

V

isions of Paradise

#114: *the Passing Scene*



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Artwork

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Out of the Depths

32 facts that percolated to the top of my mind recently:

1	I remember where I was when I heard that JFK was shot but not when I heard that Richard Nixon resigned.
2	When you grow up one of four brothers, you naturally learn to be very competitive at a young age.
3	Somewhat surprisingly for a lifelong lover of science fiction, I have never had much interest in the space program.
4	I started reading comic books in the late 1950s with Tales of the Unexpected before drifting into superheroes such as <i>Green Lantern</i> and <i>Justice League of America</i> .
5	When I was a boy I frequently walked several miles to the public library to take out books with little spaceships on their spines. I read many of the <i>Oz</i> books and also something called The Light at the End of the Tunnel whose author I do not remember.
6	Most boys I knew wanted to be athletes when they grew up; I always wanted to be a writer.
7	Jimmy Carter was probably the finest person to be president of the U.S. in my lifetime; unfortunately, he was probably the least-qualified president until George W. Bush.
8	I look favorably upon Italian-American celebrities, both such old-timers such as Frank Sinatra and Joe DiMaggio, and more recent celebrities such as Robert DeNiro and Al Pacino. I feel a certain amount of pique though towards those who change their names so as not to sound Italian, such as Billy Martin, Dean Martin and Tony Bennett.
9	I never hero-worshipped movie stars or athletes as a youth, always preferring musicians and writers.
10	I am envious of my students whose immigrants parents forced them to learn as much about their homelands as possible, including speaking their native language at home.
11	My list of favorite musicians started with Dion and progressed through the Dave Clark 5, Moody Blues, Bruce Springsteen, Chris de Burgh, and currently is Richard Thompson.
12	My list of favorite writers began with Clifford D. Simak and progressed through Robert Silverberg to Michael Bishop and Andrea Barrett, and is probably Jack McDevitt now.
13	I am a lousy interviewee, so it is probably good that I never aspired to be an administrator, since those people are hired primarily based on interviewing skills rather than based on competence.

14	I really do not like people who are either too lazy or too inconsiderate to do their job properly, especially when it impacts on those of us actually trying to do our best.
15	How can schools expect students to follow the rules when some teachers either do not bother enforcing them, or blatantly violate the rules themselves? For example, occasionally when I walk through the hall at school I pass a teacher using a cell phone.
16	Speaking of cell phones, how ridiculous is it that so many people walk around with phones glued to their ears like another appendage? What the heck do they have to say all the time anyway?
17	Still speaking of cell phones, how selfish are those people whose cell phones ring in the middle of meetings, then they begin talking right during the meeting?
18	I guess it is expecting too much of a recording artist to complain that Bruce Springsteen never maintained his 1970s quality after The River .
19	I guess it is expecting too much of a writer to complain that Roger Zelazny never maintained his 1960s quality after Lord of Light .
20	I rarely watch television, but I enjoy <i>Deal or No Deal</i> . That show is a practical example of why it is good to understand statistics, as well as a case study in greed.
21	I have no interest in the book version of The DaVinci Code , since I do not enjoy either thrillers or totally-invented-by-the-seat-of-the-pants history. However, I have considerably lower standards for movies since we get videos for free and thus are a lesser investment in time and none in money. The DaVince Code video was passable.
22	I love X-Men movies. The highlight of the second movie was seeing Kurt Wagner / Nightcrawler. I thought it was the best comic movie I ever saw until Batman Returns .
23	Psychologists can supposedly tell a lot about a person from their earliest memories. I knew a girl who had serious emotional issues. When she went to see a psychiatrist the first thing he asked her was to tell him her earliest three memories. My earliest memory is my cousin Rita and I huddling behind couches in my grandparents' house while cars with flashing lights crowded the street below and uniformed people hurried up the stairs into my grandmother's bedroom. Needless to say, we were both terrified.
24	My second memory also involves my cousin Rita who had a favorite doll Ginger which finally died, so we had a touching burial ceremony over the garbage can into which her parts were placed.
25	I only recall a single incident from my first few years in school. That was the day my 1 st grade class behaved particularly badly, so the teacher, a Sister of Charity who obviously did not take her title seriously, told us we had to stay in school overnight. Then she locked the door and went home, leaving the entire class crying uncontrollably.

26	I blame my grandmother for my mild hypochondria. I grew up in an overcrowded house—12 people but only 5 bedrooms—so I slept in the sunporch with my grandmother who had a serious heart condition and was dying of cancer the entire time we were roommates.
27	My primary goal in life has always been to publish science fiction professionally. No matter how successful I am as a teacher, or how many nonfiction books I publish, part of me will always be a failure without that published sf book.
28	I am envious of people who have personal friends in the sf community rather than just pen pals.
29	I am envious of writers who have been writing for thirty years less than I have, yet are considered successes in the field. Sometimes reading those writers' fiction is particularly frustrating.
30	The fact that so many people choose to be connected much of their lives, via either ipods or cellphones, is evidence that those people are not comfortable with their own thoughts, and would rather live their lives on a surface level rather than spending time actually thinking.
31	When I was in high school I enjoyed history more than any other subject, yet when I was considering a college major my choices were English and math. I am still pleased I chose math since now my career teaching math does not interfere with my pleasures reading and writing.
32	I did not read any science fiction for the entire year of 1995 because I was burned out from my choice of reading the previous decade. For the next ten years I read mostly literary sf stronger in characterization than sense of wonder. In the past year though I have drifted back to sense-of-wonder fiction, and I am experiencing many of the same thrills I felt as a youth.

