

Skip's part...

Here's a handy Latin phrase for you: "*annus horribilis*." (It means just what you think it means - "a horrible year.") From Bowie's death to Trump's election, 2016 was basically filled with one unpleasant surprise after another, and I know I am not alone in feeling that way. Good riddance to it, say I.

That's not to say there weren't some high points. Marietta's graduation was an extraordinary event, and it's been a real pleasure to have her back home for the last few months.

I went to DC for Move To Amend's first National Leadership Summit in May. This included the opportunity to do some real live lobbying, visiting the offices of Sen. Casey and Rep. Marino with compadres Kathy Dodge and Chuck Heyn, and some workshops exploring the fascinating ideas of the "Theatre of the Oppressed." (Move To Amend is trying to get a Constitutional Amendment passed that will allow more effective regulation of the role corporations play in our political process - see movetoamend.org for more info.)

I then attended the New Economy Coalition's "CommonBound" conference in Buffalo in July. I got to meet David & Fran Korten, the folks behind YES! Magazine (which I heartily recommend, by the way - www.yesmagazine.org), and learned a lot about the nascent "New Economy" movement, which is looking to create economic systems beyond the old and outdated "capitalist/socialist" paradigms. (For more info, see neweconomy.net and nextsystem.org.)



With David Korten at CommonBound

I left my job at the Wayne Independent in early September, after I realized that the job was in fact slowly killing me. (That wasn't anybody's fault in particular, of course; it's just the way things are structured these days. I wish them all the best.)

I did some part-time driving for the folks at Highlights for Children, chauffeuring authors, illustrators and educators back and forth between Highlights' new workshop/retreat center and various local airports. This gave me the

opportunity to have wonderful and far-ranging conversations with some truly remarkable people about education, literature, literacy - and politics. Some of those conversations were very hope-giving; some were more than a little alarming. (But hey - that's the nature of our times, right?)



Performing at "Second Saturday" variety show at Black & Brass Coffee

I've been able to do a bit more on the creative front. I just finished recording some tracks for an EP of "Winter Songs" - and I hope to do a couple more EPs of other material (including some "Blind Peanut Nicholson" material) over the next few weeks. I've had a great time performing with "Club Funny," our local improv group (including an appearance at the Scranton Fringe Festival) and I appeared in a short film called "BAD VAMPIRE." I am now in the process of compiling my writings from the last few years.



As "The Lieutenant" in BAD VAMPIRE

Basically, I'm wrapping things up as much as possible. Big changes are coming, as you may have noticed, both here and abroad. In January, I'm heading to Canada for a bit, then going on an expedition of sorts - Iceland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Germany - and then hopefully finding a way to get involved in refugee assistance in Europe, probably in the Greek isles, but wherever I can be helpful. Might get to the Mideast, or maybe even India, who knows? Should be gone at least 6-9 months, maybe a year. At least, that's the plan - but you know what they say about plans... They're a good way to make God laugh.

Hope next year is an *annus mirabilis* for you. Stay tuned via Facebook, Twitter (@smendler) or my blog, skipmendler.wordpress.com