

Well that year went fast! I haven't quiet got the hang of writing '2023' instead of '2022' and it's almost 2024 already. I think history is speeding up. I have come up with a new law of physics, the Einstein-Brown Theory of Very Special Relativity. The theory posits that by the time I'm 80 I'll be writing a Christmas letter every other week.

This year turned out to be special for me, it was the year of my first existential revelation. No, not finding an image of the Virgin Mary on a slice of toast. Although I did find an image on my toast the other day, but it looked more like Maggie Thatcher, which made it completely undigestible. No, my revelation was much more profound. In March we were sitting in a little white village in the mountains of southern Spain sipping Rioja and munching jamón while gazing over the Mediterranean (as one does). It made me appreciate the wonders of the world and the beauty of all the different cultures. So why on earth am I sitting on my fat ass watching my life slowly ooze by in suburban NH?

Now don't get me wrong, living in middle class suburban America has been wonderful, as long as you are white, educated and avoid the mass shootings. It's a great place to raise a family, convenient, comfortable, accessible. Someone cuts my grass, digs the snow off my driveway, the neighbors are friendly. It's all easy and comfortable but is this all there is for the rest of our lives? Sod it, we are bugging off either to a metropolitan area or the middle of the boonies, somewhere different. Or better still, a metropolitan area in the middle of the boonies – so Portland, Maine it is. But it gets better . . .

Ellie and family have been living with us for the year and they were due to move out in the summer once Bob had found a job in the area. Well, you know . . . the job market is slow . . . the kids are settled at their schools . . . we don't know where we'll end up yet, so . . . could we stay for another year? Absolutely, in fact it works out perfect. Ellie lives in the NH house and we bugged off to Maine (1hr 20min north). They do their child rearing in suburban comfort and I get to pretend I'm 26 years old and stagger around all the breweries, bars and music venues. Now that's the way life should ooze!



The trouble is that it didn't quite work out as we planned due to health issues. Christine finally had enough of all this cancer crap. She decided to get rid of all the extraneous bits inside her body that have (or could possibly get) cancer. We got some cowboy sawbones to hack and whack away at her, tossing out anything that came to hand. . . reproductive system, pah, useless; lymph nodes, no idea what they do, out they go; unused neurons, completely superfluous. She's now like a walking cavern. When she eats you can hear the food echoing around inside.

The operation was at Mass General in Boston and it only took her a couple of days for her to know the life stories of every nurse on the ward. We had to get her out of there before she organized several committees and a quilt group.

The operation was in August and the recovery period is several months. She decided she would be more comfortable being in the dotting arms of Ellie's family for the first few months so we ended up being lodgers in the house I'm leasing to Ellie. It's not as complicated as it appears and everyone seems to be

making the best of it and we are just about transitioned up to Maine full time.

All the rest of our family are doing fine. The kids, their spouses, grandkids and dog are all in great shape. We obviously see a lot of Ellie's three kids and there are plenty of cute stories but really, who gives a damn about other people's grandkids so I won't bore you with that nonsense. OK, just one anecdote . . .

My job in the morning is house barista, I make everyone coffee. I know, it's a huge imposition on my lifestyle but I don't complain (much). I make a big fuss and tell all the grandkids that I do everything in this house. I've got them well trained . . .

Me: "What do I do in this house?"
Audrey (5) & James (3): "EVERYTHING!"
Lyanna (7): "Erm, you just make coffee!"

Eventually Lyanna convinced the other and now I get:

Me: "What do I do in this house?"
Lyanna, Audrey, James: "NOTHING!" + lots of giggles

If I put the old pouty face on I can get Lyanna to begrudgingly admit I do "somethings". Ungrateful little bastards – they can make their own coffee!

The Stephen engagement odyssey is in it's last throws and he has finally got a date to get married. March in Mexico. Not only did I get an invite, I'm officiating the ceremony. I know, is he nuts? I did ask him if he's taken into account my sense of humor and he told me to go ahead and do my worst. Oh dear, a challenge. On the positive side he's having a tequila donkey at the reception. We'll probably both need it's loving care after the ceremony. I don't know what the donkey is all about either but how bad can a tequila donkey be? I suspect it might be my highlight of 2024.



I hope everyone has a great Christmas and you all ooze through 2024 in style.