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SF Signal Meme: I don't usually play along with these online surveys, but this one is irresistible.

Science Fiction, Fantasy or Horror?	Science Fiction
Hardback or Trade Paperback or Mass Market Paperback?	Trade paperback (easier to read)
Heinlein or Asimov?	Asimov (I did not discover Heinlein until I had been reading sf for a half-dozen years)
Amazon or Brick and Mortar?	Brick and Mortar (although not exclusively)
Barnes & Noble or Borders?	Borders
Hitchhiker or Discworld?	Never read either (I'm not big on humorous sf)

Bookmark or Dogear?	Bookmark! Dogear is blasphemous
Asimov's Science Fiction or Fantasy & Science Fiction?	F&SF
Alphabetize by author Alphabetize by title or random?	By author
Keep, Throw Away or Sell?	Keep (unless I did not like it, then give away)
Year's Best Science Fiction series Gardner Dozois or David G. Hartwell?	Dozois
Keep dustjacket or toss it?	Keep it
Read with dustjacket or remove it?	Remove it
Short story or novel?	Novella
Harry Potter or Lemony Snicket?	Harry Potter by default; never read Lemony Snicket
Stop reading when tired or at chapter breaks?	Chapter breaks
"It was a dark and stormy night" or "Once upon a time"?	"It was a dark and stormy night". The other is a fantasy opening.
Buy or Borrow?	Buy
Buying choice: Book Reviews, Recommendation or Browse?	Book Reviews (although occasionally by recommendation)
Lewis or Tolkien?	Tolkien (barely; neither is among my favorite authors)
Hard SF or Space Opera?	Space opera (the modern definition; NOT the Tucker definition)
Collection or Anthology?	Anthology
Hugo or Nebula?	Nebula
Golden Age SF or New Wave SF?	New Wave SF; I'm a child of the 60s
Tidy ending or Cliffhanger?	Tidy ending
Morning reading, Afternoon reading or Nighttime reading?	Nighttime reading primarily
Standalone or Series?	Standalone
Urban fantasy or high fantasy?	Historical fantasy

New or used?	New
Favorite book of which nobody else has heard?	A Dream of Scipio, by Iain Pears
Top X favorite genre books read last year? (Where X is 5 or less)	1. Resplendent, by Stephen Baxter 2. Seeker, by Jack McDevitt 3. Spin, by Robert Charles Wilson 4. Revelation Space / Redemption Ark / Absolution Gap, by Alastair Reynolds
Top X favorite genre books of all time? (Where X is 5 or less)	1. Brittle Innings, by Michael Bishop 2. The Fall of Hyperion, by Dan Simmons 3. Lord of Light, by Roger Zelazny 4. Gateway, by Frederik Pohl 5. The Stars My Destination, by Alfred Bester
X favorite genre series? (Where X is 5 or less)	1. Darkover, by Marion Zimmer Bradley 2. Hyperion Cantos, by Dan Simmons 3. Polesotechnic League, by Poul Anderson 4. Mars Trilogy, by Kim Stanley Robinson
Top X favorite genre short stories? (Where X is 5 or less)	1. Her Habiline Husband, by Michael Bishop 2. The Girl Who Was Plugged In, by J. Tiptree, Jr. 3. Lines of Power, by Samuel R. Delany 4. The Last Castle, by Jack Vance 5. A Rose for Ecclesiastes, by Roger Zelazny

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I consider the current era the easiest for keeping in touch with the f&sf world because of the large number of f&sf-related websites which offer regular news and opinions. Here are my favorite websites, most of which I check either daily or at least weekly:

Three daily news sites:

http://thebookblogger.com/sfbc/	the blog of SFBC editor Andrew Wheeler which he updates weekdays with links to reviews, articles and interviews
http://www.sfsignal.com	not quite as extensive as Wheeler's site, but published on weekends and just as essential
http://www.locusmag.com/	the online equivalent of Locus Magazine .

These are my favorite review sites:

http://www.sfsite.com (Publishes twice-monthly, just published its editors' and readers' choices for the best sf of 2006)	http://www.scifi.com/sfw/ (a lot of media news, but includes a handful of new book reviews each week by the likes of Paul DeFilippo and John Clute)
http://www.sffworld.com/aindex.html	http://www.fantasybookspot.com/
http://sfrevu.com/	http://www.sfreviews.net/index.html
http://www.infinityplus.co.uk/ (a British site which lots of books not as well known in this country)	http://www.bestsf.net/reviewsmags.html (devoted entirely to prozines and short fiction)

The Passing Scene

December 2006



Saturday, Dec 2, 2006: Tuesday was a two-hour training session by the NJEA for local representatives. While I did not learn anything new, as vice-president I needed to attend it.

Wednesday I went directly from school to an appointment with the estate lawyer who told me everything I need to do for the estate, which is a considerable amount of work. Since I have decided to waive the executor's fee, I am basically doing all this work for nothing, although my share of the estate will certainly keep me from being cheated.

Thursday was a two-hour mentor training session. It was fairly interesting, and I did learn a few things to help me train my new teacher.

Friday was the most enjoyable night of the week, although again I did not have time to do any work. We met Alan and Denise at the Chinese Buffet at 6:00pm for our traditional get-together when Ceil is visiting. The buffet has new owners, and it was not quite as good as it had been previously, although it was still good overall. Then we came home where we sat and talked until 11pm.

