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Cosmic Raccoon July 2008

So, just the other day, I was watching the Pete Seeger Special on PBS and wondering how we got to where we are. I think back, it seems like yesterday, to the steps of the Lincoln memorial on the edge of the reflecting pool. National guardsmen with their guns trained down on us. Getting smacked over the head with clubs. Stitches. Because we thought we could stop war? What ever happened to those days? Where did all our noble intentions go?

Our children—do they know of our wild imagines of peace and equality? Do they know about those days filled with fear and hate and lies? Speaking of which, did you know that we are the only nation on this side of the planet that allows the drug companies to advertise on TV? Meanwhile, back on PBS, old Pete is singing, "If you love this land of the free, bring 'em home. bring 'em home. Bring all troops home from overseas. Bring 'em home bring 'em home." Thus endeth the rant. They tell me there are meds that can help me.

Except for the fact I just finished reading OUR DAILY MEDS by Melody Petersen which looks at the pharmaceutical industry's takeover of the health of the nation. Did you know we are the ONLY nation that does not control its drug prices? "JUST SAY NO" seems to have been dictum to heed.

So to take a break from the television, I read Jerry Spinelli's SMILES TO GO which is a totally entrancing story of a boy learning what he is really most afraid of, and embracing it without ever naming it. Wow. What a fine piece of writing.

And of course I read (and reviewed) my regular fifty or so picture books. My computer is running awfully slow and there are any pharma-fixes, I'm afraid. So I bought an external hard drive, in hopes of keeping my old iMac alive a few more years (I do love this machine) by unburdening its hard drive. It's not often you get a chance to completely

reconfigure all your writing files, but I figured as I was dragging them off to the cute little new drive, I'd clean up the mess that has accumulated.

And that of course is like cleaning out all the drawers in your kitchen by dumping everything in the middle of the living room floor (the Peg Bracken method). So now I have a bunch of files I had totally forgotten I'd written! It was like Christmas in Toyland. Sometimes I do wonder about my brain. But during the big move to the vacant 120 gigs of new hard drive (which is the size of a memo pad, just the cutest little thing you ever did see), I also decided to wrestle my Anasazi book into submission and started a complete total rewrite, from scratch--perhaps the only way to do this sort of thing--as a hero journey. My perambulations from a not-knowing-anything kid who only knew from YMCA Indians to the real deal in New Mexico including a chicken pull in Acoma and night dances in Zuni. My fascination, obsession with Chaco Canyon and Mesa Verde got in there too, and who knows where this will end up. Look at all the trouble a new hard drive can cause? It's worse than listening to Pete Seeger and Arlo Guthrie.

It reminded me of a dream I had where I couldn't walk forward, only could walk backward in the same direction where everybody else was headed. Which of course is an old line from Marshall McLuhan, "We walk backwards into the future." It's a conundrum wrapped inside an enigma inside a mystery, like the sound of one hand clapping, right? So while I was puzzling on this, a bunch of pieces of old articles and half-written manuscripts reassembled themselves into a tidy little book on teaching adults to read. This is a miracle. Sort of like tossing a laundry basket full of parts off the Empire State Building and a radio lands on the sidewalk below.

Then, on NPR, I heard the most remarkable interview with Michael Meade (old storyteller-stab-you-in-the-heart Michael Meade) about the End of Time, the World Behind the World. "When everything has lost meaning, when the human perception is that hopelessness prevails and there is no redemption," he says, "THAT is when you trot out the storytellers and the poets." He points out that at JFK's inauguration, at the right hand of the new president sat Robert Frost. I think for George W. it was Karl Rove.

So let's all bring back the stories, the poems, the myths, and remember in the front most part of our brains that the truth is not in the facts but in the stories. Take time to tell and write the stories of our lives, stories of our hopes, stories for our children, stories of our dreams and even stories of our forgetting. Too soon we put away stories and begin to dance to the facts, and too late we learn that facts don't endure, only stories do. I think recipes are the sisters of stories.

