

The Fourth Chapter of my Life – Ukraine

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Separation – November 2006

The many things that tend to hold a quarter-century marriage together did not work in our case. Not love, not mutual needs, not financial considerations, not the prospect of grandchildren, not mutual friends. Probably most important, the fear of the unknown did not offset my certainty that there was no future in remaining together and the conviction that my three children would give me no grandchildren - my line, my parents' and my grandparents' line would die out if I depended on them.

I rented a townhouse in Rockville, Maryland with the intention of finding younger male roommates who might help introduce me to the singles scene. That was my first misconception. Although I advertised everywhere, there were simply no young men looking for houses to share. There were a lot of women. I eventually chose two attractive young women, Lan, a Vietnamese, and Christie, a Salvadorena. I took the big room and paid almost half the rent.

The shortage of young men was striking. I had hoped to meet people who would introduce me to the dating scene, or even better, who might have slightly older lady friends to whom they could introduce me. This simply never happened. My conclusion is that young men in the Washington area, by and large, are simply not that terribly engaged in seeking mates.

I had run the thought of divorce around in my head for several years before actually doing it. My conclusion was that it would be best to make it clean – simply to disappear from Mary Ann's world. Inasmuch as her world and mine scarcely

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overlapped in any case, I was able to do this successfully. I was the churchgoer, and I told Betty McWhorter, our priest, that I intended to find another mate and start another family, one with the promise of grandchildren. I likewise let my fellow members of the choir know exactly what I was looking for in the hopes that they might help me.

Not wanting to force people to take sides, I did not make contact with any of Mary Ann's family after the split. Though I am confident no way of handling it would have led to another outcome, the fact is that none of them have talked to me since.

I certainly did not want to talk to Mary Ann's friends in the neighborhood. We had held several of their hands as they went through various divorces. The model seems to be: woman leaves her good-for-nothing husband and takes the children and the lion's share of the community property and whatever alimony she can squeeze out. For me to be the one who chose to leave was breaking precedent. To leave on principle, not for another woman, and not for an obvious cause such as infidelity, was unfathomable.

I struck out all around in trying to find people to help me get a new start. What I was doing was simply too bizarre, too outside the ken of all I knew in Washington. I was on my own. One member of the church choir, a lady distinguished in my mind as the mother of about the only two successful boys among my children's acquaintances, did suggest she might introduce me, but it never happened.

I was certainly not joining a group of peers who were looking for wives. The Beatles got it right about people 64 years old. They aren't looking, they aren't interested. Even guys a generation younger seemed to be palpably uninterested. I had to learn everything from scratch.

I had several assets. I was in incredibly good physical shape, working out every day on an exercise bicycle and a weight machine. Given that the husband always makes out poorly in an American divorce, I did not do too badly. I had contributed far more than half to our community property, and came out with something less than half. It was still more than enough. Beyond that, the process was relatively quick and without much acrimony. I had a beautiful car – a BMW Z8. Also, by the way, a Honda Accord and a Ford Windstar that I didn't need.

Dating in Washington

Where to start? This is the Internet age. I joined a couple of singles clubs, Professionals in the City and a Jewish singles group. The first is a well-run organization with great number of events for singles: language clubs, wine tastings, affinity groups, vacations, galas such as the New Year's dance, and speed dating. If it were going to happen, this should have been the way it worked. I did have a number of pleasant conversations with both men and women, but nothing substantial enough even to lead to a date. I did take a woman home from the Jewish singles one night, and regretted it. There is a certain pathos about ladies past their prime. They never knew what they wanted when it was theirs for the asking in a seller's market, and they do not handle well the transition into a buyer's market.

I wrote some very clever come-ons on Craigslist and had some interesting online dialogues. However, the photos were almost universally deceiving. I met more be BBW's (broadly built women – shorthand for 200 pounds and up) than I might have imagined existed. Only one thing I could say in their favor – they did sound like they wanted to get married.

One Craigslist dodge did work somewhat. I bought tickets to the ballet and symphony, and advertised that I had an extra seat. I met a couple of nice women, well beyond childbearing age but good company. One was a Moldavian named Sylvia Bradu. She took a sisterly interest in me and did get me to go out shopping and improve my wardrobe. Another was a highly intelligent, charming be BBW. We had a lovely conversation, but conversation is not what I was looking for.

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I had been working as a substitute teacher off and on since retiring in 1998. I continued to answer the call for Edmund Burke School in Washington DC. There were a fair number of single teachers there, but unfortunately they are pretty much in the teacher mold. There universally liberal, somewhat feminist, and frankly not that bright for the most part. There was a skinny English teacher named Elizabeth that I fought with myself about asking out for about three months, but my cowardly, or merely sensible half got the better of it. I never did.

Amidst all of this failure, I did actually meet some girls. I remained a regular at the Little Falls Starbucks where I had been going for almost a decade. Laura Harding, an attractive mother of a kid about 14, was on the periphery of the group. She worked as a singer, mostly church stuff. That is a recipe for no money at all. Also, her life was rather discombobulated in general. I thought that she might feel a need for a male presence to straighten things out. Absolutely not. She would accept my help and friendship for her son Caspian, but made it pretty clear that there was no romance in the offing. Girls are funny. My friend Jim Hoover, fighting drug and alcohol problems and without a penny to his name, got closer to her than I did. I surmise that he offered no threat to her control of her own life.

There were not any young women in St. Patrick's Episcopal Church. Young women did not generally go to church. I poked my head in a couple of other churches such as Fourth Presbyterian, which I had attended in the 70s, and even a couple of synagogues. I'm not sure I was up to the hypocrisy, but there was nothing to even tempt me. There was, however, an attractive divorcée at St. Patricks in her early 50s named Crystal. She had the loveliest, clearest blue eyes imaginable and used them to devastating effect. She told me as we went out that many of the married men in church had put the moves on her. It may even be true. What turned out to be true beyond any measure of doubt was that she was a manipulative little vixen. Though she was living in in a million-dollar house and dressed to the nines, I invariably wound up paying for dinner and even paid for a vacation for which she had agreed to split the cost. Later, after I had been to Ukraine, she had the audacity to explain to me how those Slavic women would clean me out. No, she was the master. Incredibly, she had a boyfriend even as I was trying to see her, but she assured me that if I wanted to marry her she would dump him. No sale! I only regret that I stuck around too long.

I had always liked to dance, and signed up for dance lessons that the DuShor Studio in Bethesda shortly after getting single. My instructor, Adrienne, was an attractive woman but made it abundantly clear that ours was only a business relationship. We really had nothing to talk about anyhow. There were not too many eligible women there. I did hit on one woman, an assistant professor from the Washington area who was teaching in Indiana. A progressive, feminist, yada yada... all the stuff that I don't like, but moderately attractive. So I asked. She made it clear that she did not like reptile-skinned old men. Ouch.

Glen Echo Park features dancing on weekend nights. They teach you how to waltz, polka, swing and so on. The admission is cheap and there are quite a few single women. Once again, I never met one that got me terribly excited, but it was pleasant in joining in the conversation. I was doing what I should be doing, meeting people, and coming up with the same results. The people that I wanted to meet simply weren't there.

I had never been a bar drinker in my life, but it seemed like a way to build a social life. I started to visit a couple of bars in downtown DC where I could get into conversations with interesting people. I frequented the Inn at Glen Echo, not far from my former house, where I had been going off and on for years.

I would show up at the Inn in my flashy BMW Z8 sports car. The girls could have cared less, but the guys would badger me to go outside, open the hood, and let them ooh and ahh over the 4.5 liter, 450hp engine. The women at the Inn were quirky. I think that defines what's going on in America. One time one of them wanted to go home one night, and then changed her mind on a triviality. Another time some business woman in her 50s, rather attractive, invited me to

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accompany her to Buenos Aires to act as a translator in a business deal. But – it was when my passport was being renewed. No sale. Either way I would've been just a casual fling. I'm not disappointed that neither of them worked out. I was looking for something serious, and it simply wasn't there.

Thoughts of overseas

I had lived in Vietnam for four years and in Germany for another four, and had traveled rather extensively to Latin America. The women are quite different in each place. In Vietnam they were incredibly available, but culturally so different that it was hard to form a bond. My first wife had been a very Frenchified Vietnamese but we still did not understand one another. Argentines and southern Brazilians are attractive, somewhat Western, but not, however, intellectual. Central American women seem willing enough to marry, but they those I have known both overseas and in America never struck me as interesting partners. A vacation in Costa Rica in spring of 2007 confirmed that opinion. Not enough there to warrant the time and expense.

The German women I had known when I was a bachelor in there in the 1970s had been even less romantic than Americans. The only serious girlfriend I had in 2 1/2 years had been a Hungarian. I came close to marrying Livia, and had I known what the next 30 years held in store I certainly would have. She has been, by the way, happily married since 1977 to an acquaintance of mine who considered himself lucky that I would let such an attractive girl go.

All this while I was, of course, keeping up with the news on the Internet. Like every other male in America I was bombarded with advertisements for Russian brides. I looked at the advertisements and did a little research. But the thing that struck me most was the fact that a woman would be so interested in marriage that she would venture to travel across the Atlantic to meet a guy on the strength of exchanged photographs and translated letters. These women must really want to get married! I actually knew a couple of Russian brides in the US, and the marriages seemed solid enough from the outside.

I reasoned that there must be a lot more to be seen in Russia itself, Moldova or Ukraine, than just what one could find on the Internet. I decided to take a look. I was rather confident in my language abilities. I had at that point learned four foreign languages. How difficult could Russian be? I got the Pimsleur Russian course and started to learn the language via discs in my car stereo. More than that, I started taking private lessons from a woman associated with the Russian Embassy. She was gorgeous, but not whatsoever available.

