

Merry Xmas

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THIS YEAR'S CIRCUM-stances kept me focused on the present, and not, as I might have expected, on the past.¹

True, a spate of media retrospectives on the 30th anniversary of this or that induced an ex-colleague and me into a reverie for 1980, when I began paying attention to the world at large.² And I

finally saw the movie “2010,” on YouTube, 26 years after I ignored its theatrical release. Naturally, the 2010 as imagined in 1984 is considerably off.³

Mostly, though, I could travel more than I’ve been able to in many years. I had the time, money, and motivation to vacation again. The times between contracts didn’t count. I couldn’t

go anywhere because I had to conserve cash. Also, I aced my annual physical, which meant I had a few months to eat a proper diet.

In the spring, I attended the housewarming party of a friend who works at NASA, and met his co-workers at the Mission Control Center. The Clear Lake Area reminded me of Southern Califor-

nia coastal towns, right down to the palm trees. The communities have matured gracefully from the time of the Apollo 11 Moon landing.⁴

The serious traveling began after my contract ended in August. My doctor and my co-workers had suggested quite a few places to vacation. The guy in the next cube brought up Bulgaria.

“Bulgaria?” said the local salseras.

“That was my reaction,” I said.

Reality narrowed the choices further. I had to dismiss the entire Northeast because of the bedbug outbreak.⁵ Flying anywhere is out of the question.⁶ Thanks to e-commerce, I’m whittling away my wish lists, which means I can skip visiting stores along the way, on the off chance I can find what I’m looking for. So the chief reasons for traveling beyond Greater Austin are live music shows, dancing, golfing, and stuffing my face.

In mid-October, I visited friends in Omaha as a pretext for visiting the Midwest, where I’d never been.

However, the Midwesterners seem determined to prove their region is as dull as its detractors have always claimed. The turnpikes in Kansas and Oklahoma – which I learned about the hard way – even have *minimum* speed limits, presumably because these heartlanders are naturally slow.⁷ The cities where I planned to stop yielded a dearth of live music that I wanted to see when I researched online. A pity, because some of

these cities have been major jazz centers.⁸ My online research revealed no-name players at any of the clubs and lot of locals bemoaning their scenes’ declines from what it was before. I saw more performers on tour before and after the trip.⁹

Notable exception: Oct. 22, I flipped through the FM stations as I drove southbound on Interstate 35 about two hours north of Oklahoma City. By chance I heard an announcer say that tickets for the Tony Bennett concert at the Riverwind Casino were still available. I decided that if I encountered the casino 30 minutes before the show began that I’d stop and attend. Again by chance, I drove in the right direction, for I saw the casino rapidly receding to my right around 7:30 p.m. I had to drive another 10 miles to turn around, head back, wait behind an 18-wheeler carrying a massive concrete I-beam across a two-lane overpass under repairs, turn left against the casino’s traffic flow, find a parking space, enter the casino, find the help desk, find the box office, buy a ticket, return to my car and change into a jacket and dress shoes (because it a was Tony Bennett performance), and find my seat before the show. I had about five minutes to spare. It’s the sort of haphazard occurrence that I’d hoped to avoid on the trip, but which plagued me anyway.

Bennett’s voice was in excellent shape, though, and his performance made up for the aggravation.¹⁰

I danced once that trip, at a club in Kansas City, Mo. Despite the sparse attendance – Midwestern-

ers, it seems, don’t go out weeknights – I impressed two dance instructors with some moves I’d learned from a friend and sometime dance partner. I also impressed people just by being from Austin.

During my contract, my cell phone came into use for the purposes I intended. My parents called at work to see if I was all right after they learned about the guy who flew into the IRS office in North Austin in February. I assured Mom and Dad of my well-being.¹¹

Back home, two recent dances doubled as salseras’ birthday celebrations. Both times, the women ignored the men in favor of scarfing cake – mediocre supermarket bakery cake at that. Good to know where we rank in their affections.¹²

The landlord installed compact fluorescent bulbs in the complex. I came home one day to lighting simultaneously too dark and too harsh, besides CFL bulbs’ other flaws. The large, old incandescent bulb in the dining room ceiling fixture that had served me well for 10 years sat on the kitchen counter, next to a note from the installer, acknowledging that the old bulb was brighter than the new replacement. Less than a week later, the CFL bulb burned out. So much for longer lasting.¹³

I hope this finds you well and wish all of you a Merry Christmas and good fortune in 2011.

Love,

Dan

NOTES

¹ AD No. 129 (Dec. 10, 2009); AD No. 130 (Feb. 17, 2010); AD No. 132 (Apr. 25, 2010).

² AD No. 136 (Aug. 10, 2010).

³ AD No. 130n54 (Feb. 17, 2010).

⁴ AD No. 133 (May 4, 2010).

⁵ Bercovici, Jeff. "Bedbugs Ravaged My Sex Life!" GQ Nov. 2010: 134+.

⁶ AD No. 61 (Jan. 28, 2004).

⁷ "Use KTA Website to Help Plan Trips." Turnpike Times Summer 2010: 2.

⁸ E.g., Driggs Frank, and Chuck Haddix. Kansas City Jazz: From Ragtime to Bebop – a History. New York City: Oxford UP, 2005.

⁹ Powell, Austin. "Sound Grammar." AC 26 Nov. 2010: 53; Schroeder, Audra. "Soundcheck." *Idem.*, 1 Oct. 2010: 80; Trachtenberg, Jay.

"Music Listings." Ed. Schroeder. *Idem.*, 5 Oct. 2010: 88.

¹⁰ AD No. 41n3 (Sep. 21, 2002).

¹¹ AD No. 131 (Mar. 24, 2010).

¹² AD No. 134 (July 10, 2010).

¹³ AD No. 133, *op. cit.*