



**Claims Department**  
**62**

So, this is a year.

2023 has been fantastic for me, honestly. Despite setbacks, I've managed to get a trip to Hawaii, to go to LA for WrestleMania week, to write a ton of zines, to create a bunch of podcasts, and basically had a lot of fun with the kids.

It was also a time of health issues, of money issues, of general difficulty gettin' through stuff.

So, you know, a year.

This issue, I'm looking at a couple of days the kids and I had away.

Still mourning Doug Berry. Been working on putting together a compilation of his finest works, but it's hard.

OK, on with the show.





## A Couple of Days Away

Vanessa needed to be at work the two days before Thanksgiving. I had a training I could set-up, so I set it up for the Tuesday and took the Wednesday off, so I could watch the kids. You may remember the we went to the Fairfield Inn in San Carlos and visited the Blackhawk Museum and Hiller Air Museum back in August, and I thought it would be nice to give Vanessa a break and have a little bonding time with the two miniature humans with whom I live.

And Bella spent Monday night throwing up.

This is the kind of thing that every parent deals with at one point or another. A sick kid right before a trip away isn't a great thing, but when they managed to keep down a fair bit of Almond Milk, and slept through the night, we were all systems go for our visit!

Now, while the Air Museum would have been cool, but I took a chance on one of Priceline's "We'll Tell You Where You're Staying Once You Book" deals. This one was for a "3-star Hotel near San Jose Airport" so I knew 1) they were lying, and 2) 80 bucks was a good price.

I also made sure it would include a free hot breakfast, just like the Fairfield Inn in San Carlos had.

The hotel, it turned out, was the Fairfield Inn, a mere two blocks away from my work, where we stayed the night before we went to my Mom's for Christmas. It's a nice little hotel, one that absorbed the old, small Howard Johnson's motel that had been on the site for decades.

We got these at 10am, and luckily they had a room.

On the trip over, I put on an audiobook. If I'm being honest, I don't read anymore. Over the last few years, even with my glasses, type smaller than say 11pt isn't really readable by me. It's one of the reasons my zines always seem to have giant print. I've mostly turned to Audiobooks for the research I need to do (the up-coming Jack the Ripper in Fiction issue of *Journey Planet* required a 55-hour audiobook version of Otto Penzler's *The Big Book of Jack the Ripper*. I discovered Cozy Mysteries on Audible, and a great many of them were included with my membership. I found a series I really enjoyed, the *Cajun Country Mysteries* by Ellen Byron.

Now, let me set this up - Maggie (real name: Magnolia Marie Crozat) is an artist who left her hometown of Pelican, Louisiana, for New York City, only to return after having her heart broken by her ex, Chris. She goes home to her family's plantation, simply called Crozat, where her family has started a B-n-B. Maggie then finds work at another local former plantation, the one that was the familial home of the other side of her family, Duset.

Now, the elements here are ones that are completely familiar too me from all the other Cozy Mysteries I've been reading - there's food everywhere (Gumbo plays a major role in one) and there's the Bed and Breakfast angle, which two other series I've listened to have been centered around. Honestly, you could boil the Cozy Mysteries I've been listening to as 'Broken-hearted 30-something woman who likes to eat also loves solving crimes while falling in love with a local'

It's a simple but delightful formula.

The cast of characters is delightful. As many of the Cozys I've been reading feature a fascinating older character, typically a grandmother, the *Cajun. Country Mysteries* features Grand-mere,

Maddie's paternal grandmother. Something of a rarity in these kinds of mysteries, both Maggie's parents are alive and present! Her mom has a tragic backstory that pops back up from time to time, and her dad's a funny guy.

The setting, of course, is crucial, and she cajuns it up! The most frequently used phrase? *Laissez les bons temps rouler!*"

I've always wanted to start a temp worker company called Bon Temps.

Anyhoo, we got into the room, and the minute I set down the last bag, I swooned. I thought it was the lack of coffee, so I ran to the Starbucks across the way. I also grabbed donuts for the kids, which made them happy, and which Bella ate without issue!

VICTORY!!!

I, though, was, from that point forward, down for the count.

Now, for me, down for the count means something a little different than for most folks. I can't stop, someone's got to do the things that the kids need doin', and there were Cinequest shorts to watch and an issue of *Journey Planet* that needed layin' out. I did what I usually do when I'm sick: bursts of activity followed by flurries of naps.