I looked around for Russian courses overseas. It turns out that Moscow is expensive and the visa is a hassle. Ukraine and Moldova were better bets. Planning to enroll in a course in July, I sent my passport in to be renewed. Bad move! They had just started to require a passport to visit Mexico, and the State Department was swamped. It would take a couple of months to receive it.

I had time, money, freedom to travel and no passport. What to do? It turns out that it does not require passport to take a Caribbean cruise. A cruise is the furthest thing from my nature, but I thought I would give it a try. I signed up for a week in which we would visit Jamaica, Grand Cayman, Mexico and someplace else. The ports of call really made no difference. We were in port only about eight hours. The only thing we saw of real interest was Mayan ruins along the coast.

A cruise is social beyond belief. Lots of drinking and dancing and eating and talking. I'm a pretty good dancer, and I was busy. There were a couple of moderately attractive women, a fortyish mother of two who was quite clearly looking for a husband. I have to confess I set my sights lower. There was a teacher a few years older, unencumbered, who looked like a more likely bet for a week at sea. We got together. As might be expected, she felt the usual cocktail of pleasure, fear,

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guilt, and suspicion. It worked while we were aboard the ship. A few weeks later I flew out to visit her in Phoenix. She was a nice enough hostess, took me to see the Grand Canyon, unwittingly gave me a pretty good insight into Hispanic – American family life and a preview of the real estate crisis already underway in 2007 with ridiculous houses dotting the Phoenix desert. And that interest ended.

Mary Ann and I shook hands on a property settlement in mid August, planning to finalize the divorce within the next month or so. Then she reneged! All of a sudden I was free. I had my passport. I called language schools in Moldova, Odessa and Kyiv. One in Kiev called Nova Mova could take me starting that Monday. I bought my ticket.

Kiev, September 2007

My first month in Kyiv was dedicated to language study. The school, Nova Mova, had found me a daily rental apartment at \$60 per day about one mile south of the center of the city, right on top of a Metro. I was in class about six hours a day and studied another couple.

In my free time and on weekends I walked around. Kiev is beautiful in September. As I write this, the ninth September since, the temperature is in the low 70s, the air is clean, there is a light breeze, the sun is shining and my son is playing in the yard. I loved seeing the mothers with children even as I arrived. Attractive women seemed dedicated to their children. There are lots of parks in town where they could take them to play as they chatted among themselves.

The difference is so profound that I could neither fully appreciate nor articulate it at the time. These kids were in strollers, slings and backpacks. Close to their mothers or caretakers. They were not in car seats. They were playing in the parks, not being shuttled to and fro to lessons in one thing and another. The caretaker was a mother or a grandmother, not hired help. There are few "Latin ladies" of whatever nationality here. Families take care of their own offspring.

Most of all, the women look like women. They don't have tattoos or piercings. They dress to be appreciated. Most of the women of marriageable age are relatively slender. They are polite. They don't swear. They are almost all white. On the latter point, some of the women do have a somewhat Asian cast, probably a legacy of the Mongols.

Kiev is a walking city. Public transportation is outstanding. During that first month I got to know the Metro system quite well. In subsequent trips, and by degrees, I got to know the tramways, city buses and the ubiquitous jitney buses. I got extremely familiar with my map of Kyiv. After a year I would say, without bragging, that I knew the city as well as most people who had been born here.

I walked through the city's two botanical gardens and through its historical quarters. I took pictures. In one odd moment I took a picture of a tow truck lifting and illegally parked car onto a flatbed truck. The cop told me not to take the picture, so I did not. In retrospect that is strange because cops don't act like that, and parking enforcement is nil.

Walking the streets of Kyiv put a grin on my face. Everywhere I went there were pretty girls. If I smiled, they would sometimes smile back. My teachers were agreeable. The shop girls I talked to in my broken Russian were polite and pleasant. Even the jaded roués who hung out with gangsters at the Miami Blue nightclub downstairs in my building seemed pleasant enough.

Within my first week or so I had decided that Kyiv would be my best bet for starting a new life. I would continue studying Russian and do what I could to get involved with life in the city. I returned to the United States and spent the month of October wrapping up the details of the divorce, selling the Honda Accord, and putting my affairs in order in anticipation of a move.

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Returning to Kyiv in November, I got hooked up with the Phoenix School as an English teacher. It brought me in contact with classes of students, generally in their 20s and 30s, predominantly female. That description applied to the teachers as well. It was a place I wanted to be. Along the way I answered an ad in the Kyiv Post newspaper for an English conversation opportunity. The ad was a bit misleading – it turned out to be a public speaking club called Toastmasters. The guy who answered the phone was Mark Taylor. He told me that he could not meet me at the Metro to lead me to that week's meeting, better to come in two weeks. I assured him that I could manage a map and came immediately. It was the beginning of my most important association in Kyiv.

Mark's club, Dnipro Hills, was the most successful in Kyiv with 50 members including about five native speakers. Most of the members were young professionals, exactly the kind of people I wanted to meet. I joined immediately and gave my icebreaking speech in January 2008, on how to get to know children. Toastmasters encourages members to visit other clubs. It was a wonderful opportunity – I became a regular attendee at the Top Talkers and ArtTalkers clubs

Lucy Povaliy, the charming president of ArtTalkers, worked hard to get me to join. The dues were a pittance, so I wound up eventually joining all three clubs. I gave quite a few speeches, many of them more than once. They were happy to have a native speaker on the agenda, and I was happy to broaden my circle of acquaintances in Kyiv.

Meanwhile I was cleaning up affairs in the United States and finalizing my move. E*TRADE, upon learning that I was getting divorced, froze my account so I couldn't transact anything. This was a mighty inconvenience, inasmuch as all my money was there. I needed to ask Mary Ann's help just to get enough to survive. She was a bit chilly about it, but she did come through and do everything I asked, for which I remain grateful. My landlord in Rockville was not so helpful. He did not give any of the help that I asked, and hounded me mercilessly for the rent. I told Lan and Christie that we had to break the lease and move.

I had asked my neighbor, David Strudler, to sell the BMW. He found a buyer in the Netherlands and I was able to put it on a boat when I returned to the United States in March. I also wrapped up the household, sold what furniture I could and gave most of the rest away. I shipped some clothes, kitchen stuff and my bicycle and paintings to Kyiv for the astronomical sum of \$5,000.

Meanwhile I had had trouble with my landlord in Kyiv. I rented an apartment for occupancy in January only to receive an eviction notice in February. Not only was there the pain of moving again, but it cost me the commission of three quarters of a month's rent. I've also written up [that sad story](#) on my website. In any case, I wound up leaving my suitcases with Mark Taylor for the month of March and looked for a new apartment upon my return. I found one at Pushkinskaya 2-4/7 where I would live for four years before being [cheated by that landlady](#). That story is also on my website – there seems to be a pattern here.

It was good to have a stable place. I bought an exercise bicycle and resumed my regime. I also joined a gym where I could work out with weights. I bought a barbecue and invited people over for meals now and then. I became a regular at the Fregat boat rental in Hydropark, going by myself, with friends, and with girls when I found one interested in coming along.

My \$5,000 shipment of household goods finally arrived. Corstens, the Danish freight forwarder tolerated an unbelievable level of corruption. One of their employees was in cahoots with Ukrainian customs and they wanted to suck me for another \$5,000 or so to clear customs. We went back and forth on this issue for a couple of months before I finally asked him to show me where it was, and told them that I would be glad to bring a match and set it all on fire. They tried different ways to shake me down but were eventually unsuccessful. This [tale also appears](#) on my website.

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In January 2008 I started a nonpaid position as the webmaster for the all Ukrainian Association of Pensioners. Though they modeled themselves on the AARP, they had only about 13,000 members and none of the clout. They could not afford to pay a webmaster and were happy to get me for free. I in turn was happy to have a chance to speak Russian every day. I made friends with my boss, Oleg Kravchenko. Of course I looked the girls over – nothing there. I did a fairly creditable job learning the business of being a webmaster and also wound up translating stuff from German and English.

I was not so quick in finding a church connection. There was one very evangelical group, Hillsong, and a second, the International Christian Assembly. The latter was mostly American, but the kind of Americans I would not have sought out back home. I looked a couple times and decided that there was nothing there for me. I also looked in on Christ Church, Anglican, a four block walk from my apartment. That was uninspiring as well. I returned after a year of doing nothing and found a new priest, John Hall, and found a kindred soul in at least one parishioner, Mike Bedwell. I joined. It was a small congregation and they soon put me to work as treasurer, among other things.

It was probably Michael Bedwell who introduced me to the Rotary club. I started attending in the spring of 2009. From its founding in 2006, the club had grown like topsy up to a membership of 50 or so. They were mostly men, mostly middle-aged, doing good works. It struck me as a good place to make contacts. I became increasingly involved, working intensively on their major fundraiser, the Midsummer Night's Dream ball in late June.

In March 2009 I took a package tour of Turkey with a Russian-speaking group. It was trial by fire to live in an entirely Russian medium for a week. The tour was interesting, and one of the other members, a loud Russian Jewess from New York showed me all about bargaining with the Turks. A week in her company was a lesson in itself, fleshing out every stereotype, good and bad, of Eastern European Jews.

All this while I was getting to know the girls at Toastmasters. I invited them out to lunch and over to dinner and one thing in another. Though I did not find a lady love, I did enjoy their company. To borrow Woody Allen's phrase, I knew I was in the right place because I was being turned down by a better class of women. The girls were in their 20s and 30s, an age to start a family of something had worked, and they didn't laugh –my suit seemed at least credible. Several of them were quite well educated: Marina, the PhD candidate in marine biology, Maria, cybernetics and Helen, Japanese. Nothing clicked, and in retrospect it was obviously for the best.

