

My debt of gratitude to the McCleary family.

I met Mary Ann in August 1979 as I changed jobs. The last time we spoke was December 31, 2009 as Suzy was returning from a visit to us in Kyiv. Incidentally, that's also the last time I talked to Suzy – we had spent a pleasant couple of weeks together, and then, wham, absolute silence. Whatever the case, Mary Ann and my acquaintance lasted just over 30 years.

A lot goes on in three decades. We raised three children and made a lot of memories together. I would like to take this opportunity to share some of the memories.

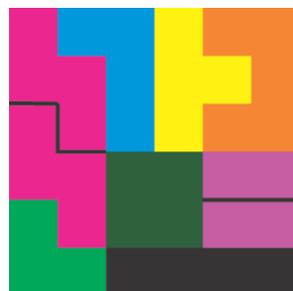
Eddie loves songs that I picked up from Rosie. He does a great job with "Little Bunny Foo Foo." As a baby he loved to hear "All the Pretty Little Horses" and "Hush Little Baby Don't Say A Word." I remember Rosie singing them to Laney when she was a baby. Our new baby Zoriana is not old enough to offer an opinion, but she seems to like them as well.

Speaking of Laney, Zoriana's middle name is Melania. It is a fairly rare name. No, she is not named after Laney, nor is she named after Mrs. Trump. Rather, it is her 95-year-old great-grandmother, a Holodomor survivor who is still kicking.

The kindergarten teachers tell us that Eddie needs speech therapy. It is true – like quite a few kids, he has trouble pronouncing the letters R and L. Oksana was skeptical but I told her that of all the therapies our grown children had, Jack's speech therapy was the most effective. All of us still remember Dr. Kahn quite favorably.

I am waiting for Eddie to show an interest in mathematics. If it is heritable, Eddie should have it. In his day, Oksana's father placed second in a Russian statewide math competition. I was a late bloomer, but did manage 790 on the math part of the GRE back in 2003. Eddie is certainly not what you would call precocious. He so far doesn't seem vastly curious about arithmetic. When and if he is, I hope I remember some of the explanations that O'John offered over the years, such as the proof that the number of primes is infinite.

As Eddie and I do his puzzles I reflect on discussions with O'John about topography. This one is easy at first - there are hundreds of ways to combine the ten 2, 3, 4 and 5-square pieces into a 6x6 square. However, we make it challenging by attempting to maximize symmetry – how many pieces can be aligned along a vertical running down the middle, such that they would appear the same in a mirror image?¹ Can the puzzle be solved for every possible positioning of one of the pieces? It is interesting to observe as Eddie's combination of random trials and strategy shifts slowly towards the latter. I suspect there is some topographic theory one could apply in order to avoid running down blind alleys, though I could not myself articulate it. Likewise, there must be some approach one could take to computing the number of possible solutions, though I have no idea how I would start.



Because he doesn't watch TV or play video games, we have to be pretty active entertaining Eddie. We do jigsaw puzzles. We play quite a bit of the simplest game of dominoes, where the objective is simply to go out. Next year I hope to move up to the game called Muggins, or all-fives, where the objective is to make the ends total a multiple of five. Come Christmas we will move up from a double 6 to a double 12 set. It's not only a better game, but you can make taller towers out of 91 dominoes than just 28.

For better or worse, the most important advantage of starting a second family this late in life is that I can see how things turned out. I regret the entire Episcopal school experience. Not that I think it would've been better in Montgomery county public schools – all the schools draw from the same pool of teachers. We might not have avoided Howard Zinn, but at least we could have saved some money.

¹ Answer appears to be five, covering 18 of the 36 squares.

After retiring in 1997 I worked as a substitute teacher in Washington area private schools. It gave me an opportunity to see how the other kids were doing. Our children were not alone in never having learned their times tables. Almost nobody in Edmund Burke or Field School knew them either. Ukrainians are horrified, unbelieving when I tell them this. However cruel and unusual it may be, times tables are drummed into kids here until they know them. They are also asked to learn long poems by rote.

O'John and Denise, you certainly know about the problems with public school math education. American schools have the challenge of educating a very diverse population, from the high-performing Jewish and Asian kids to other minorities who at best merely seem uninterested. Ukraine is different. At the top end, the Asians never came and the Jews seem to have mostly emigrated to Israel or America. On the left side of the bell curve distribution, the Soviets did their best for 70 years to try to integrate the Gypsies into Soviet society. They failed miserably. Now there seems to be a tacit agreement that the Gypsies simply don't attend school. The upshot is that teachers are immune to charges of discrimination. The school population is very homogeneous. Teachers have nothing to fear in asking the kids to try hard.

