I’m at the AWP conference in Chicago. This morning I was headed for a fiction panel. I didn’t go.

I went to the Field Museum to see the exhibition on Genghis Khan. The museum is geared toward families with children.

I knew what to expect—photos of contemporary Mongols eating yoghurt beside the opening to an actual, collapsible yurt that kids walked through with their parents.


To this day babies are born in eastern Europe with a blue smear at the tip of their spines, like ink spreading on blotting paper.

It’s a recessive trait that goes back to those Mongols. My niece, who’s adopted from southern Russia, has it, so I know.

The bar stools are filled with young MFA students out having fun. I’m at a table in Kitty O’Sheas eating shepherd’s pie, and telling this to no one.