The kids wanted to run around, and they did a little. There is a little-known fact that a sick kid doesn't heal: they acquire energies that they must expel at the earliest possible moment. Bella was in that phase, and I was in the intermittent napping phase. I opened the sliding door and let them run around the courtyard while I parked myself on the one of the benches. For a kid with Cerebral Palsy and a busted walking brace, JP sure can fly when he wants to! The little beasts enjoyed themselves, which allowed me to take a light, outdoors nap, and inspected the monument to the HoJo's the hotel had erected of the old steeple and weathervane. It was a nice touch. I think I only went to the restaurant once. I had the clams. They were gritty and a bit soggy. I think I had the true experience.

Anyhoo, after they got some energy out, we all came back inside, I tossed their tablets at them, approved apps for all-day, and dozed with the tv on Food Network.

Now, I love *Guy's Grocery Games*, *Chopped*, and most of the baking challenge shows. This time, it was GGG and I could not tell you the episodes because I was in and out of it the whole time. It was about 1pm and I was already exhausted, my stomach felt like Houdini's three days after and I could barely keep pretending my eyes were open.

“Papa, we’re hungry,” JP said as he picked up my phone, “I’ll get us DoorDash.”

Normally, I’d have argued, but this time, I kinda grunted a consent. JP ordered himself a steak, Bella a Breakfast platter, and me a burger. I was not consulted on these decisions, but the kids made the right choice. The DoorDash guy dropped them at the door, and the kids woke me up because the door was too heavy for them to open. We all ate, and I actually felt a bit better after the delightful Double Hamburger, no pickles. I sat up and watched Cinequest shorts for a couple of hours.

This year’s crop of short films I’ve been judging have been incredible. Yeah, there’s still a lot of films where you could tell they didn’t have the money to make it any better, but overall, the problems I saw in the films I would score in the 2003 to 2010 timeframe just aren’t there nearly as much. Yay, democratization of video production!

I saw about 20 that day, and they ranged from OK, but flawed, to absolutely mind-numbingly brilliant. A Documentary about the MTV program *TRL* hit me the hardest. I love when. Doc can make me laugh. There were a few good SciFi shorts, a couple of terrifying horror pieces, a really good Iranian drama. One or two that had mid-level celebs in them, and one that had an absolute A-Lister! It would be hard to compete with some of them when it came to drama, and even when the acting was a bit wooden, or the camera imprecise or the editing labored, these were the best shorts I’ve ever had the privilege to select.

I turned off the laptop and the TV for a while, JP wanted a nap, rare but not unheard of (and I think he’d had a fairly minor version of Bella’s sickness as well) so I put on my audiobook, finishing off the *Cajun Country Mysteries* (well, the fifth book of the 7 our so far, I wasn’t buying for the rest!), which suffered from some forced expository dumps and a tacked-on dramatic twist to make a happy ending for the best character of them all. Still, it wasn’t a bad read. The next on my list was another novel, but it wasn’t a cozy, though it certainly looked like one - *Union Street Bakery*.

It’s not a mystery, though it kinda is. It has many of the hallmarks of the cozy, a woman returned home after a fall from well-paying grace, a fun family, a past secret. This one has a cynical-ish thirtysomething, Daisy. who has returned to work at her parent’s failing bakery and live in an apartment above. The bakery. In beautiful Alexandria, Virginia, is all sorts of haunted. She’s also adopted, and has no idea about her mother who abandoned her at the bakery.



But an old, minutes-from-death customer does, and gives her a cryptic historic journal.

There's a lot more, but it's not quite a mystery in the way you think of them. It's an interesting look at heritage, history, and family identity. While I thought some of the plot was a tad corny, The writing was great. Prose like this isn't the norm in Cozys, there was a sort of minimalism, especially in the dialogue. This was only accentuated by the perfect delivery of the narrator who nailed the idea of every character's voice.

I would say this fell in line with Cozys, at least as far as structure and character concepts go, but plot and prose fall well outside the Cozy realm. I really liked it, though I decided to give a skip to the sequel until I've put some more traditional cozy mysteries until my gullet.

