

The Skinny

(the Somewhat delayed, Kind of Intermittent Newsletter for the New Year)

January 16, 2015

from the desk of **Peter Kauffmann**

We're over halfway through January 2015 now, which I guess means it's high time for me to start writing what is ostensibly my New Year's newsletter. Let's get started!

4th Year of Working in DC

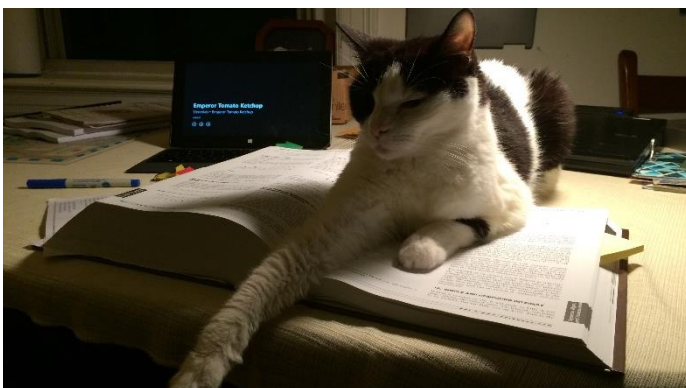
Do you or someone you know have experience in transportation engineering? If so, I seriously hope you'll consider applying for an open position at my company to help keep 2015 from being as busy as 2014 was for Gorove/Slade. We participated in numerous big projects, including the FBI's search for a new headquarters site and DC's ill-fated 2024 Olympic Bid, plus loads of smaller ones to fill the gaps.

One project that's becoming a thorn in my side as it drags on is the expansion of the Kennedy Center, which you may recall me mentioning in last year's newsletter. We're continually refining our garage layout and capacity analyses to save money (apparently the architect is really bad at keeping the design within the allotted budget), but on the plus side that means I've gotten to plan and participate in several full-scale mockups of the bus garage in the parking lot of RFK Stadium.



*Remember playing in the sandbox when you were a kid?
This is just like that, except they give you 45' motorcoaches.*

In the fall, I spent 7 weeks studying for the PE exam, and I just found out a few weeks ago that I passed and am now a fully licensed Professional Engineer! Hooray! That means I can now stamp and seal documents, should the need arise.



This was the cat's way of telling me I'm done studying for the night.

Getting Serious about Biking Again

I never stopped biking after moving out of Richmond, but I definitely stopped being as serious about equipment and distance riding. That changed in 2014. With encouragement (aka peer pressure) from friends, I started getting back in the swing of things. First up, a trip to the Baltimore Bike Party in May.



Just me and 1200 of my closest friends.

I embarked on longer and longer training rides throughout the summer to get ready for September and the annual 50 States Bike Ride. No, it's not visiting all 50 states – just the 50 state-named avenues across DC. The ride winds 65 miles up hills and down busy avenues, and despite some pretty damp weather, my friend Maris (in the green) and I made it! Julia (in town visiting her dad) was even able to meet up with us at the finish and get a few photos of our triumphant, damp return.



*Success, in spite of the rain! I could have been more soaked,
but it would've taken a lot of effort.*

As we head deeper into the winter, I'm still trying to get out and train at least once a week. I'm practicing hill climbs (a scarce commodity here in DC) to get ready for a 75-mile ride in May along the Blue Ridge Parkway that includes a 3000' climb. I already put in my registration and paid the fee, so I figure I've got no choice but to be ready at this point.

Travel Highlights

Now that we've got those features out of the way, it's time to move on to this newsletter's traditional, splashy centerfold and let me ~~show off some photos~~ give a review of the year's travel.

Winter Beach Trip with Julia

The year started out with an invite from Julia to come with her to Emerald Isle, NC. Things were certainly quiet – we'd usually have the whole beach to ourselves for walks or frisbee. Just a word of advice: if somebody invites you to spend 2 hours recording the sunrise in winter, you should consider saying no.



Oh, you know, just kayaking in January, like you do.

California with Mom and Brad

As I alluded to last time, in 2014 my mom got married and moved to California. It's a bit less convenient to visit, but on the plus side it does give me an excuse to visit California.

My great aunt and I headed west for a visit in June. We toured Tracy and the Central Valley where they live, including day trips north to Sacramento and west over the mountains to Livermore.



They get sustained winds of 30+ mph on the Altamont. No wonder they put the world's largest wind farm (4,930 turbines) there.

We also naturally took a day to visit San Francisco. We had lunch at Fisherman's Wharf, I managed to not get us too lost during the 49-Mile Scenic Drive, and we capped the day off by driving north to Marin County and taking a ferry tour of the bay.



I had a very difficult time choosing only one bridge photo.

Keeping Up with the Shapiros

Julia and I also got together in February to visit Elaine and Brad, our respective college roommates, up in Boston over Valentine's Day weekend. We saw LOTS of snow, rode a Wonderland-bound Blue Line train, toured the Sam Adams brewery, visited the aquarium, and generally dragged our hosts to a load of other touristy things I'm sure they'd done a million times before.



The Prudential Center's 50th floor observation deck costs \$16. At the bar on the 52nd floor, drinks are pricey but the view is free.