I met some girls teaching. Mary, one of my fellow teachers at Phoenix school, was an amazingly cute young thing of 24 or so. She flirted with me outrageously, but maintained a certain coy distance when I tried to get a little closer. It did not surprise me whatsoever when one day she bid her adieus and was off to Australia to get married. Phoenix had me giving private lessons to some pretty impressive woman as well. Vlaslava was a charming mother of two, happily married and serving as executive assistant to the executive of a flourishing agricultural firm. Sadly, as happens all too often, the company turned out to be a fraud. Five years later I write that she has landed on her feet.

I gave lessons as well to a lawyer named Irena Illchenko. She is a bright, poised woman. Irena dressed nicely but was very demure and composed. I could not figure a way to break through the barrier separating teacher from student. Since the money was not important to me, I finally tried the absolutely most direct, guaranteed to fail approach. I told her she was a very marriageable woman and I was looking for a wife. We met only about twice after that, during which time she attempted to introduced me to another prospective student. I ran into her again last year, six years after our lessons together. She had not changed, and I gather her life and not changed. I would like to say that a shadow of regret passed over her face when I told her I was married with a young son, but if it did, I didn't see it.

I met some other girls as well. I met Anna online. She was sweet enough, but a simple girl in rather transparently

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interested only in security – read, money. There was a redheaded hairdresser with whom I shared a compartment on a train to Zaporozhia. I took her for a day at the beach at Berdyansk. She spoke not a word of English, so the day was a delightful work out for me, in addition to which she was stunning in a bathing suit. But there was nothing there in the long run. I took a course in the 1C accounting software package. I already knew Oracle's accounting; I wanted to know about the package that was in use here in Ukraine. Oksana, the teacher was a slender woman approaching 40. Attractive enough, but one day she tripped over the bicycle in my hall and went absolutely crazy. I have had enough crazy women in my life, and shut her out then and there, increasingly horrified by her stalking phone calls over the next three weeks.

Among the other things I tried in Kyiv was the Russian bride agencies. They are easier to use, of course, locally than remotely. Meeting the girls is absolutely guaranteed. You go to their office and leaf through a large collection of photographs with brief biographies. Choose a few you like and pay something like \$20 or \$30 for an introduction and you are off.

The girls of course see your photograph and biography. I don't think that my 64 years exactly worked in my favor. I dated a small business owner, an obstetrician, and one or two others whose professions I don't remember. There was really nothing there, never a second date. However, I would've been remiss not to gain the experience. Besides that, it gave me an opportunity to practice my social skills and my Russian. I did enjoy some of the women who ran the agencies, and would sit and shoot the breeze with them for an hour or so at a time.

One of the agencies invited me on a yacht trip on the Dnieper, an interesting cultural experience I have written up [here](#).

I did manage a second date with a woman named Liussy. I forget where I met her – it may have been one of these agencies. One sentence on her a little bit later.

Which brings us up to September 2009. I was the president of the Arttalkers Toastmasters club, active in Rotary and the church, and still single despite having come increasingly closer over the past few months to getting into serious relationships with some reasonably credible girls.

Oksana

I was serving on the altar in Christ Church when I first saw Oksana. She was modestly dressed and seated herself demurely in the right bank of pews beside Michael Bedwell.

Comparing notes later, she says that she came to church with a friend she had met learning English at the Ukrainian Education Center and that Michael Bedwell had chatted the two of them up. That must have been October 3, and I must not have been there that week. I do not remember the friend.

Oksana says that Michael bumped into her on the street the following day and invited her to join him at the City Café. She could not accept, but it appears that she connected later. It would've been very much Michael's style to invite her to church, and Oksana herself was quite active in an Orthodox church at that point and was taking advantage of every possible opportunity to speak English. She found Mike to be a charming gentleman, good company and not a threat to a girl such as herself who had only recently celebrated her 30th birthday.

I introduced myself as she chatted with Mike at the coffee after the service. She was an attractive girl, a bit too much makeup for my taste but certainly interesting.

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Oksana showed up again on Tuesday at the Top Talkers Club that, as I recall, was meeting at the Phoenix language center. She must've been in Mike's company again. This time we had an opportunity to chat for a bit and I could see that there was a bit of substance to her. Then she and Mike showed up again at Rotary the following night. This was getting to be a pattern. She and I sat across from each other and had quite a nice conversation.

We ran into each other again at Arttalkers, on Saturday the 17th at the Hud Graf art gallery on Taras Shevchenko. The following day we saw each other at the Dnipro Hills club and again at church. Mike was really bird dogging her pretty effectively, and Oksana and I were getting quite comfortable in each other's company. One of these days, I don't remember which but I think it was a Sunday, we went to a sculpture exhibit at Ukraine house on European Square. My recollection is that Tanya Knyazeva was there as well as Mike. Oksana and I spent a lot of time looking at the sculptures together, including a copy of Rodin's thinker and some weird Dali stuff – a lobster telephone and a woman with drawers coming out of her stomach.

Rotary met every Wednesday, and she was a regular guest of Michael. I note that we went to a Tchaikovsky concert on Thursday the 22nd. My guess is that we went by ourselves. I note that we saw each other at the Arttalkers club on the 24th and then again on the 29th at the City Café where Mike likes to hang out. The 29th is a significant date. I met the previously mentioned Liussy there for dinner, but seem to have wound up talking with Oksana and Mike before and afterward. The situation was starting to come together.

In 2009 there were six quite active English-speaking Toastmasters clubs in Kyiv. They were grouped together in an unofficial Toastmasters area that sponsored speech contests, picnics, and fall and winter dances. The Autumn Ball took place on October 31. Mike escorted Oksana, and I went stag. I had my eye on a couple of Toastmasters, Nastia Lenda among them, but of course did not overlook Oksana. I managed a few dances with each. Oksana was a professional dancer, and I am not so bad myself. We have pictures taken that evening.

The next morning we saw each other over coffee at the City Café with Mike. By this time Oksana had told me a bit about her life, including the fact that in addition to English she was attempting to develop some other work skills such as typing. I told her that I had a typing package on my computer that would teach her to keyboard in both Russian and English. We agreed that she would come on over the next day, Monday evening, to my apartment on Pushkinskaya so I could show her.

We put the computer on the credenza in my living room and I showed her how to hold her hands in order to touch type. Inasmuch as the opportunity was there, I gently put my arms around her in as I guided her hands and breathed just a little bit on the back of her neck. Enough to suggest that my interest might be a little bit other than avuncular. We practiced typing for about 45 minutes and then fell to talking. Oksana was and is one of my favorite people in the world to talk to. We agreed to a real date the following night. At least that's my recollection. Oksana still professes with wide eyes innocence that she had no idea what was on my mind.

We ate at Tsimmes, a Jewish restaurant in Podil. The dinner was great – I had duck – but food was distinctly secondary. We talked all evening and shut the place down at 11:00.

That Friday I had a shock. Oksana called at 10:00 p.m. and asked if she could spend the night. She was quite firm that she would spend it by herself, in the guest room, but nonetheless it was delightful to have her company. Who did we run into at breakfast the next morning across the street at the Vidensky Bulochky - Viennese bakery – but Michael Bedwell? He did a bit of a double take. However, his interest in young ladies is purely Platonic. Michael, born in 1935, has never married and is not about to start. Michael knew what I was looking for and could easily sense that Oksana was looking for about the same. He graciously ceded the way for me. After breakfast we went on our way to Arttalkers.

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Oksana showed up in church Sunday morning with her hair in a tight ponytail. She was experimenting with different looks. Hair up, hair down, hair tightly curled, hair straight. Likewise with and without makeup. Sometimes it was quite evident, most of the time not noticeable at all. She has a gorgeous complexion and now I never see her applying makeup, though I think there is some in our medicine cabinet. She understood relatively early that I like a natural look and the experimentation came to a quick end.

The following night we planned to attend the EBA Toastmasters club meeting in Lukyanivska. We got there somewhat early and had a pizza next door before the meeting. As things turned out, we talked all through the meeting and then had a leisurely three mile walk back downtown. We stopped in Maidan for a cup of coffee where we met a couple of her friends and she seemed quite pleased to introduce me around.

Tuesday night Oksana stayed over again, in the guest room, with the same conditions as before. She displayed a genius for avoiding compromise in a situation that would seem to invite it. She remained a lady, politely refusing my attempts to kiss her. Two nights later, however, I did manage a brush on the cheek after a steak dinner. We talked until late afternoon the next day, Friday. Her mom arrived from Svetlovodsk the next day, Saturday, and the three of us went out to dinner and a Ukrainian restaurant.

By the time I committed this chronicle to writing I had forgotten what happened the following week. Somewhere along the line she was sick and I visited her in the gracious Obalon apartment where she had been living. I cooked some dinner and we drank a bit before I returned home. But she could not stay in that apartment any more – I still do not know the circumstances – and I invited her to stay in my guest room. Oksana moved in on November 20. It was a bit of a gamble on my part. She was playing hard to get, and the future of our relationship was not a sure thing. What was sure was that I would certainly never be able to invite another woman over to the apartment if Oksana were living there. The gamble was worth taking, and I took it.

The month of December just seem to fly. We were active as ever in the church, Toastmasters and Rotary, and we fell in love quite quickly. We started to plan a vacation together in Egypt. Moreover, my younger daughter Susanna had arranged a couple of months prior to come visit me. When Suzy arrived, the week before Christmas, Oksana was already ensconced in my bedroom leaving the guestroom free.

We had a big Christmas dinner, about a dozen people including Roman Shwed, Ric Riccio and Mark Taylor, for which Suzy prepared one of her Irish specialties. As I recall we had turkey even though I'm not especially fond of it. After Christmas Suzy and I went to Chernobyl for a day and then on New Year's Eve Suzy returned to Ireland and Oksana and I were off to Egypt.

