

**Vernon and Marguerite Gras**  
**1339 Mass Ave SE, DC./ Grasmere Farm, Sperryville, VA**  
**Christmas in town and country, 2011**

The past year hit abysmal lows (lower than 2010), but also held exciting intellectual prospects. Before describing these, we render a few personal details.

We maintained our weekly change of residence between DC and Grasmere Farm. The farm has been developed in beauty and utility and so needs little maintenance. We much enjoy what the passing seasons and weather do to our natural surroundings. (Below are some seasonal views) Our town surroundings (DC) are changing rapidly, too. Since the last census, DC has added circa 100,000 people, mostly in the 18 – 34 age bracket. Just in the last year, it has grown by 16, 000. Thus, the real estate downward plunge hasn't affected DC much. Capitol Hill (where we live) has been touted as among the ten best urban areas in the USA. Back in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Philip Larkin, the poet, while visiting a church interior pondered what would happen to churches as belief faded away:

....wondering, too,  
When churches fall completely out of use  
What we shall turn them into.”

The answer can be found here on Capitol Hill where two Baptist churches and one Episcopal mission church have been turned into condos. The latter, St. Monica's Episcopal Church, is located right across the street from us. (See picture below). To merge mundane with sacred ground is fairly pricey: ½ million for studio apts. 1.2 million for a 2 bedroom apt. We don't look forward to our next real-estate tax evaluation. I still work at the Library of Congress where I have had a desk or shelf since 1973. But only one librarian remains from the “old days” that I recognize. Buildings can be renewed or changed (the Jefferson library building has been gloriously renewed), but people disappear, fade away, and are replaced. In addition, I still pursue collecting masks and other artistic craft pinups which now decorate our DC dining room. (See pictures below) While Marguerite's dementia will not improve, her physical well being remains steady. She most probably will reach 94. . Otherwise, two family reunions and a visit by my confrere, Prof. Ahrens, from Wuerzburg University, Germany, provided memorable moments



Steers in farm pasture



Gazebo and azalea garden



Mountain storm



Entrance road to farm in Fall



Farm Cottage in Fall



Springtime azaleas



Amur maples next to tool shed in Fall



Masks on wall in DC



St. Monica's Condos.



Visiting a museum



M. in DC dining room



Beautiful DC Walks



Bruce, son; Prof.Ahrens; Prof Ludlow

Now to the low and high lights of 2011. Politically, nothing has changed from my 2010 analysis. Indeed, the political situation has become far worse. Corruption has become endemic, spreading from Congress to the Supreme Court. In a recent poll, 87% of Americans believe this Congress is the worst on record. Scholars of the Constitution also cite this Supreme Court as one of the worst upholders of the Constitution in history (See criticism in Wikipedia re Citizens United v. FEC) Here are some examples in 2011 of our spreading malaise: Eighteen Democratic senators didn't vote for their President's job bill for the same reason that Senator Baucus (D) didn't allow the public option in the medical coverage bill even though 70% of Americans wanted the public option. Corporations through campaign contributions own these senators. We are a democracy right? Government of, by, and for the people? Doesn't matter. Campaign money in huge amounts come from corporations. Our public servants have become the paid minions of corporate lobbyists. Instead of social good, Congress promotes corporate good. But, according to trickle down economics, *this is good for America* Give corporations tax breaks, subsidies, no interest loans and they will create jobs and society will flourish. Well, if the last decade (2000 – 2010) illustrates the triumph of the Reagan revolution, it is the first decade that produced no jobs. *Nada*. Nothing. Zero job creation. (See "Aughts were a lost decade for US economy, workers", Neil Irvin, *Wash Post*, Jan 2, 2010 ). The Reagan libertarian deregulations seem to have freed capitalism to destroy itself. A huge depression for the country (99%) and an indescribable increase in wealth for the investors and bankers of Wall Street (1%). Which is why the protesters occupy Wall Street and not the federal government. The latter has become a puppet show whose strings are pulled by Wall Street, which *owns* the show. The OWS is a genuine populist movement; the Tea Party is bogus. Of the ninety Tea Party

members elected in 2010, 47 appointed a corporate lobbyist to be their AA. So much for “the people taking back our government”.