Wednesday, Dec 6: Another busy week! I was at school late Monday night for *Target Teach* and at the Board of Education for a Liaison Meeting Tuesday night. Now I am busy

writing more Governor School recommendations (in addition to the 7 I wrote last weekend) as well as a nominating letter for Chris, a wonderful English teacher, for the local *Teacher of the Year Award*.

The state of New Jersey is having an anti-property tax frenzy in which politicians are desperately looking for ways to cut property taxes, which are among the highest in the country. Several of their proposed methods involves reducing teachers' retirement benefits, capping terminal leave pay, changing the denominator for pensions from 55 to 60, extending the earliest retirement age from 55 to 62, and capping pensionable salaries at \$97,000 (which would really affect administrators). Most teachers work as many hours in a year as private sector people (not including history or English teachers who probably work many more hours) compacted into 36 weeks rather than spread over 45 weeks, have incredibly stressful jobs, and make far less than the average salary of similarly-educated people in the private sector, our retirement benefits have always been a small light at the end of the tunnel financially for teachers. To cheat me out of that now after I have been working 33 years would be unethical and unjust. Not that legislators or the public care about being fair to teachers, since their main concern is their own self-interests and re-election chances, no matter how selfish those interests might be. It also hurts that America is primarily an anti-education country in which intellectuals are looked down upon rather than held in any particular esteem.

The NJEA has organized a rally for next Monday in Trenton to protest the proposed cuts. As vice-president of our association, I am attending it along with 70 other district teachers. It will be a long, tiring day, but it has to be done. Whether it does any good or not remains to be seen.

Saturday, Dec 9: Last night Jean and I used a Discover Card reward card to go to dinner at Olive Garden. It was a very good meal consisting of salad, breadsticks, shrimp scampi with linguine for Jean, and seafood (mussels, shrimp, scallops) with linguine for me. Afterwards we did our usual Friday night shopping. I went to Borders while Jean went to Rockaway Mall, then we went to Target.

This weekend I am busy doing schoolwork, writing thank-you notes and Christmas cards, going through my mother's probate stuff, going to the YMCA, buying a Christmas tree with Jean, and cooking. Fortunately I do not need to leave until 7:30am Monday morning for the NJEA rally, so that should give me an additional hour to work.

Tuesday, Dec 12: Since I do not have a car this week, my friend Mark picked me up at home and we took a bus from Sussex Vo-Tech to the rally in Trenton. It was a very large, vocal demonstration which got lots of media coverage—including many anti-teacher comments in the media—but it was a very long day as well.

Today was a crazy day at school, all due to teaching in a 50-year old aging building. Some power was out for more than half the day, including no lights in the Math Lab, plus the entire school was evacuated during 1st period due to the smell of something leaking in the boiler room. These are not unusual occurrences in my school.

Saturday, Dec 16: We have had incredibly warm weather for December, with temperatures in the 50s and 60s every day. This morning the entire herd of 17 deer were resting in the woods

behind the house. Jean leaves nuts for them to eat, although sometimes the squirrels get it first.

My chores this weekend include writing an Honors Algebra test and an Algebra 2 quiz, grading a Statistics test and mini-project, writing a shopping list for Christmas Eve dinner, and preparing a package concerning my father's unpaid VA benefits to mail to our congressman's office since, after I phoned them at the advice of the probate lawyer, they offered to pursue it for me. As usual, I also have a huge pile of mail sitting on my desk as well.

Tuesday, Dec 19: Jean gave her exams last night at Centenary College and today at CCM, while Mark took his last exam yesterday and returned today. Now only poor Andy and I are still working!

Thursday, Dec 21: It is always amazing how quickly Christmas sneaks up on us every year. All our shopping is done, and the eating orgy has begun at school. Yesterday was the annual Math Dept party (at which I got 2 gifts from teachers: a large container filled with biscotti, and a gift card to Barnes & Noble).

Today was the faculty's annual six-foot sub luncheon, along with salads and desserts brought by the faculty. The highlight of the luncheon was Marissa's homemade ravioli and meatball, which was absolutely delicious!

Tomorrow is the annual Guidance Department all-day party which hopefully will serve as my lunch!

I have also gotten my usual collection of gifts from my honors students, which is nice considering few high school students give gifts to their teachers. I don't think it is a reflection on me, but a result of my students' parents being primarily immigrants.

Saturday, Dec 23: *whew* After a very stressful few months, it is finally Christmas vacation. There are lots of things I want to accomplish during the 10 day break, but I realize family obligations will cut my time so much I will probably only accomplish a small portion of it. Today I am going through the pile of mail on my desk, then Jean and I will go to the YMCA. Tomorrow is Christmas Eve so I will spend the entire day cooking and entertaining my family.

Monday, Christmas Day: Yesterday was a day devoted primarily to food. Since the annual family gathering was at our house, we did a lot of the cooking. I spent most of my morning cooking baked polenta caprese and seafood salad (with calarmi, shrimp, and scallops). Jean and Mark cooked baked ziti, and Jean made a vegetable salad. My brothers brought antipasto, shrimp cocktail, chicken liver, roast turkey, bread, and zeppoles. Everybody brought various Christmas cookies.

After dinner, we had our grab-bag gift exchange. Stephen gave me the first season of **Babylon-5** on dvd. Jean got a new pocketbook, and Mark got dvds **Pirates of the Caribbean** and **Superman Begins**.

Drew and Kate were both here for dinner last night, and Kate returned today since her parents left this morning to visit her brother who ironically is in Florida at a tech school not too far from

Disney World, where Andy is working.