And that is the last time Suzy has talked to me. She was cordial enough during her stay. She let me buy her some nice presents. But after she left, I could not even get through by telephone to confirm that she had gotten back to Ireland all right. In our on-again off-again relationship since high school she had often made rather vicious attacks using every attack in the feminist arsenal. My guess is that the prospect of Dear of Dad leading a happy life as an unrepentant male was too much to cope with.

Egypt

A vacation always strains a relationship. There is a lot of planning to be done, a lot of coordination, and quite a few mutual decisions that must be struck. Oksana prevailed in the choice of a hotel – a beachfront Marriott in Sharm el-Sheikh. It was part of a package that involved travel on New Year's Eve day by Wizz Air.

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We paid \$100 apiece for the gala New Year's Eve Festival. However, this being Wizz Air we were delayed by about five hours. We got there just after midnight, when they were shooing the last of the guests out. There was no food left, not even a complementary drink. We walked around the town looking for something. Nope – everything had closed at midnight. We did find Oksana some expensive and not very satisfactory food.

The vacation got better after that. Skin diving is absolutely remarkable. It is like swimming through an aquarium of tropical fish. I absolutely do not understand that ecosystem. It does not look to me like there's a thing for the fish to eat, yet there are is every variety of colorful fish imaginable, swimming in clear water and easily visible through your swim mask. It is truly a feast for the eyes.

The beach is probably a mile long, and you can swim the entire distance. I do not recall any annoyances such as jet skis. There are a few larger motor launches and quite a few sloops and other sailing vessels. In other words, a rather classy collection. Oksana and I both enjoy swimming, and we did a lot.

Our first trip out we took a group tour on a sloop to a nearby bay where the skin diving was supposed to be even better. It was, marginally. It was nice to swim in different waters and to see something of the coast.

Sharm el-Sheikh is a tourist destination. There are restaurants, souvenir shops and jewelry stores on every corner. We ate well, though I do not remember any particular memorable dinners. I'll take that back. I had one large salad that I remembered all the next day as I sat on the toilet while Oksana was up on Mount Sinai on a tour. She took the sunrise excursion and came back with some remarkable photographs and a new best friend, the Ukrainian tour guide.

We took two day trips, the first to Cairo. We saw the top sights to see for one day: the Egyptian Museum of history, the pyramids, the Nile, and of course the places where you could drop money on souvenirs. We took a lot of pictures of pyramids, camels and the like. Oksana still has the piece of papyrus she bought as a souvenir.

Our second day trip was to Jerusalem. I got a quick tour of the old city, which is amazingly small – doable in a day. Our bus circled it and we got an appreciation of the Jerusalem of Christ's time. The hills are still the same. We went to Bethlehem and saw the wall separating the Palestinians from the Israelis. On our way home we swam in the Dead Sea. Actually, Oksana swam there. I didn't want to subject my hide to the dehydration. Oksana bought a beauty treatment made out of Dead Sea salt. It is the greatest miracle since Coca-Cola learned how to turn tap water into Dasani. The Israelis take ordinary salt from the Dead Sea, do some Jewish magic and charge 100 times more in the same salt would cost in a grocery store.

Oksana put my affection to the test in a jewelry store, coming away with a diamond bracelet, earrings and a pendant. The price was right, the quality looked good, and at that point I pretty much trusted her sincerity, though I did give it some fairly deep thought. It turned out to be the right decision.

Which brings me to an aside on men and women in general. The traditional deal is quite straightforward. The woman does the things that only a woman can do, bear and nourish children at their breast. They do things that women generally do at least as well as men such as cook, clean, and take care of domestic affairs. The man offer strength and protection and wherewithal to support the program. Part of Ukraine's charm is that this traditional relationship has persevered. Men need women as much as ever in order to carry on the family line. But here, women still need men's income in order to lead a decent life. Marriage is a compromise that makes a great deal of financial sense, and wise men and women learn to recognize that it also makes emotional sense. Oksana is endowed with a great deal of feminine wisdom. Thus, I passed the good provider test. I'm happy to say that Sharm el-Sheikh is pretty much the last I have

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heard about jewelry.

Oksana is a unique woman. It takes a unique woman to look past a 37 year age difference in starting a relationship. She has a unique sense of modesty, or to put it the other way, a unique nonchalance about her body. Our ground floor room at the Marriott had the usual two sets of curtains – heavy, opaque ones and sheer ones that would let in the sunlight. Looking out, we could see at least the outlines of the Egyptian gardeners tending the grounds a few feet outside the window. One could only assume that they could see in as well. Nonetheless, Oksana casually walked around in the nude. I explained the differences between Muslim and Western cultures several times, emphasizing that I thought it would be a good idea to put something on or to close the heavy drapes. However, she did it her own way.

I had never spent much time in the Middle East, but had dealt enough with Middle Easterners to appreciate the mannerisms associated with their culture. There is a kind of obsequious politeness combined with insistence that I find off-putting. Walking on the streets of Sharm el-Sheikh they would greet me in Russian, then English and perhaps German attempting to draw me into this or that store. They displayed a presumptuous familiarity and unbecoming pushiness. I did overcome my hesitancy, learning to trust the merchants who sold us jewelry, but in general it was rather tiring.

Our relationship having survived the vacation, Oksana and I spent a few months getting to know each other. Since she did not have a job, and I was working only a little bit, we had the freedom of honeymooners to spend our time as we liked. We bicycled, rowed on the Dnieper, walked around the neighborhood, went out to eat as often as we pleased, which was not that often, cooked our favorite dishes such as salmon, and luxuriated in the freedom to lie in bed and talk to each other endlessly.

Leading up to the Wedding

Oksana's loves in life include studying, physical culture, music and travel. They overlap mine fairly well, however as the keeper of the budget I am also concerned with not developing habits that we can't sustain.

In 2010 we traveled together to Crimea, where we stayed in a rather unimpressive sanatorium/hotel just east of Massandra, up the hill from the Black Sea. We enjoyed the Nikitskii botanical gardens, the Swallow's Nest castelette perched on a cliff over the ocean, the peaks of Ai Petri and the Grand Canyon of Crimea. This established Oksana's style – do everything, but don't spend too much money in the process.

The decision to get married is a complex one. In spring, after Oksana had lived with me for a few months, I concluded that this was as good as it gets, and asked her to get married. She played hard to get, not making up her mind for three months or so. It gave me the opportunity keep on asking and her to keep on thinking. Eventually, in May or June, we decided to do it. We got to work on all of the formalities, the biggest of which was getting copies of our divorce papers in order. Oksana had been married briefly some while back. That was all I knew then, and that's all I know now. I needed two sets of divorce papers, from 1981 and 2007. After that it was simply a matter of filling out lots of forms and getting them notarized and filed.

Oksana traveled to Ravenna Italy for some course or another practicing this discipline or that. She is quite persuasive, and she made it cheap enough that it was a "why not?" decision for me. I didn't want to go with her, probably because I was committed to teaching English. She had a great time and phoned once or twice to let me know everything was okay.

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Vacation in Poland, Spain and France

We took a vacation together to Katowice, Poland and Barcelona in August. We had employed the usual Ukrainian expedient to get a visa from the Polish Embassy, and needed to travel first to Poland. We went by train. The border guards in Przemyśl were onto her scheme. They gave Oksana a very rough time about the supposed business purpose of her trip. However, inasmuch as she was with an American whose papers were all in order, they finally acted disgusted and let her through.

Kraków has a beautifully preserved old town in the city center which we thoroughly enjoyed. After spending a night, we went to Katowice for a Wizz Air flight to Barcelona. I have no recollection of the flight, beyond the fact that Oksana swore she would never fly on that airline again. Counting Egypt, it was the second bad experience in a row.

We got to Barcelona, picked up our rental car, a VW Golf diesel and drove north to our hotel in the beachside resort of Platja d'Aro.

It was an old place, wonderfully situated close to the middle of town but a little bit dated. Most of the guests were older and British, and the most outstanding memory of the trip is that they had a proper dance on Saturday night, lots of people who knew ballroom dancing such as the foxtrot, waltz, rumba and so on. Oksana and I joined them dancing. The water was another story. I absolutely loved it, but Oksana found it to be a little bit too cold. So we had to move. After three nights we booked another south of Barcelona past Taragona.

We drove a great deal on this vacation, heading across the border into France to the old fortified city of Carcassonne. On the way to Carcassonne we stopped at the Picasso and Dali museums in Figueras. The Dali was breathtaking – the Picasso not so much.

As we headed to our new hotel, we drove up to Andorra for a look around. Coming back south, we spent the night in Berga just south of a huge tunnel made for the modern highway. We look for hotels along the beach and found one in a small settlement called Miami Platja where the water was a few degrees warmer than in Platja d'Aro. Oksana was happy.

We made an outing driving south to the mouth of the Ebro river, where we saw rice and bananas growing. On the way back we stopped for a lobster dinner to celebrate her 31st birthday. We noted with curiosity that there were a few Africans selling trinkets on the boardwalk. How interesting. Then, taking an after-dinner walk, we found that the mile-long boardwalk was swarming with Africans everywhere, all selling trinkets. It raised questions. Where are they from? Who buys? What next? I was glad they were not my questions to answer.

Our Wedding(s)

Our paperwork was ready in late August, so we made a date to get married on September 21. Most marriages in Ukraine are done in a civil ceremony, a great many at the Central Palace of Special Events, which we chose. It is known by its Ukrainian acronym ZAGS, for записи актів громадянського стану, or the registry of civil affairs. We had three guests, Oksana's aunt Ludmila, my friend Mark Taylor and his daughter Polina, who was then about three. I had expected something quite simple, but we were accosted on the way in by wedding photographers. Why not? They did an outstanding job for not too much money. And oh, by the way, as we paid for the pictures it turned out they had also taken videos. Would we like those? Yes, of course.