A side riff on the Gypsies. There is quite a colony of them living less than half a mile from our house in condemned houses along the right away of a long moribund subway line extension project. How they can live in the 550 square-foot unheated houses with no utilities is beyond me. But they do. In their favor I can say that despite whatever dark murmurings my neighbors may make, I don't see any evidence that they steal anything. Folk wisdom says that this is to be expected – they don't want to wear out their welcome. Also in their favor, their families seem to be intact and they treat the kids nicely. We ride on the buses with them all the time. Though it is not saying a whole lot, the kids are better dressed than the grown-ups. Both the men and the women are very attentive to the kids, and they have lots of them. The major public service that they use is the polyclinic. I'm sure that the doctors have their own stories to tell, but since I find myself to be just about the only one with a good word for them, I welcome this opportunity to share it.

Perhaps more significant even than math is that American kids today don't write. Or, rather, they write brief and ungrammatical messages on their ubiquitous electronic devices. I do not recall a single piece of prose that Jack, Naomi or Suzy wrote. They surely had a number of written assignments in high school, but I didn't see them. There was nothing of which they were proud enough to want to show me, or even let me see, and their work seemed to be generally dashed off the last minute. Once again, my observation is that the whole generation is rather like this. As an Amazon book reviewer I am pleased to find that there are a few young people who write quite well. I am however convinced that in this generation writers are the exception, more so than they were in my youth.

The elementary school assignments I remember best were the stupid ones. Jack had to make Hadrian's Wall out of little rocks. I had to help him. I did not disguise the fact that I thought it was a dumb assignment. Jack also had "group learning" sessions with three or four other elementary school age boys. It turned out to be mainly goofing off. There might have been one serious kid who would do the job, or might not. Whatever it was, the pedagogue who dreamed this up certainly did not understand boys. It's hard enough to get them to respect the educational process and do the assignments as individuals.

One of the things I remember most fondly is playing with all three kids in the family room. We jumped and romped on the heavy Swiss furniture that I had brought back from Germany. The kids would hide on one side and I jump over the top, or vice versa, everybody screaming and yelling and having a great time. It is only a bit different with Eddie and his friends. We built a climbing ladder, a climbing rope, rings and a miniature swingset in the common room on the second floor. The scale is too small for adults to join in, but the kids have a wonderful time with it.

Our backyard on Huidekoper Place was a great place for kids. Jack and Naomi and the neighborhood kids all joined in running around on the lawn, playing on the swings and horizontal ladder, and climbing up into the not-so-high treehouse I built on the corner. The house was small enough that they had a strong incentive to get into the out-of-

doors, and there were other kids around such as Federico, the Diamond boy, Emily and Margo Locker and Mara Fox's daughter. The lawn was not much to talk about, but it had the virtue of being the only one in the neighborhood.

We have that same benefit now. Our lawn is somewhat bigger and in better shape than the one on Huidekoper; the swing set and sandbox are a bit worse; the jungle gym is better but the trees are not quite so good for climbing. Nevertheless, the main attraction is that it is the only big yard and lawn around. Kids like to come in play here.

Cooking for the family was always one of my enjoyments. I was pleased to note that it rubbed off, at least on Suzy. She joined in to help prepare our Christmas dinner in 2009, making something special out of squash and marshmallows, as I recall. I'm happy to report that my pizza, lasagna, pumpkin, apple and mince pies and so on are just as popular here as back in Washington. We do more with homegrown ingredients. Eddie and his friends help me gather grape leaves to stuff in making dolma. We grow our own pumpkins for the pumpkin pie. Our apple trees are so generous that despite the fact that we gorge ourselves from August through October, more than half of them still rot on the ground. Our peach tree gave its first decent harvest this year. The sour cherry-plum tree provides more than we can use. We get overrun with cucumbers and tomatoes; for winter we have about five three-liter jars each of pickles and pickled tomatoes. And whenever we cannot find Eddie, the thing to do is to look for his purple stained face between the rows of raspberries.

