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Cosmic Raccoon for June 2008

Recent excitement here in the Willamette valley included the Starlight Parade in Portland, the largest municipal parade under lights in the world. Included in the dozens of marching bands was a 550+ member entry featuring players who had all played in their high school bands. Most were considerably larger in girth than in their high school days, but they played really well. The drum majorettes and cheerleaders were something to behold, and I highly recommend the idea for your local 4th of July parade. It gives everybody a chance to get out the old instruments, their white boots with tassels and then practice their John Phillip Sousa.

Following the Boomer Band was a contingent of Unicycle Elvises and then a squadron of recyclers who did a drill-team precision routine pushing 60 gallon recycling bins. All in all, a great parade and all local talent. I was reminded briefly of my high school marching band being "accepted" into the Rose Bowl Parade in 1961 which necessitated massive fund-raising to fly them there. We sold candies (never seen before or since) called "Goomies" and the sales pitch was "Gitcher Goomies." I think TWA Airlines made out really well on this deal.

So, boys and girls. You want to know why I no longer fly? Because without TWA it's not fun any more. I hear from my daughter, who knows about such things, that if you are a DOG and you are flying, they load you onto the plane at the last minute and only if the temperature is between fifty and eighty, and in your comfy dog crate with water and food and blankie and pillow. They off-load you as soon as the plane lands and keep you in an atmospherically controlled cargo hold. You pay about one-third of the fare of the "upstairs" passengers, and the only downside that I can see is that you get your shots and you have to fly wearing only a collar. So there must be a story in this somewhere...

In my writing group, our fearless leader brought in paint chips as a writing prompt. Now, I must say that in 40 years of painting I've never honestly noticed that they have names for each color. This is a job I could love, let me tell you, naming lilac "Precious gift" or baby poop yellow "Gypsy wagon" or pukey green as "Roasted asparagus." It is the baseline of ridiculousness. Imagine some poor English major from Beaver College laboring away in a dreary office building for Dutch Boy in Cleveland writing new names for 100 colors every year. How would you even begin to train for such a job? Go to Synonym School? Hang out at the dumpster of other paint companies and take notes? Or do you set it up as

Column A and Column B and randomly graft them to each other? What color would Bicycle Brightness be? It is my hunch that the person naming these perfectly unsuspecting colors is making \$60,000 a year. I wonder what the job description in the Occupational Outlook Handbook would be? Or perhaps it's not a person job at all. Maybe it's pages out of a thesaurus lining a gerbil cage and the little fuzzy guy chooses this year's combinations. There's got to be a story in this somewhere.

Speaking of stories, if you don't watch Corner Gas (it's Canadian) you are missing the best show on TV. Rent the videos if you don't believe me. If somebody were to make a series out of my fictional life and transplant it north of the border, it would be Corner Gas. Not only is it funny, it's charming and inventive and in its fifth season. I guess if you grow up with a name like Brent Butt (the executive producer, head writer, director, and main character) you have to be funny. My heartiest applause for this fabulous show. You can buy the videos on amazon.com or from www.cornergas.com/store. It's too good to miss. Trust me on this one.

For those of you who really know me, I'm not really into TV. So I while was watching the cooking channel, I was treated to a special on Philly diners (including those in Mayfair and Holmesdale) and their famous chicken croquettes. No, this is not a game you play in the front yard with mallets and wooden balls. It's a gourmet delight, a heart attack on a plate, as made by my mother and her mother and probably her mother before her, and served to all us unsuspecting little coronary recipients.

First you grind up about three or four boneless chicken breasts in a meat grinder (I guess you could use a food processor) and add a handful or two of bread crumbs, and some oregano and two eggs. You moosh this together with your hands and shape it into cone shapes, slightly taller than wide, roll in more bread crumbs, and stick the cones in the icebox while you have a beer or a martini or go bowling or something. And then, you dip each croquette in egg wash and then in breadcrumbs and then you....fry it in Crisco. You were warned. After it absorbs its approximate volume in hot animal fat, you drain it on paper towels so it doesn't slide off your plate, and when you are ready to serve it (if the police have not dragged you away) you pour a white gravy over it, not dissimilar to that served with Texas chicken fried steak, also made with butter, flour, fat, pepper, salt, and staggering amounts of cream, and you call it dinner. Serve with one piece of lettuce and a canned peach slice for vitamin balance and you've got dinner at 1428 Huntingdon Road, Abington, PA, circa 1953. It's a wonder my father didn't keel over long before he did. Thus endeth the sermon for today. Go forth and see what else what is on the cooking channel.