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We had not planned what comes next – I never knew what was coming next – and we went to the hotel Lebid for lunch, after which Ludmila had to go back to work and we simply went back home.

We had a church wedding in Paris. I had expected a church wedding, with the idea that we might do it at Christ Church in Kyiv. Oksana, however, wanted to travel. I got in touch with an Anglican church in Paris and made all the arrangements for the church wedding in October. My daughter Naomi made plans to come on over from the United States. By the time the event rolled around, Oksana had lost her enthusiasm for going to Paris, and we had a little bit of back-and-forth about the fact that you do not change your mind and back out of things when other people have made their own plans based on ours. We found a nice little hotel near St. Sebastian-Froissart where Naomi and I spent a lot of time talking and catching up as Oksana reconciled herself to being there and actually started to enjoy it. We saw some of the sites that one must see in Paris, including the Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame, St. Chapelle, Montmartre, a tour on the Seine, the Louvre, the Gare d'Orsay, etc. etc. We went out to Versailles one day, although as I recall we did not see the palace but rather spent our time in a wonderful market of delicious things to eat.

This was the first time I had been in Paris in about 20 years, and I was amazed at the demographic transformation it had undergone. It seems that on every corner some swarthy stranger had just discovered a gold ring that I had dropped and was doing me the immense favor of returning it. The restaurants were good, although they struck me as unduly expensive. Perhaps I had already spent too long in Ukraine.

Properly married, we continued to set up our house. Again in 2010 we had a large Christmas dinner for various hangers-on from the expatriate contingent in Ukraine. It is an eclectic mixture, not all of whom got along with each other. In particular, the irascible Ric Riccio managed to irritate Mark Taylor. Roman Shwed and Michael Bedwell were above it all as were, to my recollection, Gary and Elena Way. Oksana was still getting used to how Americans socialize. She introduced a parlor game in which the men were supposed to give compliments to the women. It didn't work too well. The guys were hardly up to complementing their own wives, and found it extremely awkward complement other women. Lesson learned – and subsequent gatherings would simply let the people make their own conversation.

We ended the year with what has been a long-standing tradition, ignoring New Year's Eve. As best I recall we had a bottle at home and went to bed early.

Starting our Family

About the beginning of 2011 we decided to start a family. And with the excuse that we would not be able to travel a great deal once we had the family, Oksana planned a ski trip to Andorra. I was working teaching English, and involved with Toastmasters, church and Rotary. I don't typically enjoy skiing, and had good reasons to stay home. So she went by herself. It turned out that the resort was mostly occupied by Russians. Back in 2011 Russians and Ukrainians still considered themselves like brothers, and she got along very well, making some friendships that were renewed as Oksana later visited Moscow and they Kyiv. Furthermore, she greatly enjoyed the skiing.

Upon her return she started to feel a little bit queasy and this and that. A rapid pregnancy test revealed the reason. We were overjoyed that our family was launched so quickly. After a lot of discussion we settled on the American Medical Center where they had a highly confident OB/GYN specialist, Ludmila Petrovna. As one learns over time, most Ukrainian doctors are highly confident. Highly competent is a question that must be adjudicated separately.

We had a nasty shock in late March. I had had a couple of phone calls on the landline in our apartment that seemed out to be wrong numbers. I went out for a long walk and came back to find the house had been ransacked. Very professional burglars had broken the locks on the front door and turned everything inside out, even taking apart the

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piano. They got away with about half of Oksana's diamond jewelry – she was wearing the other half – her \$4,000 fur coat and about \$2,000 in cash. She had been very fond of that coat, and apparently had attracted notice in someplace such as a bank that also knew her address. I don't know how they figured out the phone number, but they put everything together to orchestrate a skillful heist.

We entertained the police for about three hours. Of course, they were unable to do anything. Police in general are not too much help in a case like this, and the ones here are known for being ineffective. We pulled the house back together and talked about how to go forward.

I had made my opinions about luxury stuff like diamonds and fur coats well known. Those things tend to get stolen. Even if they don't, they lose value. If you want a real store of value, you should buy land. Looking back these five years, it is clear that my message got through. I have not heard a thing more about expensive jewelry. We did start looking for land. I like the Russanovsky Sad neighborhood of Kyiv especially well. It is quiet and isolated, close to some nice beaches along the river, and only half an hour by bus and Metro from the center of the city. We started talking to realtors. In May we closed on two adjoining lots or \$75,000 apiece. The sellers moaned that they had been worth twice as much in 2007 before the financial crisis. However, they must be glad now inasmuch as the prices have fallen by half again since Putin started the war in Donbass.

Immediately after we closed on the lots Oksana started a garden. It was a lot of hard work – for me – inasmuch as the water had to be carried by hand from the lake across the street. Still, she got a pretty good crop in the first year.

We took separate vacations again in 2011. I went to the United States for a week and a half to catch up with family and friends and to renew my driver's license. The only family member who spoke to me was Naomi. I tried to arrange a meeting with Jack but there is simply no way to talk with him without his somehow taking offense. Trying to set up a lunch was the last time I have talked to him. I did get my drivers license which at this writing is within two months of expiring. My guess is that I will not get another one.

Naomi and I went to her favorite eating places and drinking holes. I had at this point a foreigner's perspective. I could not believe how big the portions were at the International House of Pancakes, TGI Friday's and the brewpub where she hung out. I was also rather taken aback by the fact that I could not get an ordinary glass of beer in the brewpub. Everything they had was strawberry this or daiquiri that, no normal beer on the menu.

I introduced Naomi to the Professionals in the City organization to which I had belonged during my few months as a single guy in Washington. We went to a speed dating event. I enjoyed regaling the people whom I met with the story of expatriating myself to Ukraine and my pregnant wife. Naomi's amusing story was meeting our neighbor from Mohican Hills, Michael, the father of Naomi's playmate for Samantha. Both of the family's children had turned out rather badly, they had gotten divorced and Michael was doing the same thing that I had done – looking for a new start. Naomi found it totally weird that her friend's father would be hitting on her. I didn't find it weird, just rather pathetic. Not pathetic for him, pathetic for the country in which it is so difficult to have a normal relationship or raise normal kids.

These two kids, by the way, represent a strong argument for nature over nurture. It was a very Jewish family, but the kids did not pick up Judaism whatsoever. The son had a Latin cast about him. Though I believe that homosexuality is a lifestyle choice for more men than not, this particular kid was destined to be gay. He was swish from the first time we saw him, about the age of nine, and no amount of indoctrination from rabbis or bar mitzvah preparation could have changed him. The girl was a living exemplar of Ogden Nash's famous lines "As the children of the cops possess the flattest kind of feet and the daughter of the floozie has a wobble to seat" she was a saucy bit of jailbait from the age of 12. She ripened early, hit her prime at about 17, and I understand was an over the hill, blowsy slattern by 25.

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Most Ukrainians have a strong desire to get to the United States at some point in their lives. I assure them that at this point in my life I have seen quite enough of it and have no desire to go back soon. United States actually does me a favor by refusing to grant a visa to my wife. They believe that the country is so desirable that even if she went on a tourist visa she would be sure to stay forever. Therefore they will only grant an immigrant visa, a process which takes a year or so and required jumping through a lot of hoops. I am happy with the status quo. We will stay in Ukraine.

Oksana did not let pregnancy slow her down. She went for a couple of weeks' camping trip to Crimea in late summer.

Oksana gave birth to Eddie in our apartment in a very traditional homebirth on October 15. Here is my account written a couple of days after the birth:

Mother-in-law Nadia and I breakfasted in the kitchen on a simple soup – buckwheat, carrots, and squash with a bit of onion. I'm feeling close to the earth. Edward was born in that kitchen Saturday night, Oksana attended by a midwife and myself. She had won out – I had wanted a hospital. Oksana had called Nadia Sunday morning, yesterday, and she arrived on the first bus.

Last week I read in Stephen Pinker's recent "Our Better Angels" that "The Child Study movement aimed for a scientific approach to child development and began to replace the superstition and bunkum of old wives with the superstition and bunkum of child-rearing experts." Bunkum sums up Oksana's attitude towards doctors. They speak with such certainty! However, if you have been around this world for as many spins as we have, dear reader, you know with certainty how often that certainty changes.

We had a consulting obstetrician throughout the pregnancy, taking blood and blood pressure, poking and probing. I bought most of her program because I'm used to western medicine. However, the greatest part of the prescription here as in the west is CYA on the part of the doctor, very little that really needs to be done. After all, people managed to procreate even before there were shamans to tell us how it ought to be. I worked up a maximal sincerity as I coaxed Oksana to eat her iron pills, avoid salt, and maximize healthy things in her diet.

Lyudmila was death on any form of quackery other than her own. In one instance she stoutly refused to approve of Oksana's taking some black walnut herbal stuff a friend recommended... it wasn't in the book of approved medications. She recommended onions as a source of Vitamin C. She told Oksana to eat raisins for iron – black raisins, not green ones. I added sternly that she should also eat lots of beef, from black cows, not brown ones.

Come time for delivery Oksana was thoroughly fed up with the medical establishment. Through a friend she heard of a doctor/midwife, Olga. She is a charming woman, polnaya, which is how you translate saftig into Russian, with a very feminine yet confidently authoritative manner. The arguments in favor of home birth are simple. A woman feels a whole lot better in her own house, with her husband, than being poked and prodded by a parade of strangers in some cold, impersonal hospital. Beside, in case we needed help, we are five minutes by taxi or ambulance from a maternity hospital. By happenstance the maternity hospital was conducting tours last week. Oksana went out of curiosity, and was strongly reconfirmed in her decision for a home birth.