Shashlik – barbecued pork – is a Ukrainian national dish. I have learned to do a fairly reasonable job of cooking it. This year, however, I found an Internet store that will deliver real American-style steaks: T-bone, porterhouse, ribeye and strip loin. We put on three American-style garden parties this summer featuring grilled steak, potato salad and homemade pie. It is not just the menu that characterizes an American party. One of the things that we Americans do especially well is small talk. A typical Ukrainian party is a highly programmed affair, with party games, poetry recitals, guitar playing and singing popular music from the Beatles through Lady Gaga, and endless toasts. Our parties are growing more and more informal, as we find our Ukrainian friends increasingly comfortable with just conversation. Though some remain a bit ill at ease with nothing specific being expected of them, most of them do pretty well.

Eddie is just learning how to sound out words and make his letters. We are giving him all the encouragement we can in this direction. Also, we are ensuring that he does not have any electronic distractions. We have told him that whatever the other kids may have, he does not and will not have TV, video games or movies. I am enough of a Neanderthal to think that reading and writing are still essential skills and that electronic gadgets get in the way. I spend a lot of time with [bedtime reading](#).

He likes tools. He can't keep his hands out of my toolbox. I'm pleased to say he's pretty responsible about putting things back when he's done. Ukrainians are generally pretty handy people, like John McCleary Sr. and my father Ells, and unlike the millennial generation. I read last week that Home Depot despairs of people under 40. They don't shop in home improvement stores because they don't know how to handle tools. They and Lowe's are setting up classes to teach them. I don't think Eddie will have that problem.

Rather like Suzy, Eddie loves to cook. Starting about the age of five he would make pancakes in the morning. He loves to help grind hamburger, make pizza, biscuits, sauerkraut, homemade pickles and other dishes. He is a big help to his mother in the garden plot behind the house. He has vowed to make money next year my growing and selling pumpkins. There is no fortune to be made – this time of year pumpkin sells for about ten cents per pound – but I like his idea.

A major difference between his life and that of his older siblings is that we have no car. We ride the jitney bus, city buses, Metro, tramway and regional electric trains every place we go. With, of course, occasional taxi trips, more frequent now that Oksana is going out places with Zoriana.

I see a world of difference between Eddie's experience and that of American children. Instead of being strapped into a child seat and hauled around like a sack of potatoes, he is a full participant. He knows all of our local bus drivers by

name, and sits up in front and talks to them as we go back and forth to kindergarten. He knows a lot of the old ladies on the bus as well and converses with them in Russian and Ukrainian. When he is with me I have to remind him that it's rude to speak English when other people don't understand. He's usually pretty good about it. He also makes friends with the other kids on the bus. Speaking native English makes him an attractive rarity here in Ukraine, where everybody is studying the language.

Our kids will learn Russian because that's what we speak at home. Although his kindergarten is nominally Ukrainian-speaking, the staff, like most educated people in Kyiv grew up with Russian. Six months ago Oksana resolved that he had to learn Ukrainian and started to speak to him pretty much exclusively in that language. He has come along quite quickly. She also enrolled him in a Ukrainian folk singing group called Pravitsa. There, when I speak Russian – and I don't do well with Ukrainian - they look at me like I had three heads and put on pained expressions. But that will take my money. And, Eddie is very much at home speaking Ukrainian with them.

Eddie has shown no interest whatsoever and learning to play any of the instruments around our house – piano, xylophone, violin or recorder – but he does love to sing. He is not shy about performing. He often sings Ukrainian folksongs on the bus. I have to concede that his repertoire is limited and even at that he doesn't always get the verses in the proper order, but the fact that he does it all is pretty amazing. He also likes American songs, among them Little Bunny Foo Foo as noted above. The one he sings on the bus, however, is Gogi Grant's 1956 hit "The Wayward Wind," which he learned from me. I sometimes join in. I had a business card printed up for Eddie as a singer.



Eddie's kindergarten runs from 9:00 in the morning until 1:30 in the afternoon. We take the 8:20 bus from a stop 1/8 of a mile from our house into Livoberezhna, the local commercial center. From there we can walk 15 minutes or take a city bus to his kindergarten. We almost always do the family shopping together on these trips. If we are fast we can get everything done in the time we would be waiting for a bus anyhow. Eddie knows all of the vendors in the farmers' market. He is taking more and more responsibility for buying things. I can give him small bills to buy fresh chiabata bread from the baker or bananas and pears from Tanya, the fruit and vegetable lady. They all love him. It is conceded by everybody in our household that I pay a smidge more than a fair price for everything, but on the other hand Eddie always comes away with a banana, pear or plum in his hand to nibble on the way home.