Rested up, I called up a documentary about the women involved in the early phase of electronic music. It was awesome to see my friend Susan Ciani up there, and Laurie Spiegel who I've eMailed with. It was a decent doc, but I was so tired and the kids seem to be getting tired just by being in the room with me. I took a quick bath and then went off to dream land.

The kids love history. In that, they are clearly mine! We woke up for the fantastic Hotel Breakfast! The make-your-own waffle bar is always a highlight, and oddly, at the last Fairfield Inn we stayed at they didn't have one. I made one for JP, and we all basically nibbled on it just a bit.

I was beat. I managed to enjoy some bacon and a mess load of coffee. Things were so bad, I was not invigorated by coffee. I had promised the kids some run-around time, and I needed to deliver. So, after breakfast, we drove out to History Park.

I've written a few times about History San Jose, which has had several names over the years and is now just called History Park. There are a number of old houses and buildings that have been brought to the park from all over San Jose, including an original fire house, a 1920s gas station, a dentist's office, and a blacksmith shop that had survived into the 1970s! A lot of folks forget that San Jose had a significant number of races up until the late 1980s, including my Grandparents' old place. The buildings are amazing time capsules, and as a way of paying to maintain them, they rent some out to groups, including the Poetry Center of San Jose.

One of the old buildings is dedicated to The **Museum** of the Boat People and the Republic of **Vietnam**, often just called **the Việt Museum**. It's a very crowded museum, but the collection

it holds is amazing. There are models (and I write about my love of Museum miniatures in the smol issue of Journey Planet) and the ones at the Việt Museum are pretty darn nice.

There are three beautiful memorial works in front that we very much loved.

The kids ran around, as they love to do, and we headed into the small museum. The stuff in there is amazing, an old movie projector, an Androbot robot, from the company founded by my friend Nolan Bushnell after he left Atari, and a collection of matchbooks! It's small, but perfect for what they are trying to do.

I was, though, beat. After a while, I got us into the car and we headed back to the hotel.

Again, tablets and laying' down. We watched a lot of Food Network, and I took two long baths. After that, the kids started calling for more Denny's. This time, they wanted Milkshakes. I agreed, and they then demanded Fried Cheese sticks. I was OK with it, and I ordered nothing for myself. I wasn't sure my stomach could handle it. The food came, DoorDash is awesome, and the kids dug in. They demolished their milkshakes.

This was a bad idea.

Bella threw up several times. It was...not good. I got 'em cleaned up, gave 'em a bath, and they said they were sleepy. They wanted to sleep close to the bathroom, just in case, so they





grabbed some blankets and a stuffed animal and leaned themselves up against a wall.

They were out for 8 hours.

JP and I watched a little TV, but they switched to Last Podcast on the Left. It was a series on the Manhattan Project, which they'd heard before but absolutely loved. They learned the term 'sloughing' which they use over and over and over now.

JP and I both napped, JP wanted dinner, and I needed it to. I ordered DoorDash again, this time for Taco Bell. The Power Bowl is JP's usual order, and to make things easier, I just did the same thing: no dairy. It was delightful, and about an hour later, JP crawled up in another corner, I took another bath, and Bella woke up and took their tablet. They were feeling better, and I ran to the near-by gas station and got some ginger ale for 'em and they sipped it the rest of the night.

I ended up with a sour stomach, though kept everything down thanks to a well-laid plan of Tums and horizontality.

The next morning was Thanksgiving. We started with the Free Breakfast, and let me tell you, Bella was excited for sausage! I was hesitant, so I said that they could have some if they ate some at 6am and then hadn't had any issues before 8am, when JP wanted to go down and eat. We headed back to the room and I worked on the JP Vietnam issue. It was taking forever, but it turned out pretty well! I took another bath, JP took one too, and we headed back to the breakfast room, and Bella dug into the sausage and a small pile of scrambled eggs. I drank my coffee. We enjoyed breakfast, and then packed up to head home.

We listened to more *Last Podcast on the Left* on the way home, and when we got back to Vanessa, she was still asleep, which is a good thing. If anyone can use an extra good night of sleep, it's my darling wife. We turned on the TV and watched *Community*. JP had never seen any of my favorite show, so we watched about 7 or 8 episodes. They were still hilarious, even when the comedy was of the time. Ten years is a long time in



comedy these days. JP's favorite character was The Dean, which is a good choice.

I got to work on dinner - turkey pot pie.