In my Abington childhood I envied people like Frannie Martella who lived in a little village of row houses down by Donato's grocery. Her family had famously exotic dinners like real lasagna and even green salads that had been previously alive, while up the hill on Huntingdon Road we had feasts of Chef BoyArDee slathered with Contadina

spaghetti sauce straight out of the can and not a meatball for a mile. Other meals often featured such delights as lima bean-tomato-parmesan casserole baked until it smelled like monkey vomit. Some nights we were lucky kids—we faced a little island of canned spinach boiled into hot submission on the stovetop and served with a slice of hardboiled egg marooned in the middle. Even the bottomless cocker spaniel wouldn't eat it. And the time that she did, we had to have her stomach pumped. The ghost of that casserole probably still haunts the kitchen at 1428 Huntingdon Road. Abington, 19001.

But meanwhile, here at 103 Fleischman, 97361, summer has finally parked its fat white fanny in a lawn chair and is here to stay. To celebrate, I went to do a workshop in Ilwaco, on the Long Beach Peninsula of Washington where they had the Doggie Olympics, and where I visited Jack's Mercantile, a remarkable emporium of wonders: 6 kinds of oyster knives; Gumby and Pokey; Hopalong Cassidy lunchboxes; Teaberry Gum. It was like a time-warp.

The city of Ilwaco is a little port town, at the end of the trail for Lewis and Clark. I enjoyed marvelous enthusiasm from the workshop participants and highly recommend you visit All the Tea and China Tea Room when you go to Ilwaco (which I am sure you will!). In Long Beach (it's 25 miles of sand) I was reminded of the Olden Days in Stone Harbor before it got McMansioned, and you could walk for half an hour to get to the water from the bulkhead. But of course on the Pacific you don't have bossy lifeguards who scream and whistle at you if you don't go in the water right in front of them so they can "guard" you. At least in the Pacific if you go more than knee deep in the water you have a good to middling chance of being swept out to sea by a rogue wave, or being sucked into eternity by the Dangerous Undertoad. And there's not a lifeguard for a hundred miles.

The hydrangeas are blooming, my herbs are huge, and tomatoes are beginning to appear at the markets. Some folks are getting to their second cutting of hay, and a couple people have already been fried by lightning. Fourth of July here promises to be a hoot—a big parade, fireworks, outdoor concerts and movies. It won't be the same as Mancos where the firemen put on the pyrotechnics, all of the guys outfitted in NoMec, and their fireworks always manage to start at least one huge fire nearby so they have to race off in the big pumper truck before the grand finale, leaving Lyle and a couple of the Good Old Boys to light up the fireworks-flag and play the scratchy and unintelligible CD of John Wayne singing the national anthem. I wonder if the Four O'Clock Weekedays War Protesters who stand in the park and wave their signs "Bring 'em home" and sing Pete Seeger songs will march in the parade? They 're pretty old. Old as me. Born when the earth was still cooling.

I do love Monmouth. I tell people how we got here—Brenna had a dream and since we had ruled out a good number of states already, the few that had a "Monmouth" in them included Oregon and New Jersey. Since we were no-way going to New Joisey, we

headed to Oregon. I found her a house on Craigslist—all pergo, and it's like doggie Nascar when her dobers answer the door. Then, she went to get a refrigerator shelf at the local appliance store and found me a rental house that is just perfect. She got accepted at Western Oregon into the Interpreter program, got a job at the local high school, next thing you know, we were embedded, just like we hoped. So we're here for the foreseeable future, and grateful for the 170 acres of landscaped lawns, roses and trees provided by WOU (Henry is thankful for the squirrels), and the zero crime rate (the police do a good job). And just today on the way to the grocery store I had to yield to five girls on palominos at the S-curve.

The hobo spiders are prodigious, so I've been shooting them with leftover beer. Seems to do the trick. The slugs can't climb up my back step or front step so I'm safe from their gooey predations, and the hundred year old cherry tree is putting out fruit! Ain't this world amazing!

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