There are five adults in our five-bedroom house. Naomi met Yuri and Paulina, then not even engaged, living in the guest bedroom, almost four years ago. They celebrated their first wedding anniversary in July. Two years ago another friend, Marina, broke up with her partner and needed a place to stay. Oksana took a chance – most women would not be comfortable having their husband around another one as attractive as Marina – and invited her to live in the small upstairs bedroom. We see the three of them mostly at breakfast. They all enjoy talking with Eddie. Marina has a 19-year-old son who is studying in China. She is comfortable around babies and will occasionally hold Zoriana in those odd moments when she has time.

I clearly remember teaching Naomi to ride a bike summer of 1990 or so at the George Street house in Dewey Beach. I likewise remember tying four bikes to the roof of the car for our trek out there. I had hoped that Eddie would learn this summer to ride without training wheels. However, he's a kind of cautious kid and it didn't happen. Nonetheless I count my blessings. The way our neighborhood is laid out there are several destinations as far as 6 miles away that he can get to even with training wheels. We spent a lot of time bicycling together this summer. We also spent a fair amount of time at the beach. The river and lake are both warm enough for swimming between the middle of June and the first of September. Just as with the training wheels, he is not yet comfortable without swimmyies, but he's pretty good at distance. He can go maybe 1/3 of a mile alongside me.

Eddie is comfortable with little girls. He has two little playmates in the house as I write this. I'm happy to say that the girls see themselves as feminine. They dress up like princesses, flirt and pirouette as charmingly as they can. Eddie clearly enjoys their company, although he gets uncomfortable when they come on too strong. I credit geography and good luck. In my own childhood I was one of eight boys – and no girls – on my block. I was a little bit late learning how to act around the opposite sex. It wasn't much better for Jack. There had been little girls on Huidekoper Place, like Caroline Harmon's and the Locker girls, but I don't remember any in our Mohican Place neighborhood. Come to think about it, I don't recall Naomi and Suzy playing with neighborhood boys, either. Jason was the best there was, and he never came off much like a real boy. NB: as I just poked my head out, Katya and Sophika were hovering over Zoriana, learning the business of motherhood, while Eddie was off by himself fiddling with the Victorinox Swiss Army knife he got for his sixth birthday. Everything normal.

Oksana is blessed to have a husband who has nothing better to do than help her with the baby and a mother who absolutely dotes on her granddaughter. Given the standard state of tension between mothers and daughters, we are probably lucky that grandmother Nadia has to stay in her hometown of Svetlovodsk to take care of her own 95-year-old mother. When she comes up to see us she spends just about all of her time in the kitchen or with Eddie. Oksana gets mothered to death, and I get my share of mother-in-lawing, but it is all for the best.

I am always ready and willing to take Zoriana. I wanted her and am incredibly pleased that she is here. Nonetheless, there are certain eternal truisms. At least in women's minds, men never know how to hold babies. Just as when they get older we don't know how to dress them appropriately for the weather or to feed them appropriately, but that will wait. Though I get to hold Zoriana a fair amount, I am clearly a second-class citizen.

Oksana's greatest blessing is Anna, whom we met when Eddie was a baby. Anna's daughter Sophia was born just a day after Eddie when we lived in the same apartment house downtown. The mothers struck up a conversation walking the babies in the courtyard and the relationship has strengthened over the years. Anna loves babies. She has served as a surrogate mother twice, the last birth coming two weeks before Zoriana's. She is very glad to have a baby to take care of, and Oksana is likewise glad to have the help. More than that, Anna is a real Ukrainian. She loves our kids as her own, to the point of keeping Eddie in line just as strictly as we do. The kid gets a lot of respect and appreciation, but nobody cuts him much slack. All of us expect him to clean up his messes, say please and thank you, and behave himself with his playmates. Come in the house, they settle for what they get. If we had a house cat we would have to have him spayed, be wary of fleas and ticks, and complicate our lives more than I would like. The status quo is just fine. Speaking of cats, Shady must be about 15 years old by now. I wonder how he is doing.

The way our house is built there is no reasonable place to put a cat door. The feral cats from the neighborhood come around to mooch for leftovers. Eddie and I cut a cat-sized hole in a cardboard box, which we put on a workbench on the back porch to make a shelter for them to stay out of the weather in the winter. Death is an unfortunate part of the cycle of existence. The tenant, a cat we called Pyervui, which means first in Russian, though the neighbors knew him by another name, got caught by the feral dogs. The neighbors buried him and let us know. There was a day of grieving throughout the household. Eddie and I have also buried a woodpecker that flew into a window, a hedgehog that got run over, and a few frogs and smaller things.

