

2015 Holiday Greetings from Laurel and Brian

This year we had trouble dealing with someone in our household who is at an “awkward age.” Namely, *ourselves* — since it’s become clear to us that Awkward Age is the entire period between birth and death.

With Brian being 67, and Laurel, um, younger, we’ve started looking at retirement communities. After all, at some point the insanity of maintaining our non-easy-care ten acres will settle into our steadily aging brains and bodies.

Unless the boundary between *crazy* and *sane* becomes blurred. Or maybe, doesn’t even exist. We’re talking state-of-mind here, not objective reality.

We remember a woman telling us a supposedly true tale of a man who had a terminal tumor that affected the part of his brain which enabled him to know that he was going to die. So he’d walk out of a bad-news doctor visit all happy!

Crazy or sane? We don’t know. Just seems like a good way to go.

Here’s the thing that bothers us about retirement communities: we’ve found they’re full of *old people*! Creeps us out. Maybe we both have a brain tumor that prevents us from feeling we’re old. If so, that’s great.

For a long time we thought our rural house and property eventually would (1) crush us, or (2) make us happy. But why not ditch the “or” for “and”?

Some retirement communities we’ve visited do just about *everything* for you. “To hell with that,” we say.

Brian enjoys walking on the edge of our roof with a backpack blower, getting leaves out of the gutters. Laurel likes to creep through the trees and brush, looking for poison oak and blackberry starts.

Recently we were talking with a neighbor guy who had an attitude like Brian’s: “I don’t want to live in a place where I can’t pee in my front yard.” Right on, brother! Spoken like a true lover of country living.

Of course, it’s socially acceptable for dogs to pee pretty much wherever they want outside. But not to be off-leash, another reason we’re reluctant to move. ZuZu runs free on most of her dog walks: a joy for her, though not for the squirrels.

ZuZu has been getting all trained-up via classes Laurel has been taking at the Willamette Humane Society, where she still volunteers as a dog walker. Many tricks are in her canine repertoire, though our Talented Furry Child sucks at item recognition. Like between three dog toys — *ball, bone, ring*.

Most mornings our living room echoes with Laurel saying, “Bring the ball, ZuZu... No, the *ball*... the *ball*... Yes! ... Good dog!... You brought the ball!”

Mommy is so proud. While Brian sips his coffee, thinking, “If a monkey typing randomly can produce the works of Shakespeare in an infinite time, ZuZu can fetch the right one of three items in a minute.” (However, ZuZu excels at searching the house for a vanilla-scented toy!)

Our citizen activism is still at a high level. Cranky Old People like us are helping to change the world, one shaky, drooling step at a time.

(over)

Brian had a logo made for his Strange Up Salem Facebook page, which has gotten almost 2,200 “likes” from people who realize how desperately their town needs a big dose of strangeness. (There’s good reasons Oregon’s capital is referred to as So-Lame.)

Now he can wear a Strange Up Salem t-shirt and cap, and drink coffee from a Strange Up Salem mug, when he writes his rants against the irritating imbecilic idiocy of what the right-wing Mayor and City Council are doing *now*. Naturally, given his 45 years of daily meditation and commitment to all-accepting mindfulness, Brian does this with a loving intention.

Likewise, Laurel doesn’t dislike religious people. *Especially* those who are reading this Holiday Letter. Love you!

But she’s gone on a secular scientific crusade (oops, awkward word) this year. Laurel started a discussion group called Freethinkers/Skeptics of Salem, which meets monthly. They dance naked around a fire in the moonlight, drunkenly singing pagan chants.

Well, not really. (The group would have more members if this happened.)

They just talk about what it is like to be an unbeliever in a society where religiosity is all-pervasive. After all, this country would be much more likely to elect a Muslim as president than an atheist (disturbingly, a large number of Americans think we already have).

Celeste, Brian’s daughter, and her family have moved from the Studio City area south to Laguna Niguel in Orange County. Yes, *Orange County*, the place where progressives like Celeste are loathe to live.

Except when they move there and love it!

During our visit to see them in their new spiffy suburban house, we were struck by how perfect everything seems to be in their area. No litter. No ugly signs. No homeless people on the streets. Just neat, tidy, and clean almost everywhere the eye alights.

“Come live down here,” Celeste said to us, semi-seriously. “You can baby-sit Evelyn whenever you want.”

Evelyn being our eight year-old granddaughter who, like most kids these days, strikes us as mature beyond her years, especially regarding her ability to use an iPad and iPhone, and soon will be fully capable of grandparent-sitting.

Which would sound pretty damn good — if we weren’t so insanely attached to where we are: rainy, boring, messy Salem, and our challenging rural life on ten overgrown acres.

Where a man can pee in the front yard, a woman can roam the woods, and a dog can run free. Sweet! May your life be as crazily enjoyable, in 2016 and beyond.

*So many gods, so many creeds.
So many paths that wind and wind.
When just the art of being kind
Is all this sad world needs.
— Ellen Wheeler Wilcox —*