, we were chatted up by a traveling electrical engineer, an old computer programmer from the early days back in the ‘70s, half Afghani, half Irish, raised in London and married to an Indian. A recent trip to a large supermarket found me passing the large Passover display being studied by a single discriminating customer, a young woman wearing a hijab. I love it.

London itself is incredibly diverse. The US hardly has a claim to be the world's melting pot compared to here. Every possible shade of color, every imaginable ethnicity, and multiple languages on nearly every block. And that doesn't even count the language spoken here that the locals insist is English. Sitting on a train or in a pub and eavesdropping is very different from listening to the locals indulge us as they speak... slowly... and... carefully... to their American cousins. The various dialects of English spoken here are sometimes as mysterious as any of the other languages one may hear.

But just as I was feeling smug about American English, a shopkeeper inquired as to where in the States I was from. Upon hearing "Arizona," she remarked that she thought I was from the West due to my "lovely" accent. *My accent? What accent??*

The diversity here doesn't mean that there isn't the same strife over immigration that seems to be the human condition absolutely everywhere. Witness Brexit. Shortly after arriving, another neighbor noticed my accent and inquired as to my home. Apparently, "Arizona" has a reputation even here, as this seemed to assure her that I must be a kindred soul. She launched into espousing, within a 10 minute span, every conspiracy theory known to man, so as to answer every question I may have ever had. Donald Trump actually won more than 80% of the popular vote, but for the massive voter fraud that nearly stole the election from him. The Gulf War was a plot of Tony Blair's to create an excuse for mass migration many years later, all pretending to be refugees, which of course none of them actually are. This, in turn, is part of the one-world global conspiracy to remove all people's autonomy and to subject us all to slavery. To which of course, we are more susceptible given the mind control from chem-trails and the globally controlled media. On and on. Even Pizza-gate. Yes, Pizza-gate. Despite my voiced skepticism, I was reassured that it is all "absolutely true."

Next time, I may say I'm from Massachusetts. Unfortunately, my lovely accent may give me away.

We had Easter dinner with our son-in-law's family. Andy, Steph and family are lovely people, and I can't wait to introduce them to our buds who come visit, if for no other reason than to help them try to understand their weird, new American family. So far, our schedule is:

Bobbie & Jack will be here April 13 – May 3 (and we'll all be in Amsterdam April 15-18).

Laura (Nan's bud from Carson City) will be here May 10-20.

Denise (our bud from Denver) is still figuring out dates, but will be here, we certainly hope.

At the end of June, June 26-29 plus a day or a few before or after, we'll be in Finland.

The first week of July we'll be in Italy with Nan's sister Martha and our bro-in-law Fred.

The last week of July we'll for sure be back here in Belsize, as Dawn and Anthony will be back here and we'll all be closing up the house.

More are welcome to fill the gaps. Or even to overlap and join the party! We have two bedrooms, a sleeper sofa in the living room, and we can come up with a bedroll and a chamber pot for the back “summer house.” I even swept it up the other day.

We have to leave for home by August 7, plus the sum of the number of days we can show that we’ve been out of the country in the meantime, or we’ll have overstayed our time as tourists without a visa. Hmm... there’s an idea. Overstay our welcome and become undocumented immigrants.

‘Tell y’all what... Fix everything at home while we’re gone, and let me know when it’s safe to return.