Today's Christmas gifts included **Lord of the Rings** on dvd, cds *The Captain and the Kid*, by Elton John, and *Modern Times*, by Bob Dylan, and Alastair Reynolds' collection **Galactic North** for me. Jean got Edward Rutherfurd's saga **Rebels of Ireland**, plus a yoga book and two sweaters. Mark got a cd by Weird Al Yankovic, John Grisham's book **An Innocent Man**, and dvd **House**—The First Season. Mark gave Jean a Syracuse sweatshirt and me a Seton Hall sweatshirt.

None of Andy's presents have been opened yet since he is not returning from Disney World until January 4th. I'm sure he is unhappy being there right now, but at least he will only be there for another week.

Tuesday, Dec 26: Last Thursday morning Jean and Mark saw a strange yellowish bird at the feeder which neither of them recognized. Jean could not find any mention in her bird books of an Eastern bird with that coloring. Mark took pictures of it which Jean sent to Tom asking if he recognized it. Tom told her it is a Western Tanager which rarely goes east of Kansas. It has been sighted in Cape May, but never before in Morris County.



As Jean and Tom were talking on the phone Saturday, the bird was at the bird feeder, so Tom immediately came over with his binoculars and telescope. The bird practically put on a show for him, and he got lots of great pictures of it (4 of which I now have on my computer, including the one above). He asked us if he could tell several of his birding friends about it, so we agreed, and there are currently 3 birders on our deck this morning watching the bird. We were anxious it would not appear for them, but it is there as usual. This is somewhat exciting having the first sighting of a rare bird in our own yard.

Wednesday, Dec 27: Yesterday morning Jean and I drove to Morristown with Jane and Jack to have my mother's will probated. They were the witnesses to the will so one of them had to attest that they actually signed it.

My chores today include going to PNC Bank to deposit the royalties for **Nanking 1937** and order checks so I can pay the contributors. Tonight Alan and Denise are coming for dinner, which should be enjoyable. I am making pea soup while Jean is making ham-and-cheese loaf.

Friday, Dec 29: Jean and I enjoyed the night we spent when Marilyn and Frank came for dinner. We made lentil soup and pizza, which added to the leftovers we still have from Christmas Eve. Frank is a natural storyteller, and he knows a lot about history, especially New Jersey history. He is also an avid photographer who brought his camera and took pictures of the western tanager. He has plans for a book about Route 46, of which he has taken pictures from the George Washington Bridge to the Delaware Water Gap. Yesterday Frank brought all the

pictures and asked me if I would like to write the commentary. Frank does not want individual captions for each picture, but rather a documentary story of Route 46 with the pictures illustrating the story, which would be much more interesting for me to write. My idea of a fascinating travel book is **A Traveler In Rome**, by H.V. Morton, which intersperses travels through Rome with the history of each area he visited. That would require a lot of work on my part, especially researching the history of Route 46, and would entail my visiting the entire length of the road for inspiration. I told Frank I cannot possibly write the first draft until next summer, and the second draft the following summer, but he has no problem with that timeline. This might be a fun book to write.

I've been getting a decent amount of work done this week. I posted **VoP #110: *Halcyon Days*** this morning and finished editing **VoP #111: *The Passing Scene*** this afternoon. I also sent an update email to my former students yesterday. Next I want to write my "Year in Review" as well as send out locs to online and paper fanzines before vacation ends. I still do need to do some schoolwork as well, but I will do that Saturday, as usual.

Sunday, Dec 31: Yesterday afternoon Jean and I went to the YMCA, then we met Drew at a Mazda dealer where the two of them car-shopped for Andy. This morning we went to mass at Our Lady of the Mountain since the special intention of the mass was my mother.

These last 4 nights of vacation have been busy ones, spending evenings with Alan & Denise, Frank & Marilyn, and Pat & Steve Nicolich. Tonight Kathy & Dave are coming for dinner, then the four of us will go to Morristown for *First Night* activities. The last time we went there about 14 years ago was a cold, icy night, but this year the weather has been positively fall-like for the past month. Hopefully my buying the new, huge snow-blower is serving as a magic talisman against the snow!

Mark and Kate are returning from Louisville today. They have been there since Tuesday for a convention of the service organization they started at TCNJ, and of which Kate is the president. They had a lot of trouble with the airline Tuesday. First their flight from Philadelphia was delayed so long they would not make their connection in Detroit, so they had to make another reservation which did not leave until late in the evening. Meanwhile the flight in Detroit was also delayed, so they would have actually made it. Their luggage ended up in Detroit though and did not arrive in Louisville until Wednesday afternoon following a series of frantic phone calls. Fortunately, the mother of one of their friends going with them is a travel agent, so she made most of the changed arrangements for them.

January 2007

Monday, Jan 1, 2007: Jean and I are experiencing our "15 seconds of fame" these days with the steady stream of birders coming each morning to see the Western Tanager, which visits our bird feeder faithfully. One woman said to Jean and me Saturday, "How does it feel to be famous?" Perhaps we are famous among a very small pond of birders who know Tom, since he has been telling all his friends about the bird, but that is about the extent of it. The editors of a birding

magazine came one morning as well, so perhaps we'll make its pages.

First Night Morris was enjoyable. I particularly liked The Guy Mendilow Band which played folk music from around the world (and which was so good I bought their live cd on the way out) and the Nai Ni Chen Dance Company which did some gorgeous Chinese dancing. The fireworks over the town green were good too. Ironically, we were driving home at the stroke of midnight when there was virtually nobody on the roads at all. I guess New Year's Eve at midnight is the only time during the year that the N.J. highways are actually safe to drive, since anybody who is not home is celebrating somewhere.

