

The View from Vaupillon or Tacchi's Tittle-Tattle

Week 5

Monday May 11 to Sunday May 17

Monday May 11

The weekend weather was basically wet, wet, wet. Came up with that sentence with a little help from my friends and I can feel love is all around.

Saturday night, Sunday morning at about 4.00 a.m. we were treated to an amazing electrical storm. Fortunately it was just far enough away so as not to deafen us with thunderclaps but the display put on by the lightning was amazing and lasted for about half an hour. There was never more than a couple of seconds between each set of flashes and the whole house was illuminated as though it was day time. Mrs. T. slept through the whole dazzling show.

We are planning a trip today. Why? Because we can. We will drive into Nogent-Le-Rotrou alter this morning where I will visit Lidl and Mrs. T. will enjoy a tour round the local garden centre.

Friday night I prepared a dish from Reunion. Reunion is an island that is a French overseas departement and as such is therefore part of the European Community and is thus its outermost region. The official language is French but the majority of the population speak Reunion Creole. That might give you an idea as to the cuisine one might expect. The dish I cooked was Rougail Saucisse. The young lad with whom I do English speaking told me his mother was prepar-

ing this dish so I did some research and decided that I would add yet another recipe to my collection. The dish is basically smoked sausage in a spicy tomato, onion, garlic, tumeri, ginger, thyme and some form of chilli-type spices. It was very tasty and is definitely a dish I will serve again.



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Tuesday May 12

Whoops! Cleverly wrote up weekend's happenings yesterday but forgot to push the 'publish' button. Put it down to the excitement of the easing of the 'confinement'. The weather was on the wrong side of inclement. It was wet, windy and cold. The winds were extremely strong and brought down a lot of branches and twigs from the now leaf-covered trees. Our neighbours opposite suffered half of one of their large trees crashing to the ground. Fortunately it fell just short of the house and miraculously straddled, but did not damage, a trailer in the garden.

As trailed yesterday was our first venture outside the environs of Vaupillon. The trip in itself was unremarkable, other than looking at the queues of people waiting to enter LeClerc but it was symbolic of the hope that things are getting better, or at least less worse. A feeling not dispelled even by the gale force wind buffeting us as we descended from the car to the shop.

At the moment the birds have no need of additional feeding as the garden, fields and copses roundabout are full of insects, grubs and seeds to satisfy the most hungry bird. But Mrs. T. whilst putting away the delicacies with which we keep the birds fed over winter chanced upon a net of peanuts in their shells. As this would not have survived until next autumn she put it out in the hope that they would be consumed. Yesterday when I wandered into the kitchen I glanced through the window to notice a nuthatch cracking open the shells to get at the peanuts inside. So intent was it that I had the chance to go and get my camera and take a quick picture which is produced below.



Wednesday May 13

A need for speed today as I have a significant number of chores to be executed. The not least of them is to go and see Mr. John Deere and collect the part for Mrs. T.'s lawn mower and then repair it. It may come as a surprise to some of my readers that DIY and all things mechanical is not my forte. I was hoping for a windy rainy day so I could put off any attempt for at least twenty four hours, however the elements have conspired against me and as I look from my office window I see a calm day and a cloudless sky. I suspect my blandishments of the temperature being low will be brushed aside as I am instructed to install the missing piece and thus have a fully working machine.

Today is the day that in England the lockdown is being eased. Every morning I examine the statistics as to how the Corona virus is affecting Europe. One of the statistics I always look at is the number of confirmed cases in the previous two weeks. Where do think the UK stands worldwide? The answer is fourth. There are only three countries with higher reports of the disease. These are the USA, Russia and Brazil. If you look at Europe and disregard Russia then the UK has 65,911 cases. The closest number to that is Italy with 20,400. So the UK has well over three times the number of infections than the next country. It has about five times that of my adopted home, France. Why this report on numbers? Well it would seem to me that relaxation of the lockdown with those figures could be considered a wee bit premature, but the thing that staggers me is I have heard nothing in the media to suggest that the government might be considered rash. Am I the only one who looks dispassionately at the figures - I appreciate that there is a need to restart the economy but if there is a second spike and that is bigger than the first then that would be worse for everyone involved.

The sparrows in the nesting box outside my office window have definitely hatched. The parents have a different approach to feeding their brood to that of the bluetits. The bluetits enter the box on each and every delivery of caterpillars whereas the sparrows arrive at the entrance to the box and await a young one to appear before passing on the tasty comestible to the esurient chick.

