

July 4, 2012

Happy Independence Day. Are you sweltering where you are? New York has been hot and sticky the past couple of weeks. We're paying for the unusually mild winter that we had. S'okay. It's summer.

That means I'm on summer break. Finally. It's been a good school year, but it's a lot longer than what I got used to when I taught college. Since it's my first year back at elementary level, I'm taking the rest of the summer off, not going to any more workshops or professional development stuff this year. I still meet every now and then with a couple of other science teachers to plan what we'll do next year, and I have some assignments and projects to develop, but basically I can set my own hours and work when I feel like it rather than when I'm required to. I wish we could let our students have that same freedom.

Last week was my last summer workshop: a technology workshop. Now, I'm not particularly sold on using technology in the classroom—good teaching is good teaching and bad teaching is bad teaching regardless of whatever electronic toys you incorporate into your class—but the Dalton School, where I teach, offers a great deal. Once every three years each teacher is invited to attend the school's technology workshop. If you attend, you get a new MacBook Pro computer to keep. I got a new laptop computer and then spent last week learning the different programs on it. By now you've probably gotten a couple of emails from me announcing some YouTube videos that I posted; my new laptop has a built-in video camera and video production software, and I've had a lot of fun messing around with it. (If I've somehow overlooked you, here's a link to my most recent video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QLzR0N3IIGU> .) Many, many years ago I dreamed of becoming a filmmaker. That dream got snowed under, buried by the practical demands of everyday life and the need to bring in a regular paycheck. But now the snow is beginning to melt a little. I may never be able to do this professionally, but I can certainly play around in my spare time and have some fun. A lot of fun, actually. I may have to let the composing go on a brief vacation while I explore this new direction, but I don't think anyone will complain about that.

Michele and I continue to explore NYC. Just last week we went down to the old Fulton Fish Market, which is now a park/mall/tourist center with restaurants, shops and often, open-air entertainment. It was a hot summer evening. We watched some outdoor line dancers, wandered among the piers a bit, and then around dark we headed inland to the financial district. We walked past the Stock Exchange and the Barclay's Bank building and turned into a maze of short, narrow, winding, streets, among the oldest in New York City, bounded on both sides with three- and four-story buildings from the early- to mid-eighteenth century. We turned right at a street corner onto Stone Street and discovered a scene right out of southern Europe: a three-block stretch of cobblestone lane between late-18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup>-century federal-style pubs and restaurants, impassible to traffic because of the long, communal picnic tables filled with people eating, drinking, visiting and generally just clogging the entire stretch of road. We had no idea such a place

existed, but that's no big surprise. Just about every time we go into Manhattan we encounter something that we'd never seen before.

We also try to take advantage of as much of the free and cheap entertainment in Manhattan that we can work into our schedules. There are many different programs that offer reduced-price tickets for concerts and plays, and I'm on the email lists of several of them. Michele and I went to a comedy club for my birthday, and we saw "Anything Goes" on Broadway to celebrate hers, (which I enjoyed a lot more than I expected to). Recently, we saw the Phillip Glass Ensemble give a free concert at a park on the Hudson River in southern Manhattan. When there's nothing else to do, just walking around looking at buildings and public sculptures is a worthwhile experience. Lately I've been marveling at all the buildings built with Indiana limestone, and I really enjoy seeing all the fossils in them. Most of the buildings are old enough now that the limestone is beginning to weather, which makes the fossils stand out in relief and easy to spot.

Unlike Manhattan, which is glamorous, imposing, cacophonous, and screams of economic stratification, Queens, where we live, is not so exciting. It's mostly working class families, and nowadays New York City working-class families don't have a lot of time for diversions. I've already written about what an amazing melting pot Sunnyside is, but to give you an example, here's a partial list—just off the top of my head; I'm sure I'll leave some out—of all the different ethnic pubs and restaurants that are within walking distance of our apartment: Afghani, Argentine, Bangladeshi, Czech, Chinese, Colombian, Ecuadorian, Filipino, French, German, Greek, Irish, Italian, Malaysian, Mexican, Lebanese, Moroccan, Peruvian, Romanian, Thai, Turkish, and Vietnamese. As I said, I probably left a few out. Now, what I'm about to say will probably make some people angry—I know some people are very resentful of immigrants—but when I see people of all races and ethnicities living together peacefully, it makes me very optimistic about the future of our country, or at least about New York City. The people who immigrate to the United States, whether legally or illegally, are not the dregs or failures of their countries. Rather, they're some of the brightest and most ambitious. Lazy people do not travel 3,000, 8,000 or 15,000 miles across the world in search of a better life for themselves and their children. We have some of the most determined and adventurous people in the world coming to Sunnyside, interacting with other peoples of other cultures, all working hard and trying to better themselves. The United States is the world's brain drain, and that's got to be good for our country in the long run. It certainly creates a lot of problems in the here and now, but it seems to me that the benefits of having all these bright, entrepreneurial people living together, exchanging ideas, working hard and raising families far outweigh the inconveniences, insecurities and expenses of accommodating these people. When I see a woman in a sari sitting on a park bench talking to another woman in a serape and bowler, a man in a salwar kameez and another with a brogue, red hair and freckles, it makes optimistic about this country's future gene pool.

I just wish they wouldn't litter so much.

Michele is doing well. Her work comes in fits and starts, and right now it's in a fit—she's in the middle of an eight-day run of seven twelve-hours days, including two

overnights. An incredible, punishing schedule, but then she may have two or three weeks without any work. That's the nature of the doula business. We're just glad that she's getting work, because people really like her and keep asking her back, and her business will surely grow over time, (although right now there doesn't seem to be a lot of need for growth). When she's not working she spends a lot of time quilting, along with everything involved in maintaining the homestead.

Isaac and Corina are both in Thailand at the moment. Isaac has been in Phuket, an island in southern Thailand, since August. He's working for a newspaper there, writing a SCUBA-diving column, editing other columns and doing page layouts. He seems to be doing well. Corina has been in Cambodia the past six weeks, doing an internship with Ubelong, a non-government human rights organization. She's been following the trials of some of the former Khmer Rouge leaders, a very delicate and controversial issue there. She's completed her work with Ubelong and is taking a little time to travel. Right now, as I write this, she is most likely on her way by bus from Bangkok to Phuket to see Isaac. Julius is also doing well. He still lives in Washington D.C. and is hopefully being careful riding his new motorcycle.

So that's the news from the Big Apple. I hope you are managing to keep cool where you are. Here in Sunnyside, we are fighting valiantly against the temptation to break down and buy an air conditioner for our apartment, a struggle against which I am increasingly less likely to emerge victorious as, each day, the temperature rises above ninety degrees. Looking forward to the next cool breeze.

Best—though not necessarily warmest—wishes,

Glenn