



Embracing Change ... semi-alone

Ben, Jim, David, Roseanna, Ellie, Michael, Pierre, Dale, and ... More Are leaving or gone

When the Judd clan leaves, I'm gone. No questions. No thinking about it. Matt and Stacy got me here. I will either leave before them or simultaneously. I have been here since 2016. I could have left last year, but I stayed because the recruiting of international schools remains shady from Covidcation. Yes, still. Some teachers are reporting schools renegeing on their contracts due to country closures or financial problems stemming from Covid recovery. Some countries are still difficult to get in or out of because they still have Covid strains, visa restrictions, or recurring lockdowns.

Our school is morphing. Prior to the Covid pandemic, the company issued pink slips to teaching staff and started a downward slide for new hires. Assistants, aides, and substitutes were eliminated. Positions left open due to firings or teachers leaving were left open. Student caps were adjusted up to 23. Classrooms have been turned into storage, meeting, or well-being rooms.

There are many *reasons* it could be happening. Covid is the obvious one. Company cutting costs is another. I guess the world's most profitable company can't make omelettes without breaking a lot of eggs. In the end, change is inevitable. Working for a large company means the low end employees in the food chain are at risk.

For the cost, some higher-up leaders in the company may choose to trim the school costs simply from a financial perspective. Positions left open from quality seasoned teachers carry a high salary and a bountiful benefit package.

Not thinking about quality, those positions might be filled with cheaper alternatives. The benefit package can be simply whittled away. For example, the company code they enter at would be lowered. Instead of coming into the parent company at a blue level - which includes housing, annual repatriation flights, health benefits, annual bonus, etc. - the new employee

might come in at a green level, which doesn't include repatriation flights (annual flights to/from home).

Another possibility is local hires. The school is part of a company. The company is in a country with a country-wide goal of employing its local residents. That means expats are out. Locals are in. No questions. That's the risk of living in any country, including our own - although affirmative action looks quite different in the USA.

Are you wondering about my title yet? Hah. Almost everyone I hang out with is leaving. Not the Judds. But they live in a different city. I'm talking specifically about my school. The people I most frequently hang out with in and out of school are either already gone or leaving.

Ben is leaving music for company work. Leonard is going to Middle School. Jim is heading back to the USA. (Aga is slated to take his place. Goody!) Bobbi is leaving the library to retire. Ellie left art to head back to Australia. Roseanna is gone. Mike left years ago. Pierre and Elena are gone. Dale is leaving. David, my Master and best friend here, is leaving in July. I could go on.

Life here is about to drastically change overnight. I don't know what next school year will bring me. No matter. Change makes me thrive. I'll make it mine! I still have some great friends. Katherine and Kent come to mind first. It's just time to make new, strong friendships.

The most important change in my life is a new root, a stability I can take with me anywhere. PauSheng Lung Tao. Thanks to David for showing me the door I could walk through. I have found a means to health, inner peace, energy, and understanding. PauSheng is everywhere and everything. It's all I truly need.

Worried I joined a cult? Nope. I just wandered into something wonderful. I needed a new focus, a new way to grow and recover my health. Keep your eye on me in the near future. My life is excellent.

Camera Case Disaster Recovery

A general rule in “my world” is technology disaster. Sometimes it comes from friends but most likely it is my doing. Who really knows caused this particular event. I practically insisted that Chad take my SeaTouch 3 case with him to the Maldives on his last family trip. Days after we all returned to school, Chad was “avoiding” me, which simply means he wouldn’t stop in multiple times a day to drop a sarcastic comment or lovingly Flip me Off without students catching him.

After two days of dancing around each other, I cornered him in his office. Somehow, after successfully taking some UW pictures, the case stopped working. It didn’t flood and destroy my iPhone 11, just flooded the gel or something. (I still haven’t seen the damage.) Chad was blaming himself, but I had noticed a few bubbles in the gel after my last trip in January. The only thing to do was buy the upgrade case.

This is my third case from DiveVolk. I have taken hundreds of pictures with the first and third iteration of the case. As the iPhone shapes change, so must the case. I gifted my first case to a Maldivian friend. Now that this case was history, it was time to upgrade. Chad wasn’t to blame. I chalked it up to the Greg Lemoine technology rule: technology has a lifespan and it will eventually need to be replaced.

I put in an order for the newest iteration of the DiveVolk case. It just arrived from Hong Kong. When I ordered it, I had to get the bracket to fit the flash frame from the ST3 version. Not only did DiveVolk throw in an additional macro lens, they gave me additional discounted prices on the case. So I bought two. Both of them cost less than my first DiveVolk kit. I bought the second one for Chad. Why? He wouldn’t buy one for himself. He’d rather buy things for Amy or his kids. Chad loves diving almost as much as I do. Why not buy him something to remember his dives? Chad is one of those guys I’d do anything for. So....go diving Chad! Take some pictures. I’m going in a few weeks!