I have changed my mind about homeschooling Eddie. He is a very social kid. He needs to be around other children. Moreover, he needs to perfect his Ukrainian. In Kyiv you get to pick your school. I am in the process of visiting choices for next year. Meanwhile, Oksana will network with parents in the neighborhood to see what they think and we will come to a decision. Inasmuch as Eddie already speaks good English and Russian and is coming along with Ukrainian, I think other subjects matter more than language. I find the idea that a school might stress math and science in the first grade to be a little bit of a stretch, but I keep my opinion to myself. I'll go along with the game and will probably pick a math-oriented school. In any case, they all teach English starting in the first grade. I am sure they will be happy to have a native speaker who can help the other kids. It's a role that Eddie accepts with relish. As we ride to school on that 8:20 bus he happily helps Masha and Marushya, couple of second grade girls, with their English.

I will keep the homeschooling as an option. I don't sense that the schools here are going to go out of their way to indoctrinate him on subjects such as gender, diversity, global warming and such. These just aren't topics of great interest to Ukrainian society. Our major concern is whether or not they give him a good education. Teachers here are woefully underpaid. The profession no longer enjoys the status that it had in the Soviet days. Oksana and I will pay close attention to how he is coming along in arithmetic and whether or not they are asking enough of him in the way of reading and writing.

A danger sign for me will be reports of too many movies in school. The schools at which I substitute taught in the Washington area had low expectations of us subs, and I suspect of the classroom teachers as well. I don't know how many times I was asked to show Finding Nemo in either Spanish or French. I actually know those languages and could have talked to the students and tried to stimulate some discussion, but neither the administration, nor the classroom teachers nor the students themselves seemed to be terribly interested. One teacher even told me that their objective was not to make them fluent but "to prepare the students to learn Spanish when they get to college."

On one occasion the kids took advantage of my naïveté about American culture. I was substituting a science class and they said they had a terrific movie about a laboratory experiment. I got sucked in – we watched Biodome. I had to laugh – I had been had. In any case, I will reconsider homeschooling if Eddie comes home telling me about the movies he is watching in school or all of the cool video games he is playing with his friends on their smart phones.

As you can see, I am able to use quite a bit of what I learned the first time around in raising my second family. I have a bit less energy and a bit less money, but more time and more experience. It helps also that we are in a much more traditional society and not in the hothouse environment of elite public and private schools. Though I did not know the specifics of the types of political corruption so much of which has been uncovered in the past year, I had an uncomfortable sense that the people we were rubbing shoulders with in school were highly political and morally flexible.

I'll give Jack, Naomi and Suzy credit. I think they had an inkling of the deceptions and games that others around them were engaged in, both personally and politically, and they wanted no part of it. Mary Ann and I were honest with one another, and I think that the kids grew to expect the same of others. If Jack and Naomi did not hear about it before, I don't think they will be shocked to learn that the Rev. Stephen Davenport offered that Jack could be one of the three kings in the St. Patricks school play, just about the time that I as the school treasurer was digging into how he had managed to steal \$50,000 from the school. And about how he was being protected by our gay priest, Jim Steen, whose affairs with men in the choir were stinking up the place. That's Washington.

Jack made a couple of memorable contributions to the family lexicon. In this land of small apartments it seems like everybody Eddie knows has a dropkick dog for a pet. Chihuahuas, Spitz', Yorkies and so on. I am grateful that Eddie has not shown any interest in having one himself. Another of Jack's contributions came to mind at breakfast. 'Shrooms in an omelet. And, as I survey the Millennial social scene from my vast remove, the concept of wiggers seems to remain wonderfully descriptive.

I'll close with an ironic note. Although I am certainly the oldest dad of whom anybody knows – I even have Mick Jagger and Billy Joel beat – I am not such an exception in Kyiv. Young parents usually both have to work in order to make ends meet, and the grandparents spend a great deal of time with the kids. On the bus, therefore, I often chat with people my age who were ferrying their kids to and from school. The bottom line, though what I'm doing may seem like a very odd thing for an American guy, but it is not so unusual at all in this part of the world. I am in my element.

That's now in the past. It is more comfortable here. I'll close in giving thanks again for the experiences I had in raising my first family, and in wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a good new year.

Graham

