

Merry Christmas 2023

Admittedly, it has been with little ease that I conceived the message for this year's Christmas card; however, as the Five Man Electrical Band's 1971 protest anthem or the 1990's Blue Collar Comedy Tour comedian Bill Engvall foretold, I was presented with a sign this very day. As I took my morning constitutional with Sven and Lena, both of whom are well, a neighbor slowed his vehicle as he drove by and waived a copy of "Fahrenheit 451" out the window and shouted, "I can't wait to read it." He apparently stopped by the lending library I set up at the end of my driveway. The provocative and dystopian ideas of Machiavelli, Tolstoy, Orwell, Rand, Bradbury, Zamyatin, Burgess, Solzhenitsyn and the like fill the little stand. So far, Bradbury, Orwell and Solzhenitsyn seem to be big hits. War and Peace has yet to be taken (and it's even an English translation). Weird.

Notwithstanding the reading preferences of passersby, I recalled the words of Cicero, who said, "A room without a book is like a body without a soul." These words seem apropos to this year's letter not only because the disembodied spirit is an important storytelling device, such as in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Dicken's *A Christmas Carol* and the smashing cinematic triumph "Casper's Haunted Christmas," but also because it describes for me the Year of our Lord 2023...a very literary year.

In terms of health, my physical well-being has resembled something from a Dickens' novel. Gout struck in the first half of the year and in the second half of the year Norovirus, something not too dissimilar to dysentery. And so it's been with pregnant anticipation that I've awaited the onset of scurvy and rickets...maybe for next year's letter.

In terms of personal endeavor, I've come to the stage where I'm about to pedal to publishers two books I've finally finished writing. If successful, my life's goal of idleness, as afforded by the ongoing receipt of passive income, will be at hand. Contrary to Dean Wormer's admonition in *Animal House*, fat, drunk and stupid sounds like a swell way to go through life.

As with knowledge that comes from books, travel is among the greatest educations. So it was in terms of my trip abroad with my oldest friends, Alex and Tim. Oktoberfest in Munich beheld excellent German beer, numerous Nutella crêpes doused in Grand Marnier, a tent full of people from around the globe singing Bruce Channel's "Hey Baby," and the unrequited love of an octogenarian widow from Japan...everything one might expect to find in a Fodor's Travel Guide.

All-in-all, it was a pretty epic year. I hope yours was, too. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Very Truly Yours...Tom