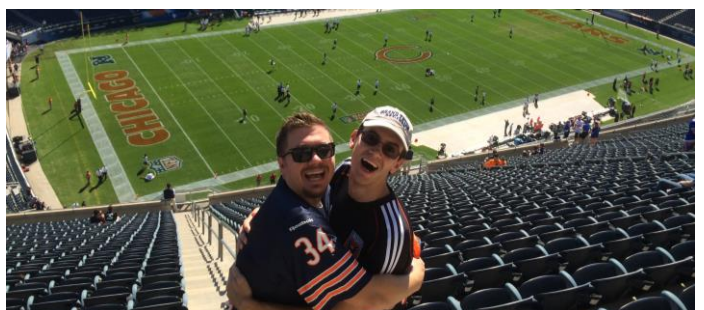
...and then a few months later I went to visit the Shapiros, this time at their new place in Chicago! I was invited along to be the third wheel with my friends the Neaces as we returned to DJ's old stomping grounds for a sports-heavy trip.

First on the agenda: a Cubs game at Wrigley Field. The experience was fantastic, but here's an indication of just how listless the home team looked – with our tickets to the 2pm game we somehow managed to see the Cubs lose twice (due to them finishing up a rain-delayed game right when we arrived).



What a spectacular ballpark.

But the highlight of the trip was seeing DJ's Chicago Bears host Brad's Buffalo Bills in their home opener.



I'm seriously trying (but failing) to match DJ's level of excitement. I didn't realize we were supposed to grow Ditka-esque moustaches.

Memphis with Julia

Big news! Julia got a job in Memphis! Okay, fine, that's also old news – she moved in March. We've each been back and forth to visit a couple of times. You will not be surprised to hear that it's quite an interesting town, between the music, culture, history, and especially the food.

This was most exemplified by my first visit which was headlined by a barbecue tour (yes, they have those!) that Julia had signed us up for. We were whisked around to different restaurants to try different forms and preparations of Memphis-style barbecue, as well as some unconventional dishes like barbecue nachos (Julia's showing them off above), barbecue egg rolls, and barbecued spaghetti (my favorite). That last item is essentially a baked pasta, seasoned appropriately and finished in a smoker.



Since then we've attended a sampling of what Memphis has to offer, including cultural events, the zoo, hiking, and even a bit of civil engineering tourism when we visited the Mississippi Riverwalk on Mud Island – a scale model of the lower and middle Mississippi rivers at a scale of 30" = 1 mile, complete with real water. I could've stayed there and watched it go for hours.



The Riverwalk model is over 1/3 of a mile long.

Local Happenings

Even after almost 4 years in DC I'm still finding new stuff to try.

Touristy Stuff

I had the occasion to revisit plenty of iconic DC landmarks like the Cherry Blossoms, Washington Monument, and 4th of July fireworks, but thanks to visiting friends and new opportunities I was able to experience those sights from different vantage points and in new seasons.

However, the big event was that I finally managed to snag a slot on a tour of this big, old house on Pennsylvania Avenue. I even dragged Julia along (she's taking the picture). It was a pretty nice place – I can't believe the tenants always leave within 8 years.



Totally worth a visit. Totally not worth jumping the fence.

Outdoorsy Stuff

With all the other events that have been going on, unfortunately I've let hiking and camping trips fall by the wayside. Let's correct that in 2015, because the two trips that I took – while super awesome – weren't nearly enough to tide me over.

August saw my Mid-Atlantic cousins and I load up and head out to Shenandoah for a weekend of camping on Moorman's River. The fantastic, secluded loop was made all the more fascinating by an eerie mist that hung over the mountain all weekend. We should totally go back some time when there are actually views!



The first day was SO INCREDIBLY HUMID.

November brought the triumphant return of my family's traditional Election Day-ish hike of Old Rag Mountain, again in Shenandoah. I invited a wide assortment of the people I've met over the last 15 years, and amazingly 7 of them answered the call. I'd love to show you a group picture, but I don't have one due to the unseasonably cold weather impacting my brain.

I've got half a mind to set up a trip to Devil's Marblyard in the spring, so hopefully I'll remember to get a group photo there.

Sportsy Stuff

Early in the year I had the opportunity to see a NBA playoff game, with the hometown Washington Harry Potters taking on the Chicago Bulls. The arena went absolutely bonkers for that game.

I was also able to complete my checklist of major league professional sports by attending my first NHL game in November, having checked off the NWSL earlier in the year.



*Look at how close we were! Thanks for the ticket, Dan!
(I should probably send him a newsletter so he'll see that.)*

2015, however, promises to be jammed full of soccer action since I finally gave in and joined the DC United supporter's club. More on what that entails in the coming year, I'm sure. In the meantime, anybody want to go to a soccer game or fifteen?

Getting Dressed Up

Everybody loves a good excuse to get dressed up and go someplace, and there 2014 did not disappoint. Julia and I were fortunate enough to be invited to the weddings of several close friends from college (and I guess their wives are close friends at this point, too). Thanks for the invites, Greg and Mitch!



We clean up nicely.

For the third year running, some friends and I went out to the Nightmare on M Street bar crawl for Halloween. I was pretty pleased with the costume that my friend Jeremy and I came up with. I'll be the Elwood to his Jake any day.



As if we needed more proof of Kathleen's depth of field skills.

And arguably the best excuse of all: going out to Fancy Dinner with your girlfriend! Here's Julia and I all set for New Year's dinner at Le Diplomate on 14th Street. It was SUPER FANCY.



*These are our "we had to put in a reservation
four weeks in advance" outfits.*

Conclusion

Okay, that about does it for this edition of the newsletter – if I write any more I'll spill onto a fifth page. That'd mean changing my template, and nobody wants that. Thanks for reading, and don't forget to stay in touch! (I'm at pdkauffmann@gmail.com)

Have a great 2015, and try not to get in too much trouble!



Oh, and as usual Sprocket says "hi!"