

2015 in Retrospect

2015 was a year of tumult. Immigration was and is a huge issue all over the world, especially in the Near East, in Africa and at the US- Mexico border. Millions have fled their homes and homelands rather than face incredible terror and/or squalor. This is a very complex problem, not made any clearer with the sound-bite solutions offered up by competing presidential nominees.

ISIS cruelty was and is on constant display. Paris was shaken, as was America when “radicalized Islamists” shot up a Christmas party in San Bernardino, California. The very freedom we appreciate is what makes us vulnerable to attack from within.

On a much lighter side, US women won the soccer world cup. The Cavs came close to winning Cleveland’s first championship in any major sport since I was 13 many years ago. But it was not to be, as likeable phenom, Steph Curry, shot the lights out from 3-point range. Time is running out on the CAVS. 2016 must be our year. As they say in Spanish, “Vamos a ver.”

The Ohio State Buckeyes won College Football’s first National Playoff—and they could have won the second, but didn’t. Enough said. A major big-time sports star was American Pharoah, winner of horse racing’s Grand Slam, by winning the Triple Crown, and then going on to win the Breeder’s cup by six lengths. I think my appreciation of horses comes from marrying into a horse family; not the fast ones, but the strong ones—draft horses—which can easily weigh twice what American Pharoah weighs. Just so you know.

There was a Pluto fly-by as NASA spaceship New Horizons sped to within 7800 miles of the dwarf planet, some 3 billion miles from earth. A pretty impressive feat.

We lost the Ambassador of Blues in 2015, the great guitarist, B.B. King. He died at 90, as did Yogi Berra, perhaps the only Yankee that everyone loved, even Red Sox fans.

2015 wasn’t particularly tumultuous for Nancy and me. I guess everyone decides just how tumultuous things appear to be. But it was plenty active for us, nonetheless.

Early in the year, I worked on my book, *The heart of the matter: Seeking the center in Maya-Mam language and culture*. If you want to



see a review(s), and perhaps order the book, go to amazon.com and search for: **ISBN-10:** 1556713754. If that doesn't work try my name and Maya-Mam.

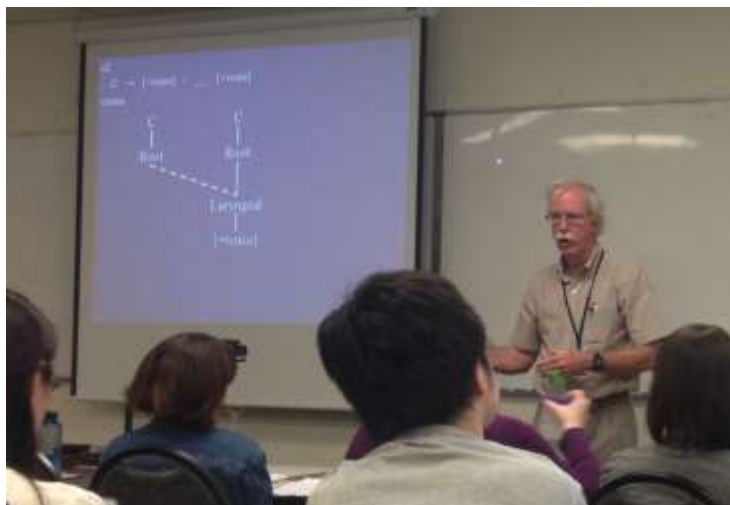
In January we visited Amalia and Kyle and we were blessed to be part of their wedding. I sang "Molly's Song," which I wrote for her when she was born. I told Molly that I could probably sing it if I didn't look her in the eyes. I made it almost to the end of the song. This photo shows one of the first times that Molly heard the song.



In May Nan and I headed off again to Lima, Peru, where I teach linguistics skills to Latino students interested in cross-cultural ministry. It was a small (10 students), but talented group of people. I taught semantics, the linguistic study of meaning. That may sound overly academic, but there are all kinds of things to think about related to words and what they mean. I was just reading an article on autism. It said that there was no word for "autism" 100 years ago, and

therefore it could not be diagnosed or compared. In other words, the lack of available vocabulary limited to some degree what scientists could observe. So linguistics isn't so weird after all. Words are very powerful because they "mean" things. Indeed culture can be conceived of as the things we talk about when we speak our native language. We think that thinking about meaning helps people to be more effective cross-cultural communicators and translators.

In August through October, we had sort of a *déjà vu* all over again experience (with posthumous thanks to Yogi). When Nan and I first trained with SIL, we were students at the Dallas International Linguistics Center. That was in 1977-1978. In August, we went back 38 years later, this time I was a professor, although I have to admit that I often



felt like a student myself. Outside of grad school at Ohio State, it was the first time I had taught a linguistics class in English. I found it very challenging, yet invigorating, which is as it should be. Nancy spent most of that time with me and was able to renew many acquaintances from years gone by and talk to a lot of young mothers about what it's like to live among those of a different culture.

In November I headed back to Guatemala for two weeks to work with both a translation group and a literacy group. It is always refreshing to be back in Comitancillo. I mentioned in my last missive about the use of Mam by young people, something that is somewhat rare around the world, as teens weigh the costs and benefits of speaking a minority language instead of a world language like Spanish or English. These kids are not rejecting Spanish. Many of them speak it well. But neither are they rejecting their legacy language, which bodes well for Mam's future. It also provides inroads for the Gospel, which should be understood in one's native, heart language. This is especially true since most indigenous people around the world have been oppressed by a majority culture. To use the language of the oppressors to explain the Gospel puts Christianity on the wrong side of the equation. It is somewhat akin to Paul's teaching on circumcision—that Gentiles don't need to become Jews first so they can understand the Gospel and join the Kingdom. Rather, God speaks to them and loves them and calls them as they are, within the language and culture that they live daily.

So it's always a joy to go back to Guatemala. Nan and I went there when we were young—younger than any of our kids are now. And now we're old. Indeed, June 2015 marked our 40th wedding anniversary. Some of you reading this were there in Ashland when we were married. Time flies, but God is good.



So what's ahead in 2016? Well, the Olympics in Río promise to be complicated, assuming the Brazilians can get everything done in time. Security will be a very high priority. And Usain Bolt is out to prove that he is still the fastest man in the world. To be that fast for that long is pretty astounding. I predicted against him four years ago. I won't do that again.

2016 also brings US elections. It seems like there ought to be a better way to choose the Candidates. This year also promises continued rapprochement with Cuba. Of all the countries from which we have had students, we have never had a student from Cuba nor the Dominican Republic. Perhaps, this too, shall change.

2016 promises to be busy again for us. I expect to be back in Peru in March for a few months. We also hope to get to Guatemala again, perhaps even twice. My year usually includes a trip to Dallas, which is SIL's international headquarters. We also plan to see some of our supporting friends and churches. We also look forward to a trip to Hawaii to visit our precious daughter Amalia and her husband and their girls. I double dip on such a trip, getting to see the family and giving a linguistics talk at the University of Hawaii. This year's talk will be based on the new book.

Elisa and family are well, as are Isaac and Elizabeth. Elisa homeschools the twins, while Nadia stays pretty engaged from nearby. Yury's business is doing well. Isaac works at the Atlanta branch of Yury's business which is headquartered in Raleigh, near where we now live.



Nan's Mom and the Santana great-grandchildren

Another thing from 2015 which is already carrying over to this year is the consciousness of our mortality. Paul says that "outwardly we are fading away," which few of us can doubt, "yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day." May it be so.

May 2016 be filled with pleasant surprises for you and deep joy in Christ.

Best,

Wes and Nancy Collins