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Cosmic Raccoon April 2007

**You have to give up the life you are living
to get to the life you are meant to live.
Joseph Campbell**

It's been a month full of eclipses, endings, beginnings, and retrogrades. It honestly makes me wonder what I ought to be doing with my life and where I ought to be doing it. Then the above quote bonked me on the head, and so I took a trip.

Off I went to Oregon to check out places I had never been. I went to Eugene, which has the cutest little airport you ever did see, and drove through the Willamette Valley to Monmouth, and then discovered Dallas. I checked out nearby towns, even ventured into downtown Salem (about 100,000) where I discovered a Nordstroms. I had to lock my visa card in the car.

I also discovered on this journey a Benedictine enclave where the nuns of Mount Angel make seven kinds of Monastery Mustard (wow, is it good) and a Briggittine outpost in Amity where the monks make this killer chocolate which we just won't talk about, if that's okay with you. I also found sixteen wineries in a very small driving radius, and admirably restrained myself from visiting each and every one of them. Also in Mount Angel I found this huge tower with a life-size music box (they call it a glockenspiel, which I

always thought was a musical instrument which my grandfather played) that activates at 11, 1, 4, and 7 and don't you know I got there right at one and thought all through the seven minute musical performance recounting local history that it's a shame every town under 2000 isn't required to have something like this.

The Willamette valley is lush and green, obviously blessed with rich soil and lots of rain, quite a difference from Texas, or even Colorado where the tornadoes and fires are pestilential. As I drove around in Dallas which is a delightful old town with a clock tower on the courthouse that chimes the hour and where they blow the fire whistle at noon, I felt like I had indeed gone to America. The churches are white clapboard with real bell towers. The fire house has red fire engines. The cars stop for you to cross the street. The German restaurants have real noodles in the chicken soup and cholesterol is not a consideration at any level. Amazing.

Then, I discovered that it was only 40 minutes to the coast, and so off I went to walk on the wild windy wintery beach and eat crab cakes and drink local beer by the fire in a beachside pub. Along the way to the coast, you go over the Oregon version of mountains where the roads are all four lanes wide—it sort of takes the challenge out of driving over the pass when you are used to the precipices over Wolf Creek or Lizard Head or Red Mountain passes and fourteeners.

After five days of earnest touristy, I came home! It was the first trip I've taken by plane since last summer and I had never flown through Salt Lake before, so I won't say any thing more about that, if that's okay with you.

When I came back and ransomed the dogs and cat from the dog hotel, they were grateful beyond words. As a matter of fact, the cat lost her voice altogether! Henry had to go stake out the perimeter all over again, chase off moles and raccoons and foxes, and pee on a thousand trees. It's tough being a weener dog on patrol, let me tell you.

The goldfish in the pond have survived yet another winter and are swimming around flashing their silver bellies while I throw bread in their direction. In spite of dire predictions by some people, these little pet store goldfishies have NOT turned into carp, but have remained small and tidy little denizens of the pond which finally gave up its last ice on March 12th. But, then came the muskrat who snacked on some goldfish. Is this a parable of some kind?

Spring hath sprung, which means we will have at least one more snowstorm of biblical proportions in which there will be at least one more fatality on Mancos Hill. Bets are also being equally placed on the summer having huge amounts of grasshoppers or no grasshoppers, and I suppose some enterprising person will come up with a way to rent out chickens to eat those insects. And I suppose some enterprising grasshoppers are making their travel plans to include Mancos as a good place to stop and eat. Where are the Mormon seagulls when we need them?

The moles are coming out of hibernation. Henry sits stock still on the mole hole, waiting in total silence, nose twitching. The cat sits on top of the pickup, watching the deer. It's all very vigilant. Watching, waiting, hoping. There must be something in the air.

There is controversy raging in town over the school budget deficit which they intend to fix by firing the highest paid teachers. The principals of both the elementary and high schools have resigned. The promise of armed conflict in meetings is about certain. But the sports program will never take a cut, as I mentioned last month. I think they ought to think about hiring a staff of all coaches. Forget the academics. No reason to dilute the basketball program with frivolous things like math or history.

