

Thank God for President Trump, he's already made my life better. I've been pestering Christine for several years to get rid of the school so we can travel around Europe for a nice long spell, but Oh No, she loves her job far too much. Then came the morning after the election "Right, we're off, buy the damn tickets now!". So we did. And they say Trump hasn't done anything positive. He has for me.

It's interesting in Europe that as soon as you are identified as American, everyone wants to talk about how we could possibly elect Trump. I always get in first and tell them he's why I'm in Europe and they sagely nod and changes the subject. I can then go on the offensive about Brexit or Irish food or Italian drivers or French hospitality or whatever. It's reassuring that wherever you go there is always something to make fun of.

During our copious traveling we came up with a few hints I'll pass on for Americans in Europe . . . English beer is supposed to taste like that, seriously. And yes the coffee is undrinkable because it's instant. Don't bother packing shorts when visiting Ireland. Or Scotland. Neapolitan pizza isn't as good as Papa Gino's but the wine is better. Always rent the smallest car possible. Except in Germany, rent the fastest. The most important of all is to have lots of relatives and friends whose generosity you can take advantage of.

We had a fine old time in Europe. People ask what was the best place/food/beer/wine/choccy bars/pork pies/fish'n'chips/illegal drugs etc. It turns out that the highlights weren't places or things, the best part was meeting relatives and friends, old and new. People we hadn't seen for decades are still great friends after the first awkward 10 minutes. It's like you saw them yesterday. It's even better that most are balder than me, even some of the men. There again none of them are as deaf as I am. As we meandered around these foreign locales, Christine would try to get my attention "Michael....**Michael**....**MICHAEL!**" until I eventually paid attention along with every other Michael in the vicinity. I explained that this was inefficient and that she should skip the preliminaries and just go straight to "**MICHAEL**". Of course once she tried that I would give her the "You don't have to shout, I'm not deaf you know". So she went back to the Michael trinity. My hearing loss reached a point where I finally accepted it and bought hearing aides. I still don't respond until the third calling of my name, it's become a matter of principle.

There is a saying about traveling that I found apt: before leaving, lay out all your clothes and all your money. Take half the clothes and twice the money. Still, it's definitely worth it.

It's tough talking about the kids since we've not seen them for most of the year. I'm sure there are many good stories, it's just that I don't know them. I guess not having too much to report can be considered a blessing. The opposite of the Chinese curse "may you live in interesting times". They are all doing well and pretty much the same as last year.

Andrew and Erin are living the American dream in Goffstown NH. Andrew opened a local office to avoid his four hours a day commuting to Boston which gives him more time to sit at his computer pretending to work and brewing artisan coffee. He's a lot like me in the fact that he hasn't taken up golf. That's my boy.

Ellie, Bob and Lyanna are doing fine in Brooklyn. In case you are wondering, yes Lyanna is still the world's greatest baby. We saw her recently and noticed that every time she takes a poop (or a botty burp) she crosses her legs and blows a raspberry. A charming habit that I found so endearing I've taken to copying it.

Speaking of passing wind, why is it that when Christine does it she smiles and says “oops, a little old lady fart” and that somehow makes it acceptable. When I do it (very infrequently I may add), it's “**MICHAEL**, that's disgusting”. I'm sure she'll be fine with it now I that I'm doing my Lyanna impersonation.

Stephen continues to be the man about town in DC and the area's most eligible bachelor. He's still working for the golf management company and apparently he's really good at golf now. What I find interesting is that he never bothers keeping score. That sums him up perfectly. Steve, you are still the man!

Gregory finally moved out of the house and took a job in Raleigh NC. A long way from here (11 hour drive) but he often finds excuses to head back, usually for sporting events. He and Kelly announced their engagement this year which pleased everyone. I think the prevailing sentiment was “about bloody time, Gregory”. The wedding date is still in flux due to Kelly's sister's wedding in the summer and the fact that her parents have to get second jobs to pay for it all. I think Christine secretly misses Gregory living in our basement.

We are now safely back in the good Ole US of A. The land of big cars, Big Macs, Big Papi, and little gun control. It's nice to be back but we've still got another three years (or maybe seven! – aaaargh) of Trump to avoid. It's tempting to bugger off again but where to go for three years and what to do?

We have gone from having busy lives to full time traveling to nothing. Are we retired? Unemployed? Still traveling? It's hard to figure it all out at the moment. A lot of our friends have retired but neither of us seem the type, at least at the moment. What do we do next? I find this question quite exciting, Christine finds it a bit worrying. If anyone has any good ideas send them to us written on the back of a \$100 bill. A 100 Euro note will suffice but definitely not that worthless Sterling nonsense.

Thanks again to everyone who put us up and put up with us. Maybe we'll do it again next year. We should probably wait a while longer for the memories to fade first.



Have a great Christmas and a very enjoyable 2018.