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July COSMIC RACCOON 2009

Before I left Oregon I got to watch one last Starlight parade on television, with its now-famous "One More Time Around" band comprised of over 500 vintage band members and cheerleaders and baton twirlers, all now in their latter years. They were terrific and I would encourage every small town that has a parade to form a similar unit to fill in when music is required for marching. Also in the parade were a bunch of barely-in-control Clydesdales, some retired greyhounds resting on couches on a float, Newfies in a boat celebrating Lewis and Clark, and the OSU Master Gardeners marching unit dressed as veggies and flowers. The Max was running in the background and there were evidently no stabbings or muggings all during the parade. Conspicuous by his/her absence was the transgendered mayor of Silverton who is channeling all the civic energies into creating a reality show starring...who else? I left on June 19th and headed back to Mancos. We made it in two days on three hours of sleep.

Moving is always an opportunity for a personal meltdown. I recently read about a guy who decided the way to zen up his life was to limit the things he owns to 100. I just am baffled where all the stuff in my little house in Monmouth (not counting the books—those I can account for) came from. Boxes and boxes shipped to Mancos convince me that people were visiting in the hours when I wasn't here and leaving stuff.

On the trip back to Mancos, at risk of being mistaken for one of the Jobses from Grapes of Wrath, I carried only the dog, the cat, the computer and a few necessities. But in spite of my earnest protests about possessions, I fear that there is some law of material suction and that this four bedroom house will attract stuff into it like a pond draws frogs. Or a vending machine in Oklahoma drew raccoons into it that had to be rescued by the Skunk Whisperer (look it up on YouTube).

As I was considering buying a new computer, I realized I love this old one, and it really isn't maxed out so much as it is badly organized. So I'm making a concerted effort to do backups and move things to an external drive, and free up memory. It's like scrubbing your toilet with a toothbrush, however. Is there any reason to save emails for longer than a month? Is there any reason to keep active files on a book that was finished ten years ago? All these decisions are the stuff that make people turn to Xanax and go postal.

I will prevail. The clutter will go. And all the weight I gained in Oregon, some due to lack of exercise after Henry died, some due to allergies (I have never been allergic to much but Oregon changed all that!!), but it's got to go. I'm going to start with firewood and fixing up the lawn. Since I can't stack wood next to the house without seriously compromising my fire-shield, this will add to the exercise quota. Then there is the matter of mowing a one-acre lawn. As I move

stuff, I'm giving second thought to revising my old "one snake" rule in which after a snake scares the bejeebers out of me I'm done working for the day.

When I got back to Mancos however, I had a bit of excitement—the local bad kid had lobbed six croquet balls through the dining room bay window, and the sheriff was my first visitor. Then I spent days vacuuming and picking glass shards out of the carpet. After which there was the matter of the feral cat pee all over the carpet. Then there was the wonderful angelic help of my friend John who came and taped up the window so the skunks and cats couldn't get in. Two sheriff cars, John, and then Steve Schmitz, who I haven't seen in years just popped in with pizza and beer. It was exciting.

I've been mowing the lawn and doing valiant battle against the burdock and rye grass and only have one flesh wound. My hands are blistered already and I can honestly say that in the old days in Monmouth, I hoped my hands were soft and lovely and now I'm just hoping they are attached.

Emily and I were rolling down the driveway (it's a quarter of a mile) in the car and saw a brand new baby deer. Spots and wobbly legs and all, it kind of froze. Emily tried to smell it but of course new baby deers don't have scent. We've also been puzzled by the lack of magpies and buzzards. but I did see a blue heron, and a few black ibis. The goldfish have grown to enormous size, and are doing their best to clean up the pond. I will go down with the mucking boots and an inner tube with a bucket suspended in the middle like a little old Chinese lady to muck out the pond, little by little, later using the sludge on my nascent herb patch. Yesterday there was a lovely snake stretched out across the driveway, looking up at me hopefully as if to say, "Ain't I am handsome one? Watch where you step, missus." He stayed most of the afternoon. Last night there were foxes. I could see them and smell them. They are eating all the mice and voles.

There are big robins, and two bright yellow orioles who steal the hummingbird juice which is fine because I am officially an Old Person Who Feeds Birds and Talks to the Roses. The river is really low for this time of year, but just right for sitting in with a cold beer.

Downtown Mancos has turned into a sort of gallery district, and the Black Hole (where the Bounty Hunter got burned down by an angry local who shall remain ever free and nameless) is now hidden by a great mural. The new library opened June 30th, and there's a distillery making rum in the alley behind the bank. But the P&D Grocery hasn't changed—everything is right where it's always been. Which is great for those of us who have enough trouble remembering where we parked the car much less where the sauerkraut is.

The Fifth Annual Renaissance Faire was a great success, complete with sword fights, a village mendicant, fortune tellers, gigantic turkey legs for sale (Emily ate almost a whole one) and lots of music. Saturday night there was a fire dance, sort of ballet crossed with burning batons and fireballs. Very moving in a primitive kind of way, with the sense that

there is magic rising, good magic, out of the darkness of the past. Sunday, I discovered some young fellows selling red-chile mead, and wrote an article for Fiery-Foods.com about them, [which you can read here](#).

Thanks to the Renaissance Faire, I've sunburned my big fat head. While I work on the house I have only had a couple of serious gouges, all treated externally with Jack Daniels. If it's less than three bandaids, it's an easy day. The car got her oil changed, her fluids checked, her tires rotated and was otherwise pampered by the best mechanic she's ever known, Gary. So all is well in the Mancos Valley for the moment.

I'm still trying to convince the guy up on Bauer Ave who has my old phone number (533-7484) that he might want to give it back to me. I offered to buy it from him before I moved, but since then I haven't felt quite so dislocated without it. I've got high speed DSL, which on my old iMac is like putting rocket fuel in a Vespa, but it also allows me to wifi the house so if I do writing upstairs or out on the porch or halfway to the river, I can work on my laptop. Or if I decide to do writing workshops for people once the dining room gets fixed they can all use their laptops without plugging in.

I'm sure that this month will bring all manner of weirdness with its two eclipses. When I was working on an article about Chaco Canyon, somebody told me that the stone "shock absorbers" under the pilings in Casa Rinconada, the Great Kiva, helped keep the roof from shaking apart during earthquakes. Then I read an article about eclipses actually causing earthquakes, which made sense of all the eclipse tracking the Anasazi did. Nothing like having a big honkin' party in the Kiva to celebrate the eclipse and having the roof fall in on you.

Because of the move, my own books have kind of been put on the "hold" schedule until all is done, so don't go looking for *Have a Merry Christmas...or Else!* for a little while. I've found it unnerving to be working on some text and hearing glass cracking in the dining room as the wind sucks the shards out of their protective coating of plastic.

So I trundled up to the Grand Opening of the brand new 7500 square foot Mancos Library, now located behind the defunct hardware store, and am thrilled with all the new books, new computers, new meeting spaces. Even a fireplace with marshmallow soft armchairs where a writers' group could really get some work done.

In the meantime, I continue to thank the newly-awakened old gods for providential and expeditious relocation to Mancos, my secret revel base. I hope you will all wish me well in my new/old endeavor and keep in touch.

Gwynne