And the five Supreme Court justices who make up the corporate mafia in those serial 5-4 decisions have done their best to deepen the corruption in their *Citizens United v FEC* decision which twisted the Constitution in order to turn corporations magically into people. Now, corporations may corrupt public officials even more by dumping unlimited and undisclosed cash into our elections via Super PACs. Scalia, the intellectual leader of this group resembles a Renaissance pope. Both know that there is nobody higher than they, except God. But both arrogate themselves to be God’s instrument to fornicate mightily and instigate wars (various popes) or to subordinate and shrivel democratic authority under libertarian dogma (the Roberts Court: Scalia) In the 2012 election, we will witness a tsunami of corporate cash drowning out any truthful approach to medicare, social security, or environmental concerns.

How corporate greed operates, corrupts, and poisons the general culture is articulated brilliantly and clearly by Matt Taibbi in “Wall Street Isn’t Winning – It’s Cheating” (*Rolling Stone*, Oct. 26, 2011) and in the DVD, *Casino Jack or the United States of Money*. Taibbi probably is the best investigative reporter re Wall Street shenanigans with a prose style that acts like a demolition ball on the phony “free enterprise” rhetoric put out by the financial sector. *Casino Jack* focuses on Jack Abramoff and his use and abuse of lobbying power. His arrogance and contempt of the democratic process has become wide spread, especially among the 1% who don’t want to pay taxes. Like the 1% French nobles who refused Louis XVI’s request to pay taxes in order to defuse the growing rage of the 99% French populace, our 1% should be taxed and restrained by getting rid of campaign financing. Doubt that this will happen. Actually, I would prefer beheading, particularly those bankers whose greed drove the world economy into the ditch. Their political puppets, of course, bailed them out with huge tax money from the 99%. To show their gratitude for this bailout, the greedy bankers gave themselves 10 million dollar bonuses. They do need beheading. What an arrogant, scurvy bunch.

Leaving this yawning abyss, let’s talk about living in an exciting age of intellectual transition as salient and important as the transition between medieval and renaissance. We are leaving the Galilean, Cartesian, and Newtonian enlightenment, pictured best in Newton’s deterministic, static world machine. We are entering the open-ended evolutionary world of Darwin. Emergence with its unending change expressed from the microscopic level to the cosmological has become the new explanatory paradigm whereby we will reconfigure a new self-world relationship. The transformation from cause and effect atomistic reductionism to a play-back communicative model is occurring in all fields from microbiology and neuroscience to ecology and cosmology. Dialogism seems to be useful on every level. Dynamic evolving process has replaced static universal laws.

If you read the explanatory placard under the trunk of the majestic elephant in the main room of the newly organized National Museum of Natural History, it informs you that the whole museum has been reorganized on evolutionary principles. Follow the evolutionary trail, it proclaims. The human origin exhibit is breathtaking because of the recent fossil finds (Up to Sept, 2011). Hominids go back 6 million years and so far there are six groups on the family tree. Only we survive. As more fossils are found our evolutionary past becomes ever clearer. Because 49% of Americans still believe in creationism, they need to visit the NMNH. A spiritualized naturalism hopefully will replace so called “world” religions based on supernatural revelations engendered by speculation and fear of the unknown. Efforts to replace worn out stories with more truthful grand narratives have recently appeared. Our knowledge of the

universe has just exploded in the last twenty five years. No longer static, it, too, has undergone temporalization. It, now, has a believable explanation with a beginning, middle, and end. I refer you to the recent video, *Journey of the Universe* which appeared on PBS, Dec. 7<sup>th</sup>. as an example of a naturalized religion. It illustrates how we can be at home in the universe in a believable way. A similar resource is Nancy E. Abrams and Joel R. Primack, *The New Universe and the Human Future: How a Shared Cosmology Could Transform the World.* ( New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2011)

So 2011 has indicated more vividly the fork in the road ahead: the low road of unlimited *laissez faire* “free enterprise” with its ultimate destruction of our living planet or the high road of looking up at the stars and understanding our ecological role in the new grand narrative. We need to control and direct our planetary future better. Young people especially need to re-orient themselves. The future won’t affect Marguerite and me much because we will shortly be joining Wordsworth’s Lucy:

A slumber did my spirit seal;  
I had no human fears;  
She seemed a thing that could not feel  
The touch of earthly years.

No motion has she now, no force;  
She neither hears nor sees;  
Rolled round in earth’s diurnal course,  
With rocks, and stones, and trees.

In the meantime, let’s take the high road and choose wisely, remembering that we share 60 % of our genes with bananas.

Our best to you

Vernon and Marguerite