Here in Monmouth (which was a dry town until 1992) we're having a hard time getting summer to finally get down to business up here. First it's blazing hot, then it's arctic for a few days. And the flowers are shamelessly enjoying it. First were the camellias. Then the hyacinths and tulips. And now, the lilacs and lavender, the irises and you can see the roses just blooming. Oh, and did I mention the azaleas, rhododendrons and peonies? My grandfather (the plastic flowers one) loved peonies because the ants had to help open them. Tomatoes are all in the ground now too, and so even little old ladies are sitting in the tomato patch smoking a cee-gar to thwart the bugs. The shameless abundance of color and fragrance here is second only to Hawaii. The bad news of course is that there is a lot of sneezing going on at 103 Fleischman Lane, but hey, it's a small price to pay. The fields are all green (grass hay is a biggie here, and 75% of all grass seed is grown in Oregon) and the workers are out in the grapes, trimming and training, and I even saw a hop field being installed on its ten foot tall runners. This is truly an amazing place.

However, I'm still struggling with the pioneer elitists who ask you, in voce sotto di condescension, "How long exactly have you LIVED here?" with the underlying inference that if it's less than 150 years, you are invited to sit in the back of the bus. I'm used to a historical viewpoint with a little more scope from the Colorado Plateau where 150 years is a spit in the proverbial bucket in terms of material culture. It reminds me quaintly of the museums I grew up around in suburban Philadelphia where a bottle or a bedpan over 100 years old was revered as an artifact of value.

That solipsism was lost in the New Mexico sun with artifacts that were 100 generations old, but seemed to speak of the endurance of human spirit far more eloquently. Plus there is a curious ubiquitous erasure here of native presence with the remnants of original tribes hardly acknowledged. Like the kid who said in astonishment after a talk about the original local tribes said, "You're kidding? There's not any real Indians any more. We killed 'em all." There is a story in this somewhere, circling around the casinos springing up on tribal land.

Which leads to this month's sermon about Destiny (or density depending on your dyslexic outlook). I was on a trip through Megamart and saw a whole display of this cosmetic stuff you put on your face and it "makes you look 40 years younger." So I wondered what happens if you're only 20? Does it take you to some past life? It's just my overreaction to a bunch of really weird things that happened in May. Like somebody put a curse on me, or stole my magumba.

First I get this a-nony-mouse e-mail from a person who hated my book about how to teach your child to read, *Teach Your Children Well*—available on amazon--even though she hadn't read it--and how I ought to roast in the fires of

Hell for writing such a thing. This person obviously was too chicken to sign her real name and address (her email is available by request if you want to pick up this gauntlet, Sancho). Then I get an e-mail (this one semi-a-nony-mouse) telling me I should roast in the fires of Hell for offering to edit people's manuscripts (accusing me of being a scam artist and worse) and that the sender, a Mr. Name and Address on Request lives in my neighborhood and will be.....(implied threat implied threat implied threat.) And as if those two things weren't weird enough, the cat yarked all over the floor while I'm reading these emails, and then while I'm cleaning up the cat vomit, the plug where the television goes into the wall blows out—kabam, dead as a doorknob—and then somebody calls me and I hear their message but when I go to the machine, there is no message.

Later that day, a guy in the coffee shop accused me and my friends of "sitting in his place" and keeps interrupting our private conversation with his rant about how he has a book about WWII that somebody ought to help him write. But of course he can't be bothered to do it his ownself on accounta he's lived here all his life.

It goes on, but I won't belabor the point, just letting all my cosmic raccoons know that unless you are living on some other planet, you might have noticed lately that we are in what Terence McKenna would have called a "steep descent into novelty" and that you better keep your hats screwed on real tight and keep your gunbelts tied to your leg, buckaroos. There's a story in this somewhere.

Look! It's Mr. Noodle's brother...Mr. Noodle!

