

Gwynne Spencer
PO Box 525
103 Fleischman Lane
Monmouth, OR 97361
(503) 606-2696
gwynnespencer@aol.com
www.gwynnespencer.com

August Cosmic Raccoon 2008

I didn't know summer here would be so hard. I wore out three fly swatters, smacking flies that were the size of sparrows. I'd wallop them and they'd turn on me, roll up their sleeves and saunter away. So then I took to shooting them with beer, but they just opened their evil little maws and laughed at me. So I got a fly swatter-stun gun combo from the Soldier of Fortune Magazine and that did the trick. The smell of burning flies is not, however, to be recommended.

Next if you can believe it, the temperature was over 100 several days this past month, totally unheard of in these parts or so they allege. I think it's a cover up like their saying it never rains in southern California so you'll visit Disneyland even in a hurricane. The herbs are growing at an alarming rate, and the grass can be heard panting when the sun sinks down below the big trees. My ancient cherry tree, which was mutilated by some previous owner or tenant and whose left arm and shoulder were turned into floor boards for the house, is valiantly surviving, like an old Viking. I water her regularly, and she even rewarded me with cherries! But the carpenter ants living in her

hollow trunk are busy all night. You can hear their little ant saws and little ant hammers going in dead ant earnest, and you can see ant shadows from their little ant lanterns.

On the nights when it was 100+, I turned on the fans and tried to suck cool air in from the neighbor's yard, the one who is like the Garden of Eden in the Rapunzel story. Several cats and a ferret got caught in the draft, but precious little breeze, so I gave up on that tactic. It seems like Emily has this urge to snuggle right next to me when it is hot hot hot, and no matter how often I push that little kielbasa toward the cool side of the bed, she keeps rolling back. I may have to wear insulated nightgowns.

I've been writing short stories since it's too hot to do much that doesn't require beer, and after about two or three beers, the plot kind of gets forgotten. I really enjoy doing "flash fiction" which is technically under 1000 words. Fiction for ADHD people. I think of it as lying for a living.

To balance the writing, I've been reading a lot. There's a new Philip Gulley book, ALMOST FRIENDS, which was good enough to keep me up all night. It's like CORNER GAS in a book, folks. And it's full of the joy of stories.

You knew that the world is made of stories, right? And that lots of people spend a good bit of their life trying to apply armor coating so that stories will slide right off them, but guess what—it doesn't work. Stories come into life

unbidden and make their demands, and stomp their big fat story feet and make us do their work for them and often don't even say thank you.

It's happening again. I told you before how I had stories stuck all over me, like somebody who walked through a field of Russian thistles would have little porcupine eggs stuck all over them. I had a couple of months there where I was pretty story-free. But then I heard the call of Shopping Therapy and went in search of a new nightgown to replace the one that had fallen to shreds in the washer. Off to Salem Center, which is built like a hamster Habitrail, with overpasses and interconnecting glass tunnels and I imagine even somewhere there's a stash of sunflower seeds and some cedar shavings for those of us who are good and pure of heart. But for me, it was just the lingerie department at Nordstrom's. And while I'm looking, there is a woman on a cell phone sitting under the rack of bathrobes, obviously in some distress. I couldn't not hear her, and having finally found a nightgown, I was relieved that she crawled out from under the rack, stood up, and just was stock still. Like somebody who has been shot. So I said, "Hi." and "Are you okay?" And....it was storycatcher time. You all MUST have read Christina Baldwin's book by now, right? Well, the short version is this: we are storycatchers for each other. That's the short version.

And so I stood amidst the Eileen West nightgowns and did my best to let this woman to tell me her story. It involved a daughter, and estrangement and meth and money and in about three minutes, it was all told. I asked her what she was going to do, and she said, "I'm going to buy a new nightgown and go

home." I said the only thing I could think to say there in the nightgowns at Nordstrom: "It isn't your fault, you know." And I guess that was what was needed, because we hugged, we said goodbye, and we each went home with our new nightgowns. That's how it works: Just say "hi". And listen. Truth has everything to do with stories, and nothing to do with the facts. Very little truth is empirically provable.

I taught a couple of writing workshops but quite frankly, it's too hot to do much, so I think I'll just stick to reading, killing flies, and hanging out near the squirrels. In the meantime, I hope all of you are enjoying your summer and that you will stay in touch with postcards.

Gwynne