I was busy last week hustling from pharmacy to pharmacy buying all of the (wrong) stuff for the delivery. Everywhere I go in the world I see a need for more of us Germans to put things in order. I could have done

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a whole lot more efficiently, starting with a standard list. Anyhow, the Germans' offer to set things straight in Ukraine somehow wasn't accepted, but that's another story.

I had a long lunch with a bunch of friends Saturday as Oksana went for a swim, coincidentally with the midwife. Oksana felt a little something, and Olga took a look and told her she should head home right away. I got a call to pick up some chocolate and oranges on the way home, followed in five minutes by a call to forget that and come home right now. When I arrived at 5:00 Olga was coaching her through early contractions. I pitched in. The Lamaze huffing and puffing thing is 90% forgotten. Now it is all about massage. Of course there is a correct way to do it – always stroking down, rather than in circles – so there is always an opportunity to chide the male party to the process for not exactly understanding the program. That's a slam dunk. We never do, and I suspect that's how it's planned to be.

We progressed fairly quickly. One thing I liked about the process was that Oksana stayed fairly vertical. Let gravity help. What a concept! Another that I liked is that she squatted in the bathtub in warm water. Has to help – the water bears some of her weight, and warm water and massage oil are a good mixture in any situation. Olga was great. She had a very reassuring voice, calmly telling her to keep on pressing, press, press. And breathe. Just in and out, not the huff and puff stuff.

As Oksana quivered from the strain we moved back and forth among four stations. Her straddling the legs of a kitchen stool, on its side and draped with towels; her on the john, her back in the bath and her in my arms as I was seated on a stool in the kitchen. Olga offering comfort and encouragement as we went. But with something added. More and more invocation of God. The mystic, Orthodox God. Pushing and prayer together. It worked well. Oksana was in pain, but she had an angelic look on her face throughout.

About 7:30 we were on the stool and things got serious. I was holding her, my hands on the ends of a twisted sheet across the top of Oksana's belly, pushing down harder than I felt was advisable, but not as hard as the women want me to. Olga was on her knees, looking up, checking progress and encouraging her. Oksana was in pain now, saying so as fact and not complaint, and chanting "Help me God" in sincere belief that God was helping, all the while with a beatific look on her face far outshining the pain. And then, wow, a cry and there he was, covered in parchment and blood, his little head shaped like a bullet, as it had had to be to make his exit. Crying and blinking. It was officially 8:10. Olga had an eye on the clock, along with everything else.

She cleaned his nose, but from the crying it was pretty evident his lungs are working OK. She cleaned him up and we waited a bit for the placenta, which we put into a pot. Then we proceeded, baby still attached to placenta in a pot, but mother free, to the bedroom, where Edward lay on his mom's breast to get some well-deserved rest. Olga cleaned mom up and I did tasks as assigned. Among the things we needed were raw potatoes. They had not been on the list of provisions, but fortunately we had some. You grate them and the make a pretty good astringent. Edward got a potato poultice on his head and Oksana took one to stop the bleeding. Some part of the process involved iodine, an antiseptic we haven't used in the US since before I was a kid. Also a bunch of homeopathic stuff and herbs. Since moving to Ukraine I've armed myself with the authoritative reference on herbal medicines, and have come to accept the proposition that at a minimum they generally won't do you any harm. Anyhow, the cleanup worked, but you won't see these procedures at Cedars of Sinai.

When all was in order I tried to start cleaning up, but the women insisted I lie down and rest a bit. So I did, just looking at Edward and Oksana. After two hours (!) it was time to cut the cord. I learned that the

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placenta has great spiritual significance. Olga tied it with red cord. We took a moment of prayer, telling God of our aspirations for baby Edward. I was offered the scissors to cut him free to join our world, but I asked Olga to do it as I trusted her hands more than mine. The placenta will be buried in our new land, tying Edward to a place, and Edward himself spent his first night lying on the breast of a very happy mama, as I lay on the other side of the bed giving thanks and thinking about his future.

I note that the placenta was duly planted beside the apple tree next to our house. It had sat for the best part of the year in our freezer as we designed the house, as we wanted to be sure that we didn't put it in a place that would be covered by the house.

The last couple of months of 2011 are a blur. Like every young mother, Oksana could not sleep much at all, since Eddie kept on crying. She had the benefit of having me around to take a bit of the pressure off. I would put Eddie in a sling and go out for a walk to give her a break. However, if we were all three at home, the baby's piercing cry would go right to her soul and not let her rest. I assured her that if the baby is warm, fed, and dry there is not much more that you can do. Babies cry – get used to it. Oksana finally adopted this attitude, but it took a rather painful year and a half. Now that he is five she will call him out on its whining, with little sympathy for exaggerated bawling over a minor fall. But it took a while to get there.

2011 was a very busy year for me and Rotary, but not for the best of reasons. I became my club's President-elect for the year 2012–13, then resigned when it was clear that the treasurer had embezzled the \$55,000 in his trust and the club was not going to do anything about it. I originally resigned only my officer's roles, but in mid-2012 gave up my membership as well. I rejoined in late 2014 on the assumption that things had changed. They had not, and I quit yet again (twice, actually) in late 2015. At this point it is final. Along the way I wrote an account of what happened, which [is posted on my website](#).

Planning our House

It did not take long after buying the land before we started to think about building on it. In July and August 2011 I started drawing floor plans. Oksana and I agreed pretty much completely on our objectives. We wanted big common spaces – a lot of room to move on both the top and bottom floor. We wanted fairly small bedrooms, just for sleeping, so that kids could not run off and hide from the family and immerse themselves in electronic gadgetry. We wanted room for exercise equipment – what they call here a Swedish wall, bars for kids to climb on. To that Oksana added a horizontal ladder and climbing ropes. We wanted no space whatsoever dedicated to corridors – put big common rooms on both floors and let all of the other rooms open off of them. We wanted a large attic within attic staircase in which we could store our junk.

The one design objective that we couldn't satisfy was a root cellar. The groundwater is simply too high to allow it. Our ultimate design puts the floor of the house about 3 feet above ground level.

We talked about how you get the house built. The steps, as we understood them, were as follows. First, you need an architect to draw up the house plan. He engages subcontractors to draw up the electricity in the plumbing. Independently, you need people to do a hydrological survey to figure out what kind of a well you need. You need to figure out whether the land percolates so you can put in a septic system. With all that done, you need to get a builder and an interior designer. The builder occupies himself with the frame of the house and subcontractors to handle heating, plumbing, electricity and the like. We, the owners, contracted to get the well drilled in the septic put down. The designer worked with the builder on planning the interior appointments: closets, cabinets, bathroom fixtures, kitchen appliances and so on.

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In the final analysis there were too many people and their communication wasn't that good. If we ever do it again, we will find one builder to put in charge of the entire thing and do a better job of vetting the subcontractors. We like the builder that we got, but the electrician he chose was a disaster. Oksana and I still have different opinions about the value we got for the \$6,000 that we paid the designer

At any rate, we engaged an architect, Artyom, and an interior designer in the fall of 2011. The first designer, Sasha, was a disaster. We dismissed him, kissing off about \$2,000, and found Eva. Eva at least had a computer program to do the design. Nowadays you cannot do it without computers. By the end of 2011 our plans were coming along fairly well.

The crib, the baby bath, the stroller, the diapers and all the paraphernalia that go with the baby filled or 85 m² apartment. We can't complain – most people in Kyiv raise children in less space – but nonetheless we had ample incentive to push forward with our plan for building. By March and April 2012 the plans were pretty much in place and we started to talk to contractors.

Renting in Russanovsky

About this time Oksana and I decided to move to Rusannovsky Sad in order to be closer to the project. We looked at a number of rentals. Prices seemed relatively high. We wound up paying about \$1,600 per month for a small three bedroom house, a bit over 100 m², on the 34th line about a kilometer from our property. The price did not include utilities, which turned out to be quite expensive as the house was badly insulated. As we have learned is unfortunately common in Ukraine, concluding the tenancy with the former landlady was [acrimonious](#). She did not return our deposit, and her devout displays of Christian faith turned out to be hollow.

Summer in Rusannovsky Sad was beautiful. We were about a 15 minute walk from a beach where we spent a lot of time. Oksana had developed quite a friendship with Anna Kolesnik, who lived in the same building we did downtown and whose daughter Sophia was born the day after Eddie. Anna came to babysit for Eddie two or three days a week, and the one year old toddlers spent a great deal of time playing in the sand on the beach. The house had a small lawn and some fruit trees, so the kids got to spend time out of doors at home as well. It was a welcome change from apartment life.

We engaged the contractor and poured the foundation for our new house in October 2012. We had hoped that construction would go quickly. They got the frame of the house up in late fall, but they could not do much through the winter. Concrete simply does not set when it is freezing. It was late spring 2013 before they got serious about finishing the plumbing and electricity and interior walls, and the designers people could come in and install the cabinetry and appliances.

I enjoyed getting to know the neighbors on the 34th line. None of them spoke much English, so it was an opportunity to practice my Russian. Valery and his wife Natasha were an intelligent and respectable couple about my with two daughters and a handful of grandchildren. Valerie was retired as an engineer, a delightful guy to talk to. There were other retired professionals, Nicholas and Vasily, who were not doing too much with their time except drinking. I would drink with them from time to time, but eventually the conversations got rather boring. The same stories over and over again. Boris, the guy on the corner, would drink and earnestly sermonize me about the saving power of Jesus Christ. He was a nice guy and I took it in good grace. It is interesting that although these people live just a kilometer away now I very rarely see them. Eddie and I occasionally wander up to a tiny shop in that neighborhood we call simply "Elena's" and see Vasily and his cute little dachshund named Terminator.