Coming Up

It has taken me all these years to come up with an accurate description of my traveling needs. Perhaps it was covid and all the time I spent NOT traveling. Perhaps it was the many conversations during or following the lockdowns. Here it is: Just getting out of my home country is not enough. I have a need to travel somewhere new, somewhere I have never been, somewhere that puts me in a completely unfamiliar situation.

Part of my remaining Covid "bank" of trips and outstanding financial recoveries, is an expensive dive trip to RajAmpat. Raj Amat is a world class diving location in Indonesia. A few days after I booked the trip, Indonesia closed its borders. It went from a vacation spot during Covid to another black-listed country for travelers. Live-a-Board dot com, the company I paid for the trip, granted me a two year grace period to take my trip. That was almost two years ago. Hence my trip in a few weeks. However, the online company already sold my trip to the dive company. Therein, lies the rub: I have to dive with the same Indonesian Live-a-Board company but they aren't going to RajAmpat until next fall/winter season. It has to do with the tides, currents, and weather.

My trip to RajAmpat will have to be set aside. Perhaps Bali and Komodo will suffice. I was only scheduled for an 8-day live aboard to Komodo, but the costs differed. The RajAmpat trip was already paid and cost me upwards of \$2000 more. That meant a remaining bank of \$2000. My company also requires me to leave for minimum 18 days for repatriation reimbursement, so it only made sense to extend my diving. Damn!

On June 22, barring country closures, flight cancelations, and any other life interruptions, I will be headed to Bali for back to back live-a-boards. The first is a sailboat. We are scheduled 12 days from Bali to Labuan Bajo, to the east. I'll hotel one night in LB and board my second live-a-board to visit Komodo and surrounding islands in search of the Hairy Frogfish and the Mandarin Fish.

Wish me luck. All the luck you have. It is a pre-requisite for my sanity to get out of here and go diving. If I don't, I'll have a mental breakdown, a conniption, a looney bin visit, a bat-shit-crazy-episode.

No, I don't know anyone else going on the trip. This is my first trip since Australia that takes me out of my regular programming schedule. I look forward to it like a child waits for Santa. I'm peeing myself. Now I have a new camera/housing to try out. Can you hear my inner screams?

Hairy Frogfish



Mandarin Fish



Komodo Dragon



Return of the Hobby Farm and *some* Normalcy

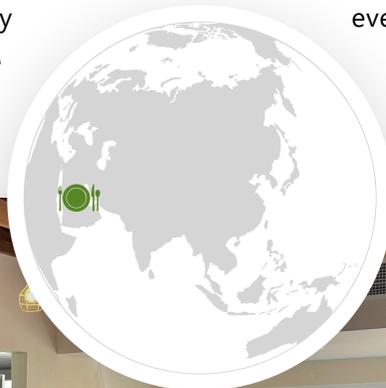
Last night, I was sitting around with David, working on a project. Some friends called and asked if we wanted to join for dinner at the hobby farm. The hobby farm? What?

Now, you have to consider, the hobby farm has been closed since March 11, 2020. Pre-covid, I enjoyed their bottomless coffee and home cooking environment almost

every weekend for the past four years. It was the only place I ate dinner for weeks at a time. There was no other place to meet me for a lesson, talk to me while I was writing my book, or let me buy you dinner/breakfast. The hobby farm was home.

The company people that eat here only eat here.

Whether it is for Friday BBQ, a regular hamburger, or the living-room style sharing a pot of coffee over weekend breakfast, the patrons keep coming back. The two chefs have been working here for the past 29 years. Only one of them returned. But, as I write this, everyone that walks in gives the chef a smile and a hug before they order.



