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Francis J. Sullivan Studio • Derry, New Hampshire, 1916

Cosmic Raccoon June 2009

It always makes you wonder.... why the rest of the world can live without all my junk, and then why can't I? I've been once again giving away, casting off, thinning out, discarding things that seemed important enough to move perhaps once.... but not twice. I'm also thinking that perhaps stuff is a curse. Except of course... books. There are some books I know are irreplaceable so I have to haul them around until my life is done and then it will just be somebody else's problem. And if I know my kids they won't throw them out either. Like guilt—it's the gift that keeps on giving.

I've been reading a lot, as I do when I'm stressed, and rediscovered Robert Newton Peck's *WEEDS IN BLOOM*, which he says is a "autobiography of a man". It is comprised of short tight portraits of people who have been major influences in his life, most of whom were not rich or powerful, or even literate for that matter, but like weeds. Wabi-sabi. Robert Newton Peck style. It reveals why I love his earliest books, *A DAY NO PIGS WOULD DIE* and *SOUP* stories.

When I was teaching in Gallup (this was when the dinosaurs were still alive), I went to a literature-based literacy workshop by Bill Halloran with the outrageous premise that you could raise reading levels in students by reading to them. Halloran was an early and enthusiastic proponent of Robert Newton Peck (who was also a buddy of Fred Rogers.) The *SOUP* series is still one of my favorites because of their highly crafted portraits of country characters, perhaps even the unrecognized motivation for this newsletter through the years.

If you are thinking of writing memoirs, there's not a better place you could start than reading *WEEDS IN BLOOM*. Just along the way keep in mind that Peck has a really simple and effective definition of what is a good story: plot is "two dogs and a bone", characters are

"weeds in bloom", setting helps it all happen. And always, always, not letting truth get too much in the way of the story. Remember: the universe is made of stories.

I've started a long list of projects that need to be done to the old house in Mancos, now that it's turning 110 years old. Perhaps a new heater is in our future, since the old one is vintage 1953. A new dining room light fixture to replace the pull-down on a cord that was born in 1947. A stone walkway across the river since according to the Corps of Engineers I can't build my own bridge and am far too old to swing across the mighty Mancos on a rope to get to town (a la Terabithia). An outside shower. Another bathroom. And lots of gardens. The apple trees are in fine form and I hope for a good crop.

The town of Mancos is undergoing some sort of "wounded deer leaps highest" spurt of growth as an art hub, with several new galleries and even a distillery opening in mid-May. Little old Mancos may keep from being a ghost town yet. Back in Mancos I'm also hoping to do some writing workshops and getting to know my chainsaw again. I think I may even make it back to town before the Renaissance Fair which is the last weekend of June.

I've been reading the Mancos Times online edition and always am surprised at how much things stay the same in the Center of the Known Universe. I only wish Henry could have gone back with us. I do miss him a lot. He did not have to die. Recently it has come to light that the allegedly safe spot-on flea medication has been implicated in the sudden death of a large number of otherwise healthy dogs, and I am sure Henry was among them. So if you are thinking of using this product (contact me if you want details. I don't want to get sued), I'd recommend you go instead to the herb store and get pennyroyal extract (about \$10) and dilute it with some water and spray it on the bedding and other places fleas might be partying. It's been used for a couple thousand years as a flea repellent. And it doesn't kill dogs. I am so sorry I didn't know this in time to save my dear old Henry boy. We miss him. He'll be with us in spirit in Mancos, and I'll put his ashes in the old corral where he and Mr. Raccoon had more than one meaningful encounter. Morphic resonance rules.

In addition to fixing up the old house, and perhaps some serious herb installations, I hope to get busy with new titles. I recently finished writing my heretical [TEACH YOUR CHILDREN WELL: A GUIDE TO TEACHING YOUR OWN CHILDREN TO READ](#) which will be available soon on amazon.com in a spiffy new edition. My editorial stance is that parents should be required to teach their children to read before the kid is admitted to school and my book teaches them how to do it. Imagine what it would do to American education. No more Title I. No more "remedial reading". Kids would all know how to read before they come to school. You know there is still a law on the books somewhere in New England that makes it a crime to send a child to school without having taught him to read because it is beneath the dignity of the "schoolmaster" to teach such a rudimentary skill. As if it were potty training.

I also just put the finishing touches on [HAVE A MERRY CHRISTMAS....OR ELSE!](#) Even though it seems a bit early to be thinking about Christmas presents, it was on the top of my "to do" list so I did it. During the process of writing I realized that I love writing short stories, especially when I can use the genre to ponder the unsolvable mysteries of life like why men's

ears get so big when they get old. The book is available on amazon.com right now if you feel like reading out of season. If not, I'll remind you later on in the year, you can be sure.

My little book of [FUND RAISING IDEAS FROM A to Z](#) is actually helping people in the nonprofit world scare up money in these hard to semi-hard times. To promote it, I was invited to appear on Jody Seay's delightful television show, *Back Page* which is filmed at OSU. To see a show, go to <http://www.oregonstate.edu/media/tgllkd>.

As I pack boxes, I take a break and write another chapter in my Chaco book. I've figured out how to do it without losing my mind and it's actually coming together, about ten pages a day. I am amazed how easy it is to write when you have the bones already glued together in your mind. But it takes a long time for that "glue" to happen, I gotta tell you. This book has plagued me for twenty years, and this summer I intend to get 'er done. It has several outrageous chapters that will drive archaeologists wild and lead them to serious drugs or hard liqqer but it's my story and I'm sticking to it.

It seems to be a summer filled with extraordinary change and unprecedented mileage, but I'm hoping that as we hurtle toward 2012, there is purpose in it all. I guess that's the irrepressible Presbyterianism speaking, or the fact that the chimes at WOU which had stopped the day after I moved in have started up once again. A kind of sign, don't you think? They're not particularly memorable chimes or even musically different, just bonging out the hours, but their reappearance kind of took me by surprise. Like finding a snake in your toilet.

I am ready for surprises, and am not going to be thrown into fits by trickster energy. It's part of the process of moving, and change, and growth. Like my cat who sits on the computer and pulls down the slats of the Venetian blind, on the lookout for the Big Bad Black Cat, I am cautiously looking toward the future. Since I've been at sea level for two years, I expect the altitude to just about kill me in Mancos (7200 feet) and am planning to take a LOT of naps. The hemoglobin required to sustain life at that altitude is considerably more than what I have in my old pipes right now, so I'm hoping I don't get any stupider than I already am. If so, they'll be using me for a hat rack or a doorstop.

But I'll probably keep right on writing and then you poor readers will have to read a newsletter written by a woman, an old woman, with the brain of a hamster.

Until the move is done....

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PS. Don't forget you can download a free chapter of The Secret Diary of Nikola Tesla at <http://www.cenotaphroad.com/store> and a free chapter of Ferocious Promotion for Timid Authors at <http://www.fundsforwriters.com/ferociouschapter.htm>