Which obversely reminds me of my sixth grade with Mr. Holiny when our class, for reasons yet undetermined, was exiled to the junior high campus rather than our comfy old Highland Elementary School. This was the best year I ever had in elementary school, under the watchful eye of a teacher who liked what I wrote and appreciated my stories in spite of my crappy handwriting. He is

missed. And due to the power of google, his daughter found me and sent an email which made me feel very blessed to be able to write and publish this handmade newsletter every month. Mr. Holiny would have been proud.

It seems everybody in the world is reading *"The Secret"* and there are even Secret Circles forming to discuss the consequences of letting the universe know what it is you want. I keep thinking back to that line in South Pacific sung by Bloody Mary, "If you don't got a dream, how you gonna make a dream come true" and wonder what it all means, because of course we have assumed all along that it really does mean something. And then I am reminded of that other classic South Pacific adventure and remind you all ---"If not for the courage of the fearless crew...the Minnow would be lost."

I am always nostalgic for Hanalei and the South Pacific in April, which is when I used to take the Big Trip to the only place more exotic than New Mexico (when I was living in The Land of Enchantment which once again takes the honors for where you are most likely to die a violent death). One year, the local Kauai north shore kids were invited to an Easter Egg hunt on the lawn behind the old green Congregational church where they held spectacular luaus which I always thought was a mighty fine way to recruit new church members, much better than guys on television with suspicious looking hair and fifty room mansions they bought with donation dollars.

The Grand Prize of the Hanalei egg hunt was a surfboard with about ninety five pounds of chocolate shrink wrapped to it, but you had to find the Gold Egg to win. Even after several hours, none of the kids had found the gold egg, and so the church ladies asked the guys where they had hidden it, and of course they couldn't remember because they had been doing some quality control testing on Primo beer during the process of stashing the eggs the night before.

Here in Mancos, the VFW has an egg hunt too, and you can get your picture taken with the Easter Rabbit whose costume was

sewn locally in about 1934 and now features a lot of bare spots. If you ask me it's really scary to have to sit on that bunny's lap. I'll send you a picture and you can decide for yourself.

If you're stuffing Easter baskets, don't forget to put a book in each basket. Our job as adults is to make reading fashionable and one way to do that is to provide books. Here are some titles that you might consider:

My First Easter (a board book) by Tomie de Paola (great for little children)

The Country Bunny and the Little Gold Shoes, a classic about the hardworking lady bunny who makes the egg deliveries happen

The Carrot Seed by Ruth Kraus, a story about patience and belief. Also nice to give a pack of carrot seeds with this.

The Dumb Bunnies Easter by Dav Pilkey (which has absolutely nothing to do with Easter)

Junie B. Jones First Grader: Dumb Bunny by Barbara Park which I love love love.

Max's Chocolate Chicken by Rosemary Wells in which Max just cannot abide the idea of not getting the most eggs and thus missing out on the chocolate chicken, so he steals it.

Lilies, Rabbits and Painted Eggs by Edna Barth tells the origins of the various Easter traditions from around the world. Also keep in mind kids love "little books" like the *Nutshell Library* by Maurice Sendak, and if you look you'll find teeny tiny *Peter Rabbit*, *Rainbow Fish*, *Mother Goose*, and other miniature treasures that are perfect for tucking into a basket full of treats.

Meanwhile, if you don't have any chocolate chickens in your birdbath, or little yellow birds feasting on your thistle feeder, let me tell you I think they are far prettier than Peeps, and I'm glad to be officially an Old Person Who Feeds the Birds. While I am gearing up for spring cleaning, which means destroying whole ecosystems of spiders, I like to read *Sophie's Masterpiece* by Eileen Spinelli because it's a story about passing on the gifts we are given in the most appropriate way, not necessarily the easiest. Do find a copy and read it. Another great addition to your bookshelf for ALL ages ought to be Jack Prelutsky's *Behold the*

Bold Umbrellaphant, in which you will find, "The Ballpoint Penguins black and white, Do little else but write and write. Although they've nothing much to say, they write and write it anyway." Nuff said.

Gwynne