

2016 in Retrospect

2016 will go down as a year of surprises. Great Britain left the European Union in the famous “Brexit.” The Rio Olympic Games were largely orchestrated without turmoil (aside from the nation recalling their president just in time for Opening Ceremonies). Fidel Castro died (after an almost 50-year rule). The Barbie doll’s impossible physique finally became more realistic and much more compact. And Bob Dylan received the Nobel Prize for literature. This brought me back to senior high English literature class, where Mr. Newby predicted that when we were old, the poets that would be studied in English classes across the land would not be only Whitman and Longfellow, but Paul Simon and Joni Mitchell and Bob Dylan. Congratulations, Mr. Newby!

Perhaps not surprising, but at least genuinely noteworthy was Usain Bolt’s triple triple—gold in the three sprints (100m, 200m and 400M relay) in the last three Olympiads. That, my friends, is domination.

Most surprising of all 2016 events was the election of “the Donald” as our next president. We went to bed on election night with Hillary enjoying a marginally comfortable lead. In the morning, I fired up CNN.com to “It’s Trump.” I still can’t believe it.

Other surprises included the Cleveland Cavaliers winning the first major-sport



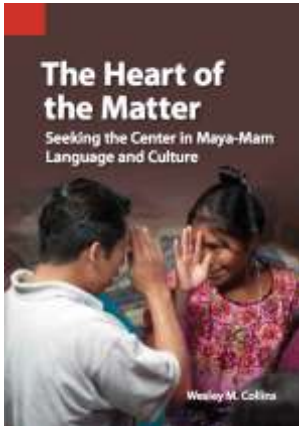
championship for Cleveland since 1964, and then we came within a base hit of winning the World Series as well. I continue to be proud to be from Cleveland. Can you tell? I'll have no comment this year on the Browns. And maybe not next year either.

For the last ten years Nancy and I have been frequenting Lima, Peru, where I teach a variety of courses with CILTA, a university program aimed at helping Latin American missionary candidates learn the linguistic and cultural skills needed for effective cross-cultural ministry. 2016 was no different in that regard.



I taught two phonology courses which are designed to help students learn and deal with the sound systems of languages that they hope someday to learn to speak—or, as in the case of our most recent graduating class, languages that they have been speaking, sometimes for years, and who took additional training at CILTA. I hadn't taught the advanced course for eight years, so it took some additional time to get ready. It went well. I'm extremely proud of our students. This year we had 18 altogether (not all of these took my classes). Our 2016 students hailed from Mexico, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, Argentina and El Salvador. Our grads since Nancy and I started in Peru in 2006 (some 200, all told) literally work all over the world in Gospel ministries with and for people who speak minority, often previously unwritten, languages. In the picture, we've included some spouses, and some of the faculty and staff, so the numbers don't add up to 18. Actually, it takes quite a team each semester.

A nice surprise early in 2016 was that my book on Mam language and culture went to market. Sales have not been particularly brisk, but I'm hoping to experience the adage that "slow and steady wins the race." You can check out the book and even buy it at Amazon.com for around \$20 plus postage or the kindle edition for \$12 (with no postage). You can read some details and a few reviews at:



https://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_ss_c_1_11?url=search-alias%3Daps&field-keywords=wes+collins+maya-mam&prefix=wes+collins%2Caps%2C237&crd=1050A5A00AVAX

You'll need to scroll around some for the best price.



Wes at breakfast with Valerie (Colombia) and Karen (Argentina). We're expecting seven students from Argentina this year, plus ten others. Nancy often spends time with our students discussing issues of family and the practical side of living overseas—and doing some English tutoring.

Another surprise for us in 2016 was the sudden and unexpected passing of our dear friend and my mentor in so many ways, Charlie Stewart. I met Charlie when I was 13 and he was a man who believed in me and saw things invisible to most and especially to me. But he found ways to build into my life far beyond the time we spent together in Christian Service Brigade Summer Camp. In addition, he was a main mover in my getting to know Nancy. I am eternally grateful to him and deeply saddened by his passing. We maintained a relationship of iron sharpening iron for over fifty years. He is deeply missed.

In 2016, Nancy and I visited a number of our partner churches. We're grateful to each one, and to each of you that help move forward our part in ministry to speakers of minority languages. We also visited our kids and their kids. Amalia and crew are

in Hawaii and I had the chance to speak to a group of linguistic students at the University of Hawaii at Hilo. That's always fun.

The family is well. Amalia and Kyle's daughters are Eden (6 years old) and Aila (2 this past December). We were delighted to see them recently. Elisa and Yury's children are the twins, Jacob and Lucas (7 years old), and Nadia (4). Isaac and Elizabeth are expecting a daughter, their first child, in April. They are in Atlanta.



Hawaiian granddaughters.



Carolina threesome with Lab pups, Chula and Charley.

Some rough news for us in 2016 was that, after never really being sick in my life, there's a good chance that I have Parkinson's disease. Fortunately, I live with a great health care provider. And we trust that God has a plan and purpose even for such setbacks. I'm seeing both a naturalist and a conventional doctor, and we're praying for God to be near. My teaching doesn't seem to be affected, but I am slowing down.