I do not make New Year's Resolutions per se, but there are two goals I would like to accomplish in 2007: First, I want to do more writing, particularly finish the Tibet book, and start the *Route 46* book. Second, I hope to be a better correspondent. Now that I do not send hard-copies of **VoP** to most of my readers, I need to send more locs in order for other fan editors to keep me on their mailing lists.

Thursday, Jan 4: Andy came home from his four month internship in Florida Wednesday, but he was so exhausted he fell asleep on the couch most of the day. Now he has a bunch of chores to do, including buy a car, go to ESU to get his diploma (he graduated while he was away), and find a job.

Sunday, Jan 7: Yesterday morning Jean and I went to the YMCA in the afternoon. In the evening Kathy and Dave asked us to go to Community Theater in Morristown to see the Golden Dragon Chinese Acrobats. That was a very good show, but now I am left with a ton of chores to do today: write an Honors Algebra 2 test, do paperwork for my mother's estate, write thank-you notes for the list of contributors to Heath Village's Friendship Fund (which came in the mail Thursday), grade an AP Statistics test, an Algebra 2 quiz, and another AP Statistics activity.

Wednesday, Jan 10: Andy bought a new Hyundai Elantra GLS today. It looks nice. I hope he has good luck with it.

Thursday, Jan 11: Everybody is out tonight but me. Andy went to the Seton Hall-St. Johns game with Janel and Michelle, while Jean is at a dinner meeting at CCM.

Friday, Jan 12: One of the reasons I get so little work done at school, besides spending so much time working with my new teachers and students, is the fact that sometimes it seems as if everybody needs my advice or involvement for everything that happens. Here are some examples of situations I had to deal with this past week alone:

- Monday afternoon the vice-principal called me into her office to discuss the fact that the administration is not pleased with a new Special Ed English teacher and plans to begin the process of not renewing him next year;
- that night when I got home from work I had a message from a teacher from another school who needed me to phone him back;
- Tuesday morning another lead teacher came to ask me how to deal with the fact that some of her teachers are being particularly uncooperative;
- Tuesday I was walking to lunch when another lead teacher asked me for advice on how

to deal with one of her teachers who is in trouble for ripping up a student's test without even grading it;

- the principal interrupted my 7th period class twice to ask for my input on a situation involving another teacher and a student's parent;
- the teachers' association president interrupted my 8th period class to discuss the upcoming Calendar Committee, of which he appointed me as one of the members;
- another lead teacher called me into her office Wednesday morning to discuss the abysmal state of one of her classrooms;
- the principal called me into his office to discuss the fact that he is considering firing one of the coaches;
- I attended a meeting between the principal and a teacher as her association rep;
- during 1st period a lead teacher came to me totally frantic, seeking advice about her to deal with a totally incompetent teacher in her department;
- during 2nd period I met with a teacher about his unfair observation with his supervisor. He and I are going to try to meet with her together some afternoon next week;
- I sat in on a post-observation conference between my supervisor and a first-year teacher, so that I could hear what areas she wanted him to work on improving;
- I had a meeting after school today with the two lead teachers from both township schools in one subject area to discuss their department's problems with their supervisor;

Needless to say, I am totally exhausted right now, and I feel sorry for my students who have not been able to spend as much time working with me this week as usual. Jean suggested that I lock my office door so nobody knows where I am, and try to get some of my damned work done. I certainly need this three-day weekend desperately.

Saturday, Jan 13: Last night I chatted awhile online with Yuantian who was my student 3 times and is now student-teaching mathematics in central New York right now, but she would like to return to the NYC area. Since we anticipate three-to-five openings in my department, I would love to have her back. I know she is good since she taught for me when she was my Independent Study student her senior year. Obviously her chances of getting hired here would be pretty good.

Sunday, Jan 14: Andy's graduation party was very good, with about 40 people eating chicken parmigiana, baked ziti, cavatelli & broccoli, and sausage & pepper, along with chips & dip, bread, salad, and desserts. And we all thought the holiday eating splurge was over!

After everybody else had left, Jean and I chatted with Alan and Denise awhile. Alan commented that now that all of our parents (except his mom) are dead, we have become the "older generation" in our families. He seemed a bit spooked by it, and he wondered if he will ever see either of his two young grandchildren graduate college.

Thursday, Jan 18: Mary, who teaches Geometry and Sequential Algebra 2, fell down her basement stairs last Friday morning and will be out at least 8-12 weeks. Her leg is so swollen they have not even been able to operate on her yet. Joe (who retired two years ago and still subs for the Math Department) taught her classes this week, but he does not want to do so regularly, so Pam is desperately looking for a substitute teacher by next week. Good luck to her...

The weather this winter had been incredibly autumn-like with temperatures in the 50s and 60s, until this week when they finally dropped to the teens overnight and the 30s during the day. We are having our first mild snowfall today, with accumulation so slight it is barely measurable. Mark is anxious to use the new snowblower, but he is returning to school Saturday.

Saturday, Jan 20: Yesterday morning the roads were so icy my car could not stop at Sandshore Road. Fortunately no cars were coming so I drove right through the stop sign. My principal was upset that the superintendent did not call a delayed opening. It was another counseling day at PHS, with a line of teachers waiting at my desk waiting to speak with me, then another conference with the principal who was really in a foul mood.

