

This and That, Christmas 2017 Edition



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After a long writing hiatus, I'm back in action. Time flies when you're having fun, time flies when you're not having fun, time flies when you're busy, and time flies when you're not looking. So why can't we ever catch time and stash it away for a rainy day?

This Christmas I decided it's time to catch up my loyal readers with all the news fit to print (and more) on the Virginia edition of the Charest family. This has been a good year, and a busy year, for both Winnie and me.

In January we resumed our home improvement project of replacing all the worn carpeting in our home with wood flooring. We had started the previous January, foolishly thinking it would only take about four months to replace three levels worth of flooring. So this January, we only had the upstairs flooring and stair treads left to do. About the same time, I was hired by a Washington, D.C., language school as a part-time English Second Language (ESL) teacher, teaching an evening class. Winnie did the flooring work on weeknights and I made my home improvement contributions on weekends while working weekday evenings.

I really enjoyed teaching again and enjoyed the atmosphere of working in a teaching environment. Over the next few months, I

had students from Mongolia, China, Saudi Arabia, several South and Central American countries, and one student from the Gambia. However, with evening classes, my day job, and commuting, I was putting in eighteen-hour days. I started to realize that at 60, I just couldn't keep up that kind of pace. So after several months, I dropped down to just tutoring a couple of students and being available as an occasional substitute teacher. This was a schedule I could manage long-term, and I'm still affiliated with the language school.

Meanwhile, Winnie and I finished out the upstairs flooring along with side projects of building a new closet, adding a door into an attic space, and repainting everything. We completed the work in June, just in time for our next big adventure of another vacation trip to China.

Winnie had gone back to China about three years ago, but on that trip, she spent all her time nursing her mother through a bad spell. I hadn't been to China since 2011, and I really wanted to explore more of the country and visit Winnie's family.

So in late August, we made a jammed two-week trip. We flew non-stop from Dulles, Virginia, into Beijing and then jumped to [Xi'an](#), the location of the [Xi'an Terracotta Warriors](#), for the first leg of our trip. From there we jumped to [Hangzhou](#) and explored the beautiful [West Lake](#). We also toured the [Leifeng Pagoda](#) which is the source of the "[Legend of White Snake](#)." From Hangzhou, we jumped to [Liuzhou](#) to visit family, then on to Luchuan, Winnie's home village of Baijing, and then Nanning and home via Beijing. Interestingly, on this trip, our flight from Dulles airport took us east over Greenland, down over central Russia and Mongolia, and into Beijing. On our way home we left Beijing and continued east over eastern Mongolia, Russia, Alaska, then down over central Canada and back into Dulles. So we made an around-the-world flight as a bonus to our other adventures.

During the year I also made a couple of quick weekend trips to Rhode Island to visit family and check on an aging Aunt and Uncle. We did have a big loss this year; my Aunt Noella Papangno passed away in November. One of my trips to Rhode Island was to attend her memorial service.

Over the summer we did our usual; Winnie planted and tended her normally fantastic vegetable garden, and I took either my kayak or powerboat out on the water whenever I had some free time. Winnie continued to go swimming at our local rec center several times each week and occasionally managed to drag me out with her.

Over the Thanksgiving holiday, Winnie and I made a quick trip out to Tennessee and visited other families including Mom, who turned 90 this past October.

So that's pretty much been our year. We're down to one major home improvement project left (finish out an attic) plus a few minor projects that we'll probably take care of this year. My job continues to be stable, which a real blessing considering the Government contracting industry. Winnie is still working as a Physical Care Assistant (PCA) and mostly likes the work for the opportunity to meet interesting people.

Winnie and I want to wish all our family and friends a very Merry Christmas, and a New Year of good health, happiness, and prosperity!