

Back in Maine

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Alfie and I returned to Maine today, stopping midway for several hours to speak at a lunch in Kennebunkport (no, not at the Bush estate). I've done this two summers in a row, at the Colony Hotel, a vast and luxurious and lovely summer resort hotel. Last year I stayed overnight (their treat in return for my speaking) but this year I needed to head on north because of commitments here tomorrow, and because the dog was with me (though they tell me that it is a dog-friendly hotel, and indeed I did see a cocker spaniel in the lobby).

Alfie was a pretty good boy, though after an hour of so of being tied to a piano leg, the kind local bookseller volunteered to take him for a brief walk. I wrote that sentence wrong, didn't I? I made it sound as if the bookseller was tied to a piano. But you knew what I meant.

I read today's audience...and last week, a different audience, at Lesley University...Chapter 2 from "The Willoughbys"...the chapter that describes the terrible parents, who are dreaming up a despicable plot to rid themselves of their children. Heh heh. Villainry! I love it.

Only recently, reading (also at Lesley) from an very old Anastasia book, did I remember that Anastasia Krupnik...then age 12....had a crush on her gym teacher, who was named...ta DA...Ms. Willoughby!

And also recently, I have had some correspondence with a young man who works for the Civil Liberties Union in Oregon, and his name is...ta DA... Willoughby. And..here in Maine...the local chamber music series is headed up by board president ...ta DA...Mrs. Willoughby.

So apparently the name did not just appear out of the blue, for me. It was lurking there. And I hope no one named Willoughby minds. Although the parents, Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby, are terrible parents and end up dying a bizarre but deserved death at the end....the children (there are four of them) are quite lovely and all of them live happily ever after, as most Willoughbys should.

The book has a phrase in it which has captivated my two grandsons...to whom I had read it....and now is a catch phrase in their circle of 6-to-10 year old friends. It is spoken by a boy in the German section of Switzerland, when he doesn't want to eat his breakfast cereal. (I had to explain to the grandsons about the w/v confusion when Germans speak English). The little boy says to his mother, while scowling at the muesli: "It makes me want to vomit."

My German granddaughter, whose last name is Lowry, told me this summer that each year as she begins school (in Germany) with a new teacher, she is a little uncomfortable when the teacher calls out the list of names...because "Lowry" is a difficult name for Germans to say; and the teacher usually mispronounces it and says something that sounds like "Luffry" and has to be corrected. But, my granddaughter described, her most recent teacher said the name, mispronouncing it only slightly, then said to Nadine: "Did you know there is an American writer named Lois Lowry?" Of course it was fun for Nadine to say, "Yes, as a matter of fact she is my grandmother."

I remember before she was born when my son and his wife were considering baby names, they felt it had to be something both Germans and Americans could pronounce easily. If Nadine had been a boy she was to be named Stefan; but it would have been a bit of a problem because it would have been pronounced Schtefan...and Americans would never have gotten the feel of it.

Thik I'll go have some ice cream. If my grandsons were here and I asked them if they would like some, they would say: "It makes me want to vomit." Then - chortling - they would go fill a big bowl.

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