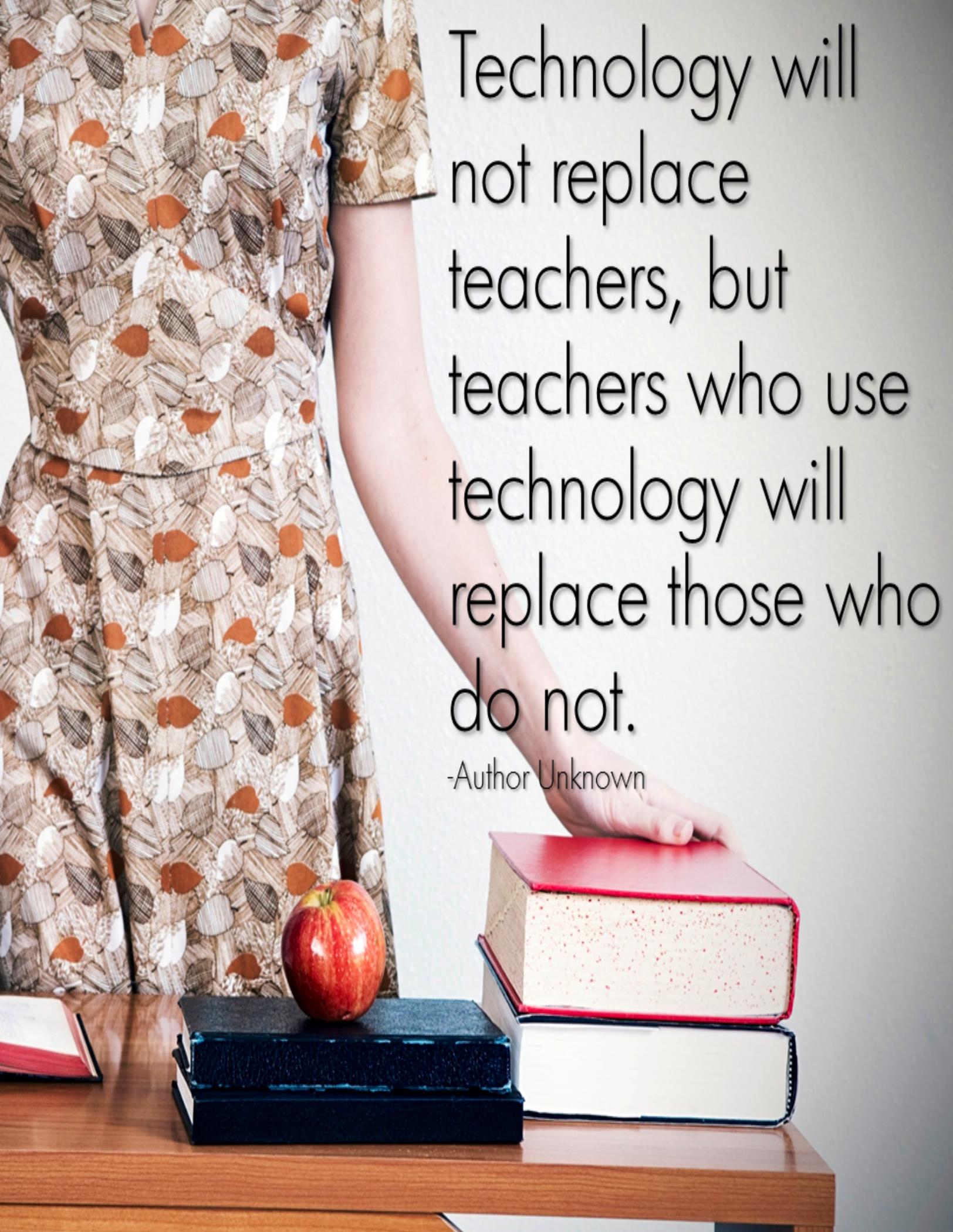
A Remodeling of the Hobby Farm restaurant Changes Neither the Environment Nor the Food

The previous version of the hobby farm restaurant was like a living room. Odd chairs and tables matched the random silverware options you would grab out of baskets. Nothing matched. Old pictures of horses were sun bleached, fading, and had been up since the place opened a million years ago. If you wanted a condiment like jam for your toast, just go up to the coffee station and grab the jar of jam and a knife. Stick the knife in. Take it back up to the coffee station for the next patron.

Now it has changed. The interior has a creamy tan, white, and black theme. There is an outdoor wraparound balcony with matching

sets of outdoor tables and chairs. The bathroom is decorated straight from a cubicle in IKEA. Not bad.

Covid has marked the space too. No more plates or silverware. Everything is plastic. Condiments are in baskets by the coffee machine. No sharing the jam anymore. However, the food taste has weathered it all. The burgers are excellent. The chili even better. They didn't change their menu or their table side service - although the add-on servers don't know anything about service or speak English. Our remaining Chef does. Welcome back Hobby Farm. I missed you so much! Smile.

A woman wearing a patterned dress with orange, white, and brown circular motifs stands behind a wooden desk. On the desk, there is a stack of books: a black book at the bottom, a red book on top, and a white book with red speckles on top of that. A red apple sits on the black book. The woman's right hand is resting on the red book. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Technology will
not replace
teachers, but
teachers who use
technology will
replace those who
do not.

-Author Unknown