Last night Jean and I went to the Seton Hall-Georgetown basketball game. The Pirates only have one player who is 6'9", and he was playing his second game after knee surgery, so they were outrebounded 39-12 by the huge Hoyas, losing by 20 points.

The school nurse took my blood pressure yesterday, and again it was high with the bottom number 92. She wants me to contact my physician, which I will do, but I also ordered two books on lowering blood pressure naturally. One thing I definitely need to do is get more exercise. I have only been going to the YMCA on weekends, and rarely walking during the week, because I get home from school so late. That's not good. Perhaps my diet needs some adjusting too. It is not bad but probably could be better.

Sunday, Jan 21: Yesterday we went with Alan and Denise and another couple to George Street Playhouse in New Brunswick to see a play with the unusual title *I Am My Own Wife*. It was definitely worthwhile seeing. The lead actor Mark Nelson played all 35 roles in basically one costume, doing an outstanding job. His performance alone was worth seeing the entire play, although the storyline itself was very interesting and thought-provoking. It was the biography of a transvestite who lived in Berlin during the Nazi and Communist regimes, maintaining a museum of 19th century memorabilia, such as clocks and original wax recording rolls. Afterwards we went to a microbrewery for dinner, which was very good (although Jean and I did not try any of their beer). I had moon pie, which was basically shepard's pie with ground lamb instead of beef, and Jean had moon pad thai which was stir-fried noodles, vegetables, chicken, and curry. New Brunswick is a very nice town, which I did not expect, although Jean said she has read about its revival in recent years.

Tuesday, Jan 23: I distributed the latest teachers' association newsletter today, containing my editorial attacking both the town council president (who is determined to lower property taxes on the backs of the district's teachers) and the chief negotiator for the administrators and supervisors who supported the Board of Education's scheme by agreeing to have his members make token payments toward their medical coverage in exchange for buying back one unused vacation day at full cost, which will more than offset their medical premium payment. While the administrators and supervisors come out ahead on that exchange, it enables the Board to show the township how they are cutting costs, with the administrators "doing their part" to help out, so now the foot is in the door for teachers to be under considerable pressure to do the same thing. The difference is that we have far inferior medical coverage than the supervisors and administrators, as well as much lower salaries, but the public still sees us as the primary enemy to their high property taxes. I am earning about half of what workers having masters' degrees in

mathematics and 30 years experience are earning in industry, while working approximately the same number of hours per year, except my hours are compacted into 10 months of mostly 50 hour weeks. But fairness to teachers is not one of the issues in New Jersey right now.

Tuesday, Jan 30: I was so tired when I got home from school yesterday, aggravated by a headache all day, that I did no work, merely rested and read all night. That was just a prelude for today though when I got soooo stressed out my blood pressure must have been sky-high while my back bothered me as well. The main culprit was the Board of Education business manager who runs the entire district like a tyrant, even making instructional decisions which she is not qualified to make but which rile both principals and supervisors. The new superintendent has made no attempt to rein her in so far, although my supervisor thinks that will happen soon. I certainly hope so. Right now she is trying to destroy my Indian Culture Club dance Friday night by refusing to send a check for our deejay since he has no state vendor number. *argh!!*

February 2007

Saturday, Feb 3: Yesterday was perhaps my craziest day at school all year! It started 2nd period when I convinced the principal not to call an incompetent teacher into his office in front of a building rep—me, of course!—and berate him for his lazy, uncaring, unprofessional attitude. I asked the principal if that would make the teacher change—“No,” he said—and whether it would cause him to bad-mouth the principal to the entire faculty—“Of course it would”—so what could it possibly accomplish by doing it? Instead, I suggested he put the teacher on a list of potential trades to the school across town.

During my 6th period class the security guard came to my class and told me I needed to phone the principal immediately. Then I was sent coverage for my 7th period class while I went to the main office. When I got there, the principal and vice-principal told that me that a complaint had been filed against a long-time teacher by a female student which was being investigated. Until that time he was not to go to class or contact any students.

I spent the next 2 periods trying futilely to keep the teacher calm, but he is so emotional that he had a severe panic attack. I immediately called the nurse who was not much more successful calming him. His blood pressure was so high she wanted to call an ambulance, but he begged her not to do so. Even when the police detective came and absolved him of both illegal and unprofessional behavior—it was all an over-reaction by a student’s mother to a harmless pat on the back—he was still a total wreck. This is what teaching has come to, unfortunately. Any student or parent can file a complaint against any teacher, and the unfortunate teacher is immediately under suspicion until proven innocent.

After school I went to a *Target Teach* planning session, then to the chiropractor, which I desperately needed after such a stressful week. After that I met Jean at Olive Garden for a good dinner, then I returned to school for the Indian Culture Club dance. It was snowing all night, so I was a bit apprehensive driving home 25 miles afterwards. The roads were fine until I reached my neighborhood on top of a mountain. Jean and Andy were shoveling several inches of snow

off the driveway when I got home at 11pm.

Today was a better day, since I got a lot of work done. This evening I am going to the annual *Teacher of the Year* dinner which Chris won, a very deserving choice. At least I am sitting with several people I know and like, so it should be an enjoyable evening.

Tuesday, Feb 6: Sunday Jean and I picked up Fei Fei at the airport at 4:15pm and took her to her new apartment in Princeton. We went to dinner at Tiger Noodle, where Fei Fei and I had many meals when she was a Princeton student, while now she is returning as a faculty member. We helped her organize the stuff she brought on the plane with her, but most of her stuff is being shipped slowly from Illinois. This was the first time we have seen her since Italy, but hopefully that will change since she is back in NJ permanently now.