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Oksana, her mother and Eddie went for a vacation in Zakarpattia, that small part of Ukraine southwest of the Carpathian Mountain Ridge. As usual, I kept the home fires burning. I love being alone here in the summer. The beaches are wonderful and I enjoy it long swims, my standard being a mile and a half, in the Desno River. The Desno, by the way is a tributary that flows into the Dnieper about a mile downstream from us.

The 34th St. house had a small dining room and a tiny kitchen. It was not very good for entertaining. As I recall we had people over for a couple of barbecues when the weather was good, but spent Christmas and New Year's by ourselves.

The first part of 2013 was relatively routine. We were spending a lot of time with an active toddler, chasing him up and down stairs as he learned how to walk and get into things. We found ourselves spending more time at the house under construction. In retrospect, even what we did was not enough. We should have been there actively overseeing the process.

The New House

We moved into our house on the 20th line in late July. That made a big difference in our budget. The house would cost more than we expected, but the relief of not having to pay rent more than made up for it. Three years later we have saved over \$50,000 in rent, enough to offset whatever cost overruns our lack of experience cost us. Furthermore, we have the pleasure of being in a new house.

We took Eddie on a trip to Odessa in August. It was the first time we had used Airbnb. The apartment was not what we expected – it was cluttered and not especially clean. Nonetheless Oksana and Eddie had a fairly good week. I had come down with a cold on our train trip down. Boarded the train with a sore throat, and by the time we arrived in Odessa I had a full-fledged cold with a cough and everything. I had a book to read – I forget which – and Oksana and Eddie enjoyed the city.

Yurii Karabach and Polina Telegeeva housesat for us while we were in Odessa. They liked the place so much that they moved in shortly after we returned, and they still share it with us. Polina changed her last name to Karabach in July 2015.

The first few months in the house we had more than the usual level of breaking in problems. In particular, the electric work was shoddy. We were in constant contact with the builder to fix this and that. He was pretty good about it. We had not installed the water filtration system. The people who drilled the well had told us, just after it was installed, that we absolutely had to build a shed right on top of it and put in a filter system for another couple of thousand dollars. It is absolutely the wrong way to sell something. I decided that there was no way we would do that. We would live with unfiltered and untreated water.

There's nothing dangerous about the water, but it does have a high level of iron. Pretty soon our bathtubs and showers were turning orange. I gave in and consented to a filter. It is installed inside the house, and seems to work adequately. Meanwhile, the septic system that this alarmist had installed for us has its own problems and he refuses to give us any help at all. Gurgling and an occasional sewer gas smell are ongoing, chronic problems which I have attempted to document but which neither I nor anybody else is willing to tackle head on. Since it looks like we have to dig up and reinstall the drain field, I am in no rush. That is the most expensive repair involving a septic system, and nothing I could do would diminish the cost. They simply didn't install it right in the first place.

The bad wiring caused fires in our bathroom and in the fuse box in the utility cabinet. It also caused a short circuit in our bedroom, which involved cutting through tiles in some fairly ugly manner in order to find the wires. We had thought

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that the builders would know where the wires were within the walls. No, they don't. Neither do they know where that water and drain pipes are. These are notes for the next time we build something. We want to know where it all is. We should probably take photographs before they put the drywall up.

I dropped out of Christ Church shortly after we moved to Rusannovsky Sad in 2012. Getting there was a bit awkward, and a new Russian-speaking Toastmasters club had started up offering something else to do on Sunday.

However, most of the reasons had to do with the church itself. It had no permanent pastor and it was not growing. We had an excellent preacher, Dennis Bowen, who delivered interesting sermons most Sundays. When he wasn't there others of us took on the task. The church was simply not growing. As people left they were not replaced. I had served as church treasurer for three years and could see the impact on the budget.

Some people did, however, stick around. There was Ludmila, a true parasite. She hit up everybody for money or support in some form or another. I gave her 20 or 30 hryvnya the first time she asked, but cut her off fairly abruptly. A family of more generous souls invited her in. In a week she ran up astronomical phone bills and then on her way out accused the father of the family of making lewd overtures to her. One look at Ludmila and you would know that that was absurd. She had also made moves on Mark Taylor – a Toastmaster, Mark has no interest in church – telling him she was going to move in with him. He practically had to shout to tell her that that was not going to happen.

The person who forced my decision to leave was church lady Olga Kostetskaya. Olga pretended to have some training in the ministry. She had absolutely no tact whatsoever. She presumed that the two hryvnya or so she dropped in the plate every Sunday gave her a right to offer an opinion on everything. Every two or three months she would chew me out mercilessly for some affront or another. I was wearing the wrong thing, or I failed to acknowledge some holiday properly. Last was the music. We had nobody planning the music, so I selected hymns for the service. She intruded herself in the process. One week she emailed me on Sunday morning to tell me that two of the four hymns were wrong, they should be changed. The program was already printed. I would not have changed them under any circumstances, but I did not read her email. She cursed and spewed for about 10 minutes.

I was giving a sermon that morning and I changed my topic. The Bible offers contradictory advice in many circumstances. One bit of wisdom is "steel sharpeneth steel – so sharpeneth a man the countenance of his neighbor." You should tell somebody when they offend you. On the other side, there is turn the other cheek. My sermon was to the point that I had had enough, and it was time to tell a person to stop the abuse. I didn't name her, but several in the pews had heard the exchange. Over the course of the week I gave the matter some thought. I wasn't getting much out of the church, Oksana didn't attend, and they offered nothing for our son. Why was I there? I called the senior warden and asked him to come pick up the church treasury; I was quitting.

Oksana and I remained as active as ever in Toastmasters. She traveled to Budapest in October 2013 with a couple of other women from Ukraine for a Toastmasters district conference. Of course, she insists that these conferences are absolutely necessary for personal development. I remain unconvinced, but I'm happy she's having a good time with it. I'm also pleased with the people that we know through Toastmasters. They are intelligent, active people, the kind of friends I am proud for my wife to have.

The new house allowed us to start to entertain again. I don't recall what we did for Christmas, but we have pictures of a dance party at which Oksana is doing the Charleston.

My daughter Naomi came to visit us for a week in January 2014. It was wonderful to catch up. We had a party and invited all of our Toastmasters friends over. Aside from that we mainly just chilled. We saw some of the sites, but for

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Naomi a vacation is truly a vacation and she didn't feel a great obligation to spend it doing things. She was at a comfortable place in her life, between boyfriends, relaxed and successful in her work.

Lawn and Garden

That spring we finally got the lawn put in so the kids had a place to play all summer. We bought fruit trees, planted hosta, and made the grounds look somewhat presentable. Oksana reinstalled the vegetable garden, now entirely on our second lot.

Anna continued as our babysitter and Eddie and her daughter Sophia romped on the lawn all the time. From the new house we went to another beach. The closest one is on a lake about 10 minutes from our house. The three-year-olds would paddle around a little bit with water wings, but mostly they like to play in the sand and on the lawn that some thoughtful soul had installed. I love swimming in that lake. It is about 1 1/2 km long, enough to get in a good hours swim.

The following year we would start going to the river beach more often. It is further away, almost a kilometer, but has nicer sand and more people. I love to swim there in the morning, but in the afternoon, especially on weekends, it becomes a little bit crowded with motorboats and jet skis. Not wanting to mix it up with them, are usually stay out of the navigation channel, fairly close to the shore, and even at that I'm concerned about boats on one side and getting tangled in water lilies on the other.

The three of us took a trip to Lviv the summer of 2014. It is a walking city, and Eddie did pretty well. We walked up to the top of the high Castle where they were beautiful views. There are also big and exotic snails and slugs that enchanted Eddie. We visited the Kryjivka restaurant with a partisan, anti-communist theme. The last thing we did was to go to Shevshenko Hi, an outdoor architectural Museum. We got there about closing time and Eddie was sick, so we didn't see much, but we resolved to come back.

Oksana and I remained as active as ever in Toastmasters. We became increasingly involved with Svoya Rubashka, the Russian speaking club, where I started to deliver speeches. I am disappointed that after nine years now my Russian is still not as good as my French and my German. Those languages came easier. I was younger, true, and I was more formally educated. But I think that the truth is that Russian is simply a more difficult language. It has more nuances, and it is not as closely related to English.

There should be a significant overlap of interest between Toastmasters and the service clubs, Rotary and Lions. The one is self-improvement, the other is community improvement. I put together a 20 minute talk on what Toastmasters has to offer with the plan of presenting it to other organizations. The first I chose was my former Rotary club, Kyiv Multinational. At the meeting where I gave the presentation they talked about two new projects, one involving a team of Brazilian orthodontists who specialize in cleft palate who were being forced out of Crimea by the Russian invasion. The other was a burn center championed by a German club that would serve burn victims in general but victims from the war zone in particular. The projects seem interesting, and the people who had destroyed the club in 2011 were mostly gone. I decided to rejoin. They immediately made me treasurer. It made sense – I had kept their books informally until I quit in 2012, and was able to automate their Excel records to create a continuous archive dating back to the reestablishment of the club after the theft of the treasury in 2011. There were a few anomalies, not big ones, and I was happy to be involved once again in doing some good works.

In spring of 2015 the Rotary club asked me to become the president for 2015 – 16. Tanya Kvachova, a friend from Toastmasters whom I had brought into the Rotary, was named Secretary. The two of us went to Kharkiv for what they

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call their President-elect training seminar. We had a wonderful time and got to know the other Rotarians from the Kyiv area. Our club had always been kind of an outlier. The other clubs are all (with the exception of a French-speaking group including no Frenchman) Ukrainian speaking, and there is a conviviality, a comradeship in which our club had simply never participated. Tanya and I greatly enjoyed the company - I probably more than Tanya, because the preponderance of the members are older guys, with whom I could connect relatively easily. The weekend included a gala dinner with good dance music which I thoroughly enjoyed. I chose to dance with women from other clubs. Tanya is too attractive, and I didn't want to start tongues wagging. At any rate, we had a good time.

