

2020 The Year In Review

Thursday, December 31, 2020

As expected, work in "big data for electric distribution simulation and analysis" tapered off to unsustainable, so I start a new job January 4 as a Data Engineer with a company called [Sqooba](#) here in Bern, which is now wholly owned by [Open Systems](#). The elevator pitch is: "on a team developing ML based MDR for a SASE company". In English that's: "using machine learning to detect and respond to illegal intrusions in cloud networks". I'll still be doing big data, but using Spark structured streaming, Kafka, Kubernetes, MinIO, etc. instead of batch processing electric network analysis. The 9code GmbH company will be put in hiatus mode, with a possible resurrection for some values of the definition of "retirement". One downside of the new company is it's an Apple shop so (queue the sound track of Darth Vader heavy breathing) I'll be moving to the dark side and learning a whole new set of trivial keystrokes, arcane procedures, limitations and quirks. Their office is on the same tram line as our home, so it's an easy commute, but I will probably only be going in occasionally while the pandemic is rampant.

Given the new job, the open source software we developed will stay pretty much the same as it is now and the release cadence will decrease, since I will be working on it ad hoc instead of full time. It has now become quite sophisticated and covers the full chain of processes for several use-cases. If you want a tediously boring explanation, I've made a [presentation](#). Another downside of the new company is they don't do open source, so I'll continue working on these projects to get my fix.

Recently I've had a tooth abscess. I expect it will be OK in a few days with the antibiotics but I'll need to have oral surgery to get two teeth removed. What fun! One up-side is, if you can't eat you tend to lose weight. Mostly I'm keeping fit with a daily trip to the gym (which has been closed off and on lately) and daily walks with Jacqueline along the Aare river or through the quaint town of Bern. We don't own a car, so grocery shopping is another bit of exercise – dragging the trundle-buggy or hauling it into the tram, then carrying it up to the third floor. Our usual trips to other parts of Switzerland are still possible, but you need to wear a mask on the trains. It being that foggy time of year they call winter here, we haven't been doing much of that kind of traveling because when you get to the mountains all you can see is fog anyway. And of course flying to foreign destinations is not really an option currently.

We did some profit taking on Tesla stock, and bought into Bitcoin. So far, that is a very wise investment. I also convinced Jacqueline to reinvest in Tesla, which is also still doing well. At the moment I'm trying to figure out how to invest in RISC-V (because Nvidia buying Arm will move competing companies off of Arm silicon to something else, and I think it's RISC-V) and desalination (because solar is getting cheap enough and water scarce enough to create a perfect storm). I even have thoughts of creating my own atmospheric water generator - to condense humidity out of air using solar, but that project has been on my to do list for about a decade now.

Retirement planning is ongoing. The current tentative plan is to work slightly past age 65 to maximize retirement saving and reduce the time for which funds will be required. The location isn't set, but it will probably be in a large-ish city because Jacqueline is a city girl. The budget – aside from dreams of cashing out big-time from Bitcoin – will probably be modest, on the order of 75% of what we need now, which kind of implies moving out of Switzerland which we don't want to do.

As to what retirement actually looks like, I figure there's probably room for one more project – which is yet to be determined. Maybe some sort of small shop or repair place, or just more puttering around with a pet project would be possibilities.

Samantha made a [tiny house](#). I helped by installing the electric system with a solar panel (that doesn't produce much in the fog), battery, charger, inverter, lights, fridge, stove, etc. She's currently living in it at a year-round campground – which is a misnomer because one can only stay there for six months. Alexandra is in second year medicine at U. Bern and working part time at the ETH. She's currently preoccupied with a final exam about dissecting bodies - ick.

I'm much heartened by the US shift away from coal because it's actually cheaper now to [demolish an existing coal plant](#) and replace it with a solar farm. Economics will trump environmental protests every time. I had always thought that peak oil would occur when there wasn't any more oil left in the ground, but it turns out [we may have hit peak oil already](#) due to Corona and the shift to work-at-home and electric cars. I never thought I would see it in my lifetime. That is cause for immense rejoicing. When we sold the Tesla stock, I toyed with the idea of buying a Tesla. After a lot of discussion the answer was no, we don't need a car. Similarly, I haven't yet purchased an electric bicycle, but mostly for the reason that I would never pedal again, and that would be bad for my fitness level. Both of these options are still on the horizon, if by chance we move for some values of the definition of “retirement” where the location is not equal to here.

I still putter around on maker and hacker projects. I just gave away my 3D printer to the EigerMaker makerspace in Interlaken because I hadn't used it in years. I did attend Make Zurich and worked on another of my pet projects that's been on my to do list for years, the [Grafitti HoneyPot](#). With the pandemic, these maker events are virtual, which takes most of the fun out of them and loses the focus that they generate.

I'm still journaling daily, writing short stories and occasionally drawing or painting. This level of activity isn't enough to get any good at it, as yet, but hope springs eternal. I have been writing more letters (on paper, in an envelope, with a stamp) and sent out over a hundred hand-written Christmas cards. I consider this an easy on-ramp to actually writing stories, so if you want a letter, send me your address. With the demise of the land-line, the ability to look people up in the white-pages of the telephone book has been lost.

As a brief update on the other topics from last year's review, that weren't already covered: I did manage to fix my old coffee machine, so no shiny new coffee machine for you; I did build my own NAS (network attached storage) out of a Raspberry Pi and two 1TB SSD drives so that I could archive DVDs of photos and old hard disk contents.

There are a few New Years resolutions I have in mind beyond the usual suspects. First up is to minimize social networking. This consumes a lot of my time and I believe it could be optimized, reduced, or in some cases eliminated. I tried doing none of it for two days and didn't notice any withdrawal symptoms. I'll let you know before I shut down any accounts, but that's how I'm thinking at the moment. Second priority is to clean up the upstairs and the garage. I've moved my office upstairs and what was 'out of sight, out of mind' is now punching me in the face. One of the minuses against getting a Tesla was that the garage would have to be cleaned out, and power run to it at some unknown cost. I'll figure out both of those. Third priority is to actually finish one or more short stories. It can't be that difficult to invent a good ending, can it?

So, I'm keeping busy, getting old, and loving living in the future.