Yesterday was *Target Teach*, so I went to dinner with the group. Chris insisted on paying for me because she appreciated my nominating letter for her *Teacher of the Year* award so much, plus she was grateful that I attended the ceremony Saturday. That was very nice of her.

Fei Fei's furniture was shipped to her apartment today, but she had to go to Newark for some citizenship paperwork, so Mark house-sat for her inbetween driving her to the train station and picking her up afterwards.

Thursday, Feb 8: Last night was the 8th grade parents' orientation, so all we lead teachers were there to answer questions for the parents. Chris and I went to dinner at Applebees for the second time in 3 nights, this time at the invitation of the supervisors (another free meal for me! ☺).

The annual *Year in Review* issue of **Locus** came today, which is always dangerous since it lists the recommended books by several reviewers whose taste overlaps with mine. So far the only book I have added to my *Recommended Reading* list is Karl Schroeder's **Sun of Suns**, which is the first of a trilogy, so I do not need to worry about buying it for awhile. He is an author who has gotten generally strong reviews for his first 3 novels, but somehow has escaped my notice until now.

Sunday, Feb 11: Jean and I went to the YMCA yesterday morning, after which she tutored Janel and Michelle. Meanwhile I drove to Princeton to get four huge boxes of imported Italian china which were wedding presents for Fei Fei and Silvio. We put them into my car, and brought them home where Andy helped us move them into our basement. Fei Fei stayed with us overnight, so the four of us chatted a lot. For dinner Andy made chicken mozzarella (there was not enough parmigiana in the recipe to call it chicken parmigiana!) and two packages of gourmet ravioli which Jean got from Steve's cousin who runs a frozen ravioli company as a gift for the two of them towing his wood splitter back to him using Jean's car.

This afternoon Jean, Fei Fei and I drove to Edison where she caught a train to Trenton and ultimately to Washington D.C. for a two-day conference at which she is a speaker. While I envy Fei Fei's position as a faculty member at Princeton, she is under a lot of pressure to keep her name in the forefront of her field if she wants to earn tenure in the pressure cooker atmosphere at Princeton. Perhaps it is better that I am not talented enough to be a scholar, but have become a lowly high school teacher where I have am a moderately big fish in a very small pond.

Tuesday, Feb 13: Predictions are for a major snow and ice storm tonight through tomorrow, starting overnight tonight. Fei Fei returned to Princeton today on a train from Washington D.C., while Mark and Kate were in NYC for the taping of a Rachel Ray show late this afternoon. Fortunately they all got back safely before the worst of the snowstorm arrived.

Thursday, Feb 15: Yesterday's snow day gave me a chance to catch up on some schoolwork. Areas east of us had considerable icing, but since it was colder by us we had 6" of fairly light snow instead. The new snowblower did a good job dealing with the snow overall.

Saturday, Feb 17: I have a four-day *Winter Break* weekend, with lots of work to do, including preparing my taxes, sorting through my 2006 receipts, doing a bunch of estate work, grading 2 tests, writing 2 other tests, proofreading the AP Calc final exam, and taking my car for a diagnostic test to hopefully determine why the air-conditioning lights have been flashing since I had some bodywork done after the accident.

I started reading Jack McDevitt's novel **Infinity Beach** this week, and I realized one of the reasons I enjoy his fiction so much is that it resembles the type of sf I like to write myself: an exotic futuristic setting which is both wondrous and thought-provoking; a historical mystery not based on a crime but on trying to unravel historical facts or legends; character and plot-oriented rather than an action/adventure thriller. The authors who influence my writing are such people as Robert Silverberg (whose love of history shines through such novels as **Nightwings** and **A Time of Changes**), and Poul Anderson (particularly in his *Polesotechnic League* stories whose settings and alien beings are truly wondrous, although the plots are more problem-solving than mysteries), but recently I should add Jack McDevitt to the list.

Monday, Feb 19: Today and tomorrow are a short *Winter Break*, so I have two extra days to relax and catch up on my work. Tonight Mark is meeting David, Stephen and me at the Seton Hall-Pittsburgh basketball game.

The *Rachel Ray Show* that Mark and Kate saw last Wednesday was televised this morning at 10am. Jean and I watched the show with Drew (who came over with an "airline emergency" that needed our faster internet access) and saw several close-ups of Kate and Mark. I graded some tests so I did not waste the entire hour for 5 seconds. ☺

Wednesday, Feb 21: Mark and Kate signed up for an "Excess Inventory" week through our TAN vacation plan, a cost of \$198 for a week in Myrtle Beach during their Spring Break. I am anxious to see how they like the accommodations.

Friday, Feb 22: Here I am sitting in a cold house at 9:10am waiting for a furnace repairman to arrive. I got home late last night (8:00pm) after the *Indian Culture Club* rehearsal, so I decided to sleep until 6:20am rather than my usual 5:40am. When I awoke the house was freezing. Jean went into the basement and saw the bottom of the furnace leaking, but since she teaches all day I needed to stay home. I told the secretary in charge of assigning substitute classes that I would come in as soon as the furnace was repaired, and also to tell the vice-principal that I will definitely be there at 6pm for *Yaadein*, the music-and-dancing show that the ICC kids have been planning and rehearsing for the past month. Now I am catching up on some computer work while waiting for the repairman.

