

December 23, 2012

This is the final edition of Sunnyside Life. Michele and I are moving from Queens. We are buying a house in Ossining, NY—we close on December 28—and plan to move there on the 29th.

Queens is ugly and depressing. The Sunnyside area probably looked beautiful in the 1930s, when everything was newish. (Actually, I think some parts of it, like the Sunnyside Gardens area, are still very pretty.) But 80 years of heavy use has taken its toll on it, and most of Sunnyside, indeed, most of Queens and Brooklyn, is dog-eared, stressed, and encrusted with grime. Plus, there's no hint of nature, just endless concrete, steel, glass and asphalt.

I'll miss the diversity of people. It has been very heartening to see how so many different ethnicities and religions can all live together in peace. I'll miss all the wonderful ethnic grocery stores and restaurants. I'll miss the convenience to Manhattan and the spectacular view of the Empire State and Chrysler buildings from our street corner. I'll even miss the flying rats (tourists call them "pigeons") skittering among my legs on my way to the subway each morning.

But I won't miss all the litter, the endless noise, and the anomie that, ironically, comes from living among so many people. I won't miss the thin layer of windblown grit from the construction at Sunnyside Yards that covers everything not in motion and probably lines the insides of my lungs. And I won't miss trying to block out all the decaying industrial ugliness that surrounds me anytime I walk more than 5 or 10 blocks from my apartment.

Michele and I spent a good part of last summer exploring upstate New York looking for a small town to relocate to. We saw several possibilities, but all of them posed significant challenges and uncertainties. Would I be able to find work? Would fracking come to the area and poison our well? Would we see our kids as much if we moved further away from them? So we reached a sort of compromise and settled on Ossining.

Ossining is about 35 miles north of Manhattan. It's a small town; it's surrounded not by countryside, as I would have preferred, but by other towns. So it's more like a quasi-small town: a somewhat distinct, tiny area cut out of a much larger swath of the endless NYC suburb that spreads out over New Jersey, New York and Connecticut. It's on the Hudson River and offers beautiful views of the opposite shoreline in the distance. And it's very hilly, so there's no monotonous grid of tidy, middle class houses. The roads are windy (and confusing), there's a lot of green space and there's some nearby forest. Plus the Hudson River at the base of the hill.

We'll have our own house with a yard. It needs a lot of work, so I'll have less time for composing, at least initially. But we'll be able to garden, which is something we both missed more than we expected to when we moved here. I'll continue to teach at the Dalton School. There's a train that takes around 40 minutes to get from Ossining to 125th St. in Manhattan, and from there it's another 8-10 minutes on the subway to work.

Financially, it seems to make sense for us. My traveling expenses will be much greater, but our mortgage payments, including taxes and insurance will be lower than what we're paying now in rent, so they'll sort of balance out. But now we'll be gaining equity, whereas when we were renting the money was just gone—pfft! Plus, we'll be in a

house with a yard in a quiet neighborhood. With neighbors, maybe. So basically I'm trading time for space and ownership—taking longer to get to work in exchange for having a nicer place to call home.

Michele is very excited about moving. Living in Queens has been especially hard on her, and she feels like she's hardening toward the world because of it. Moving to Ossining will give her the chance to get her hands back into the Earth and to become part of a community again. So between our upcoming move and the anticipation of having Corina and Julius and their significant others visit for Christmas, Michele is in good spirits.

Isaac is in Thailand and won't be able to join us this year. We really miss him. But he is doing well at the newspaper in Phuket; he was recently promoted to manager of the news division. Corina is one semester away from graduating. She and a friend from Bloomington are going to Costa Rica for a couple of weeks over Christmas break. Julius is doing well in D.C. and now rooting for the Washington Redskins—boo!—and the Denver Broncos now that Peyton Manning—yea!—is their quarterback.

I still teach science to 4th and 5th graders and coach one of the Dalton School's robotics teams. My composing output has gone way down since completing my second symphony last spring—it's not unusual to have a letdown after finishing a major piece—but I recently completed a set of four choral pieces featuring the poetry of an old friend of mine from Bloomington as lyrics.

I hope this has been a good year for you. I wish you a happy holiday, or, I hope you had a happy holiday, depending on which you celebrate, and I offer my best wishes for a happy, healthy and prosperous new year. Enjoy the season.

Glenn