Nancy seems to gravitate to health-care issues. Aside from watching over me, she assumes a major role in caring for her mom, now 88, and dealing with stage-three breast cancer. The prognosis seems good. We live about twenty minutes from her. Her sisters come to help as they are able.

You might recall that a few months back, I proposed a riddle in an update. I gave a hint by saying that the riddle was related to the Olympics. It generated a bit of response—mostly sarcastic. For some reason, the message containing the riddle didn't make it to some of you. This only happens when I send e-mails from overseas. When we're in Peru, several people that normally get our updates, don't get them. So some of you may have no clue what I'm talking about as far as the riddle goes. But, as a reminder to most, here is again.

**One-time athletes won't ask for more
Than three point two eight oh eight four.**

What this number is is the conversion of meters to feet. To illustrate, the Olympic high jump in Río was won with a leap of 2.38 meters. This means almost nothing to me. I mean, two meters is a bit over six feet, right? A lot of kids jump 6 feet in high school. So what's the big deal? But if we multiply 2.38 by our conversion factor we get 7.8083992 feet. That is soaring. Almost eight feet stirs me far more than 2.38 meters, even though the heights are equivalent. That figure in feet and inches means something to me and to the millions of us who don't relate well to the metric system. For the record, the number 7 (in 7.8083992) is feet, whereas the numbers to right of the decimal are NOT inches, but the percentage of one foot. The entire leap was officially 2.38 meters, or 7 feet 9 3/4 inches in "our" measurement. My answer to the riddle is:

**Meters to feet makes more sense
than pounds and meters, kilos and pence.**

In other words, I really enjoyed watching the track and field events at the Olympics, but only when I knew what the winning heights and distances meant.

The alert reader who came closest to my solution was my friend and former SIL colleague, Tom Godfrey. His answer was:

**They could make their records harder to beat
if new guys measure not meters but feet.**

If you just can't get enough of this, here is Tom's solution in his own words:
...the standard meter is supposed to be equal to 3.28084 feet for Olympic contests. Let's say the Olympic record is 9.58 seconds for the 100-meter race, which would convert to 328.084 feet. If the conversion factor were to change to 3.3 (which is more than the old standard), then 100 meters would convert to 330 feet exactly, so new guys trying to break their record would have to run almost two feet farther to reach the 100-meter mark. At the record rate of speed, this would take at least another 0.05 seconds to run, so even a slightly faster runner might not break the old record. So Tom was in the ballpark. His prize is having his name appear in print in this publication. Congratulations, Tom.

The super alert reader and keeper of Mam trivia might also know that Tom and I co-authored a 400-page book on the dialects of Mam back in 1987. If you could somehow dredge that up from your memory, kudos would certainly be due you.

So what's ahead in 2017? Time magazine devoted an entire issue to the question, wondering in particular, how newly elected President Trump will deal with the media, the country and the world. 2017 is also the year that private enterprise is

scheduled to take over the nuts and bolts of space travel. NASA will cede much of its modernization of the space program to private companies, mostly Boeing and SpaceX.

In many places 2016 was a year of terror, and it's hardly conceivable that this will diminish in 2017. Indeed, it seems already to be occurring. The same goes for racial violence. In addition, computer bad guys are as smart as the good guys, so hacking and cyber warfare will undoubtedly continue apace. May God help us all.

On the lighter side, 2017 just may be the Year of the Cleveland Indians. It has been a long time coming. The Cavs look strong, too...and then there's the Browns.

January, 2017 marks 40 years that Nancy and I have been members of Wycliffe Bible Translators. I continue to teach and speak at college campuses about Bible translation and linguistics, two major themes in my life. It has been a privilege and pleasure to represent so many of you in these different endeavors. Some of you have prayed for us and supported us those entire 40 years. Thank you.

Ministry to the Mam in Guatemala continues in our absence. Byron Feliciano heads up a major literacy effort among his own people. He is a native speaker of Mam, an active Christian, and a gifted teacher. Much of his training came via our Canadian friends, the Vaters. Byron and his literacy group distributed almost 1200 Mam New Testaments in 2016. They also offered hours and hours of instruction to new Mam readers, helping them to experience the joy of reading well and pursuing faith in their own language. Funding for the literacy project goes month to month. If you'd like to participate, please let me know and I'll give you some information.

Another project going full tilt is the Old Testament translation project, led by friend and former student Samuel Jimenez. He heads up a committee of four that works online with Wycliffe colleagues to complete the translation of the whole Old Testament. We hope this will be completed within two years and then the New Testament will be updated before publication of the entire Bible in a single book. It's exciting.

Nancy and I and Elisa moved to Mam country in 1980, joined soon afterward by Amalia and Isaac. That decision has affected us all in many ways, hopefully for the better. Thanks to all of you who have helped make that happen. We trust that God is being honored by the Mam and by the speakers of thousands of languages where His kingdom is proclaimed—in peoples' mother tongues.

Thanks for your interest and for plowing through this missive.

Blessings to all,

Wes and Nancy Collins