Saturday, Feb 23: The furnace was fixed by 11pm, so I returned in school in time to teach my afternoon classes, including AP Calculus (in which I am behind the pace I need to complete the BC curriculum in time to review adequately for the May exam) and AP Statistics. Afterwards I sat with the Asian-American Club (which is a different, but overlapping, club than ICC) awhile. They have finished making origami cranes and are now stringing them in preparation for our fundraising sale in another week. Afterwards I sat with the ICC kids in the auditorium while they were decorating for the show.

Then I went to the chiropractor before meeting Jean for dinner at Charley Brown's. We both ate stuffed chicken breast, which was good, plus their salad bar includes chopped chicken liver and delicious rye bread, which was the highlight of the meal. ☺

The ICC show *Yaadein* was very good, and at least to me looked as well-done as any high school production run by a professional director. It was totally conceived and directed by the ICC officers who are a very motivated and reliable group: president Dipa, vice-president Akanksha, (who was the driving force behind *Yaadein*), Secretary Dhara, Treasurer Kruti, and Publicist Shweta. This was their third successful event of the year, the others being the November family dinner, and the recent dance. I am certainly putting a lot of night hours with this club, but these kids are certainly worth it.

Fortunately this is not a particularly busy weekend. My main chore is grading the AMC 12 contest (David already graded AMC 10) and updating the standings.

Monday, Feb 26: A major snowstorm predicted for last night into today ended up being only a few inches and a delayed opening only. Fei Fei had a 7am plane flight to Utah where she was speaking at a conference at 4pm their time. There were over 100 cancellations at Newark, and her flight was delayed several hours, so she arrived barely in time to speak.

Tuesday, Feb 27: Andy got a job offer today from Embassy Suites. He has a meeting with them Thursday to discuss the job, including benefits and salary. Jean has heard very good things about Embassy Suites as an employer from two friends, one who worked there for several years before going into teaching, and one who has two sons working for them. So that's encouraging. Andy is a good worker who is liked and appreciated by his employers, which is also encouraging. We'll see how this all works out.

The Grievance Chairperson, is running for president of the teachers' association, so I am safe, thank heavens. I certainly do not need additional time-consuming duties and responsibilities in my life right now!

Cast of Characters

Alan & Denise	our closest friends who were our neighbors when we lived in Hopatcong
Andy	our older son who recently graduated from East Stroudsburg University
Ceil	Jean's 86-year old aunt who is the spryest senior I know!
David	my younger brother who teaches math; his wife Karen, daughter Jillian
Fei Fei	former student of mine, now a close family friend I refer to as my "daughter"
Janel	my niece, a junior in college, and her sister Michelle, a college sophomore
Jean	my wife
Kathy & Dave	our friends and neighbors
Mark	our younger son, a senior at The College of NJ; his girlfriend Kate
Rick & Barb	our longtime friends; their son Chris
Silvio	Fei Fei's husband
Stephen	my second brother, his wife Doreen, sons Chris, Kyle and Ryan
Steve	our neighbor, his wife Pat
Tom	a former teacher who is active in the Audubon Society



On the Lighter Side

A bit of PUNishment for you

I wondered why the baseball was getting bigger. Then it hit me.

Police were called to a daycare where a three-year-old was resisting a rest.

Did you hear about the guy whose whole left side was cut off? He's all right now.

The roundest knight at King Arthur's round table was Sir Cumference.

To write with a broken pencil is pointless.

When fish are in schools they sometimes take debate.

A thief who stole a calendar got twelve months.

A thief fell and broke his leg in wet cement. He became a hardened criminal.

Thieves who steal corn from a garden could be charged with stalking.

We'll never run out of math teachers because they always multiply.

When the smog lifts in Los Angeles, U C L A.

The math professor went crazy with the blackboard. He did a number on it.

The professor discovered that her theory of earthquakes was on shaky ground.

The dead batteries were given out free of charge.

If you take a laptop computer for a run you could jog your memory.

A dentist and a manicurist fought tooth and nail.

A bicycle can't stand alone; it is two tired.

The optometrist fell into his lens grinder and made a spectacle of himself.

Time flies like an arrow; fruit flies like a banana.

A backward poet writes inverse.

In a democracy it's your vote that counts; in feudalism, it's your Count that votes.

A chicken crossing the road: poultry in motion.

With her marriage she got a new name and a dress.

Show me a piano falling down a mine shaft and I'll show you A- flat miner.

When a clock is hungry it goes back four seconds.

The guy who fell onto an upholstery machine was fully recovered.

A grenade fell onto a kitchen floor in France, resulted in Linoleum Blownapart.

You are stuck with your debt if you can't budge it.

He broke into song because he couldn't find the key.

A boiled egg is hard to beat.

He had a photographic memory which was never developed.

His parents thought he was a budding genius, but he turned out to be a blooming idiot.

A plateau is a high form of flattery.

Those who get too big for their britches will be exposed in the end.

When you've seen one shopping center you've seen a mall.

When she saw her first strands of gray hair, she thought she'd dye.

Bakers trade bread recipes on a knead to know basis.

Santa's helpers are subordinate clauses.

Acupuncture: a jab well done

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A YOUNG LADY was dating two men—a dairy farmer and a poet. She had trouble deciding if she should marry for butter or for verse.

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There were 2 lines in heaven, one for henpecked husbands and one for non-henpecked. In the henpecked line were hundreds of men. In the other line was a solitary little man.

Some of the men in the other line asked, “Why are you standing there?”

“My wife told me to.”