Thursday May 14

When Mrs. T. arrived with my morning coffee she gave me the news that the weather was 'Sunny, but a bit nippy'. I can confirm that this diagnosis was correct for when I returned from my first exercise this morning all my extremities were suffering from being chilled.

There has been very little to report on the wild life front at the moment, though I did see the partridges yesterday two fields away, hopefully there is now a covey that will emerge from time to time and delight me.

One of the little appreciated advantages of living in France is that you are an hour ahead of the United Kingdom. This means that early in the morning one has the chance to listen to 'The Farming Program' at a more civilised hour. Most mornings at 6.45 a.m. I ask Alexa to play Radio 4, whereupon I slowly drink my coffee and take in the more measured tones of farming news before a more frenetic thirty minutes of the Today program.

On Sunday we are having our first social interaction with 'real' people. Two friends of ours will be coming over for lunch. We shall, of course, be being vigilante, though they, like us, have been extremely careful in following all the confinement procedures over the last eight weeks. The task now is to plan a repast suitable for the reopening of direct contact. I shall not yet divulge my cunning plans as I believe they are among my devoted band of readers. I would like it to be a surprise.

Yesterday's trip to collect the part of Mrs. T.'s broken lawnmower was not an outstanding success. When I arrived at the merchant a young lady took my details and disappeared into the bowels of shop and re-emerged with something that was plainly not a cable but a belt. The upshot was that eventually I returned home and loaded the machine into the car and took it back and demonstrated the problem. The good news is that now the lawnmower is residing at the establishment and the very nice young man who assisted me agreed to fit the part when it arrived - so definitely a case of bad news, good news, well for me anyway.

Friday May 15

This morning's first walk was definitely less chilling than yesterday, although there is still room for improvement. I still require my ganzy for the initial outing. We are hoping for improvements over the weekend as we are expecting guests for lunch and we will be eating outside on Sunday.

Yesterday I suddenly had a hole in my meticulously planned schedule of the day - I think it was a smudge on the back of the cigarette packet. I decided that I ought to continue the cataloguing of my cooking program videos that I have managed to acquire over the years. It came as a bit of a shock to me that I now have over 3,500 episodes which occupy more than one terabyte of disc space. I calculated that if my job was to watch these non-stop then with the French thirty-five hour week I would be employed for the best part of a year, let's hope the French government think this is a necessary occupation, but I am not holding my breath.

In these troubled times Mrs. T. does her bit. If you look at the picture below left you will see that it is a Christmas Cactus. Thus even now we can have the pleasure of the festive season. I am tempted

to go and get one of my Christmas Puddings that were made last year for consumption this.

Her further exploits are shown by the second photograph, this is another flowering cactus. This is its first sortie into bloom this year. It is amazing, we bought its ancestor several years ago in a brocante for a few centimes. Since then it has flowered every year, sometimes two or three times, but with an



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incredible number of flowers. Each time we are sure it will expire due to fatigue but no matter what it continues to produce blooms and offspring. These survive every year in the greenhouse to delight me at the onset of summer.



Saturday May 16

Shway, shway, the weather improves. Unfettered by additional upper body clothing I perambulated around the neighbourhood for my initial exercise in shirt sleeves. If this holds until this afternoon I might even risk an outing on my bicycle. However Mrs. T. is not so sanguine about the climate, as she claims that overnight it is still too cold to risk putting out her tomato and other plants.

This morning there was the first sighting of swifts (though until I go and check the bird book I cannot be sure they were not house martins or swallows), this means a full scale alert in shutting all doors to outside buildings. They have a tendency to build nests directly above important pieces of machinery and the result is guano covered implements.

This morning also brought another good new, bad news story. The first email I opened informed me that my order for disposable surgical masks would be available on Tuesday. The bad news was that they would be available in Toulouse. The current government rules state that I need an 'attestation' to undertake a voyage of more than 100 kilometres and unfortunately Toulouse is 668 kilometres distant, thus it seems unlikely I will be able to collect protective equipment. Then, good news, another email arrives telling me they had made a mistake and that a new email would be forthcoming. So we now await said email with mildly bated breath, which of course will be

become more bated when wearing one of the masks! Why should I be worried about receiving the email? Well I will not be allowed to collect the masks without a print-out of my personalised permit which will be checked against an official document.

I shall not be posting tomorrow as I shall be busy all day and it is another step in my keeping Sunday different so I can note the passing of another week.