Rotary had another event a couple of months later, June in the Carpathians in a resort town called Truskavets. This time I brought Oksana and Eddie and Oksana's mother Nadia. Just give it is a lovely town. Eddie and Nadia enjoyed walking all through it. Oksana and I were able to dance the night away at the gala ball this time. On the way back we stopped in Lviv for a day.

Oksana and I got away later in the summer for a weekend in Ternopil. It featured the standard Seibert family planning – very little. I had reserved a rental car and a hotel in the small town where Ukraine's second most important religious complex is found, the Pochayiv Lavra. I was a little bit apprehensive. I had not driven for four years, but it worked out just fine. We enjoyed the freedom of having a car to drive and see an old castle set off in the woods atop a cliff, and to visit St. Anna's Spring, if I remember right, just across the oblast border to the north.

Returning to the town of Ternopil, we made a long walk through the park and along the lake. It was an absolutely wonderful way to spend a summer afternoon. We watched modern-day Vikings rowing a replica of a long boat back and forth as we sat on the veranda and enjoyed a delicious dinner as we waited for our train.

Oksana and Eddie spent two weeks in the Carpathians at a music camp called Dilly Dilly. They came back full of enthusiasm. I enjoyed the time to myself here on my permanent vacation in Kyiv, swimming and bicycling.

In July I was installed as president of the Rotary club at a fancy Beach resort south of Kyiv. The first couple of months, July and August, were relatively uneventful. As is the tradition here, our club in its turn hosted all of the Kyiv area clubs for a joint meeting in August. Ivo Kersten, and outstanding orator from our Toastmasters, gave a talk on civic involvement from his perspective at the Dutch Embassy.

Thanksgiving marked another high note for the Rotary. We simply did not have enough people left in the club to interest the Radisson hotel. They could not host our annual dinner. It took only a little bit of arm-twisting to convince me that we should do it at our house. We had a wonderful gathering of about 25 people, with a turkey that just fit into the oven. It was the calm before the storm. Within a week I had quit the club, a sad affair I write about [elsewhere](#).

Starting in summer of 2015 Oksana developed an increasing interest in the Orff method of music pedagogy. She traveled twice to Moscow to attend conferences. Not only did she learn about music, but it gave her a chance to reconnect with her father's relatives and to learn a bit more about her family history. As I write this, in 2016, Oksana has become increasingly absorbed with Orff. Our house is full of Orff instruments and she teaches at two separate schools here in Kyiv.

Eddie's First Foreign Adventure

Eddie made his first trip out of the country in April 2016. One of the benefits of Rotary was that the club's district headquarters in Poland facilitated getting five-year Schengen cultural visas for family members. Oksana jumped at the chance. Eddie and I have no problem; we have American passports. The three of us took the overnight train to Warsaw

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where we stayed in a wonderful bed-and-breakfast for a couple of nights. We happen to be just across the Vistula from the zoo, and it happens to be a wonderful zoo. We were all enchanted and that took the entire afternoon.

Oksana likes to take in the opera every place we go. She is a persistent woman, and has a hard time taking no for an answer. She simply would not accept their explanation that the opera was totally sold out on this particular night. She worked for about 15 minutes trying to find the Badovska exception to the rules as Eddie and I stood there. Finally he and I went to a pizza joint to have some dinner as she continued her work. All in vain – after another 15 minutes she joined us. The pizza was excellent.

The next day we walked all through the old part of Warsaw. It did not weather the Second World War terribly well, but there are several old buildings standing. There are lots of interesting shops, including chocolatiers. We were impressed at how civilized Poland is. It is like a richer version of Ukraine. We could even sort of understand the language. Figure out the correspondence between the Polish use of the Latin alphabet and the Cyrillic alphabet and you are most of the way there.

We went to Toastmasters meetings in Warsaw and the next day in Katowice, and found them very cordial and welcoming. The level of English is about on a par with that of the Ukrainian clubs. The structure of the meetings is different. I have heard this from others – clubs like Toastmasters and Rotary have distinct local characters in every country in which they operate.

We spent the day in Kraków before taking the overnight train to Lviv. While in Kraków we rendezvoused with our Toastmasters friend Elena Zhivanovna, who had received some Orff instruments for Oksana. Burdened with the Orff instruments, looking rather like a gypsy peddler and his family, we boarded the train for Lviv. In the Lviv train station we did something I had never done before – accepted the offer of a guy wandering around offering daily rental apartments. It turned out wonderfully. It gave us a place to change clothes and shower before taking another overnight train back to Kyiv. That's the short version of our vacation story. [The longer one is here.](#)

The social highlights of the year were two music parties that we hosted in our house. We invited people, mostly from Toastmasters, to come over and play and sing. At the first one that's what we did. For the second, the weather was so good that everybody spent most of the time out on the lawn, and although much was drunk and much conversation was enjoyed, we didn't do much with music. Both parties resulted in a lot of Facebook posts.

Oksana's commitment to Orff pedagogy has been growing all year. As the movement is centered in Vienna, and most of the important materials are in German, she is learning the language. Fortunately there is a German-speaking Toastmasters club here. I had not dropped in once over its two years of existence, but with Oksana's interest I started going. I am pleased to note that even forty years after leaving Germany, my German language skills remain pretty good. I have given two speeches over the course of two months, served as Toastmaster once and evaluator a couple of times.

All the while I have been in Ukraine I have continued reviewing books on Amazon. The total count stands now at 325. I get no money for it, but I do get the satisfaction of posting my opinions in a place where intelligent people will read them. It also leads to some interesting email exchanges. There must be a couple of dozen people whom I know only over the Internet and only through my Amazon writing.

Along the way I started a couple of blogs on Ukraine. I have given them up; people do not seem terribly interested in what I'm up to. There is a widespread sense that the West is collapsing. It is evidenced by the identitarian movements in Europe – variously called far right, right wing, Alt-right – and the Trump phenomenon in the United States. Almost all observers look at this as a problem created by individuals and to be solved by more enlightened individuals.

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I see it differently. I see individual people as being heavily influenced by their surroundings. We are social animals, and we cannot escape it. If Western society is to survive, it cannot survive merely as a collection of individuals, it must survive as a culture and a gene pool. Put another way, we evolved in the context of family, clan, tribe and nation. If we are to survive it will be in the same context. These entities are held together by beliefs that are without a rational basis. The most fundamental irrational belief is having children in the first place. Children do nothing for the individual, at least in modern society. They are an expensive drag. Parents are lucky if they even show some gratitude. To commit yourself to children, you have to believe in something bigger than yourself. It may be religion, or a belief in your people.

Such beliefs are inherently, by definition irrational. They are also inherently bigoted. If you don't believe that your own people are the best, why would you procreate? And this is precisely the problem facing the West. Cultural Marxism has taught our children that their own society is evil and that they do not deserve to reproduce. They are not doing so. We white people are dying out every place we exist. I, for one, do not want to go gently into the night.

The beliefs just stated separate me from most political writers. They would like to engage enlightenment man in a rational discussion. I think our survival depends on tribal instincts and gut feelings that are outside the realm of the rational. So I don't write blogs too much anymore – I spend time with my kid. But I do continue to review books on Amazon.

The other thing I must do at this point is to look out for the future of my family. We are quite well situated by Ukrainian standards. We own our house outright, and we have both Social Security and a private pension to live on. Nonetheless, it looks like the powers that be – liberal politicians and central banks – are hell-bent on destroying the whole structure of society. I think we can count on owning the house, but I do not believe that Social Security will hold up even for the duration of my lifespan, much less that of my wife and son. I spent a lot of time thinking about their future. Like every investor I talk to, I am bereft of good ideas where to invest in order to avoid the coming cataclysm. As I write this we are shopping for another small piece of land. Prices in Kyiv have fallen by half since Putin started the war in the East. My bet is that land will retain its value better than almost any alternative. It has its risks – betting that Putin does not initiate a full-scale war, and betting that there will be enough people to fuel demand for land here in Kyiv – but it seems like as good a bet as any.

Zoriana

Oksana and I knew when we got married that we wanted more than one child. It took us only a couple of months for her to get pregnant with Eddie. We did not get started trying for the second until he was approaching three. It was more difficult than we imagined. It turned out that one of the guys in the Russian speaking Toastmasters club was a doctor in a fertility clinic. After he gave a couple of speeches about the miracles he worked, we went for a visit. Doing everything right, Oksana got pregnant again in the matter of a few months.

Zoriana was born at home on September 7, 2017. This time we hired a more experienced midwife who seemed to have everything under total control. The whole delivery took only about three hours. The [birth announcement is here](#). Since I sent it to people with whom we are not in terribly frequent contact, I also wrote up what [Eddie](#), [Oksana](#) and [I are](#) up to, as well as a summary of our (lack of) [travel](#) plans.

At just shy of three months, Zoriana is a healthy girl, already up to 6 kg. She is quite even-tempered. This is due, I am sure, in no small measure to the fact that we pick her up all the time. Oksana cannot stand to hear a baby cry. Anna, Eddie's longtime babysitter, is now with us about five days a week to take care of Zoriana. Eddie has become more and more my responsibility.

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Conclusion

That's a wrap on my autobiography 10 years after having made the decision to divorce and start a new life. It finds me approaching my 74th birthday. I expect the world will be radically different by my 84th, that the coming decade will see more change than I have witnessed in my entire lifetime. I hope I have the strength, and I hope I am able to prepare my son for whatever is coming.