Why not a whole turkey? Or even just a turkey breast? Well, we didn't want to have so many left overs, and ground turkey is super-cheap. I started with the turkey and browned it, then took it out, leaving whatever fat was still in the pan.

Added diced mushrooms, leeks, carrot, small diced butternut squash and peas. I added corn starch, then stirred in small amounts of chicken stock and almond milk, a bit of Worcestershire sauce, some garlic, a bit of ginger, basil, parsley, and nutmeg. I stirred for ages, adding bits and drips of stuff to make it into a fantastic gravy after I added in the meat again, it turned into a wonderful gravy, and simmering for three hours, it gained incredible depth of flavor.

Now, we had a pie crust, but I thought, you know, we have some potatoes laying around. I popped a pot with 1/3 chicken stock, 1/3 almond milk, and 1/3 water, a little olive oil on top, and got it to boil. I then popped the potatoes in, got 'em mashed with vegan butter, garlic, almond milk, a bit of fresh basil, and some red pepper.

I poured the meat 'n gravy into the pie crust, then topped it with the potatoes. It's a Turkey Shepard's Pot Pie!

I popped it in the oven and it was fantastic! Even Bella, who is not a child who enjoys eating, loved it and asked for seconds!

It was delightful. As soon as it was done, I started planning our Christmas meal!





I was lucky enough to get to do an oral history with Markl Mothersbaugh, one of the founder of the band DEVO. He's a made genius, and his work as a composer for films like *The Life Aquatic*. And, while I did ask him about DEVO, I couldn't give it the attention it deserved.

Let's start with their founding. At Kent State, Mark met a fellow named Gerald Cassale, and featuring brothers of both, and a couple of others, they formed under a couple of different names before settling on DEVO after developing a gimmick where they were dedicated to 'de-evolution' which is the idea that humanity is regressing towards a primal form due to the development of society.

It works.

So, they started produced music that was both ahead of its time. They were making Punk rock in 1973-4, well before the movement towards Punk started in New York. Yes, the MC5, The Stooges, and even the New York Dolls all were basically doing Punk, but this was different. They were using keyboards in addition to the drums, guitar and bass, and it worked. Their early music, especially songs like *Mongoloid*, really hit. They had some classics on their first album, *Q: Are We Not Men? A: We Are Devo!* had an amazing pedigree. David Bowie and Iggy Pop both stood up to get them a contract, and Bowie was gonna produce that first album. Some previous commitments meant that Bowie had to step away and let some guy named Brian Eno produce.

A helluva fall-back, Eno.

The album is an absolute masterpiece, though it took them a while so they only get the respect for what had been avant garde. Songs like *Jocko Homo* and *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction*, which is one of he greatest covers of that song ever played. The highlight, though, is *Gut Feeling*. The song doesn't feel like Punk, it feels like late 1960s Garage Rock, like *Psychotic Reaction* by San Jose's own The Count-5. It's a damn groove, and it flows into a straight, hard punk rock breakdown at the end called "(Slap Your Mammy)" which is just fantastic.

This was released about the time I saw them for the first time, as I remember it (and I remember very little other than Mark wear a baby mask in a crib) it was DEVO, Blondie, and The Avengers, but looking over records, it looks like it was DEVO and CRIME and Blondie with The Avengers.

The next album was *Duty Now for the Future*, and other than *Secret Agent Man*, it's only OK. The third album, *Freedom of Choice*, was the best example of DEVO's output. *Whip It*, *Gates of Steel*, and *Girl U Want* are among the best songs that DEVO ever put out. They're great for providing an intro point to DEVO.

This was followed by *New Traditionalists*, an uneven album with two great singles - *Through Being Cool* and *Beautiful World*. The next album, *Oh No, it's DEVO* might be their most under-rated album. It was also the last time that DEVO was really something different. They were ahead of the curve first by bringing in the electronics to what had been a world of guitars and drums, and then as the world of Pop music moved into the electronic world, they amped up slightly more traditional. When bands like Information Society, a truly under-appreciated band of

the late 1980s and early 90s, DEVO had moved into the mainstream.

I loved DEVO as a kid, and I think I've seen them four or five times. They always kill it, and when they went on tour in the mid-2000s, they were still incorporating a lot of new technology into their act, which is pretty impressive for guys in their late 50s!

