

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

Cosmic Raccoon December 2008

This time of year I am reminded of a story in which an elegant dinner at Sagamore Hill is punctuated by the thud of a turkey falling off the platter onto the floor. Mrs. Roosevelt, more concerned with the distress of the young serving girl than the chagrin of her dining guests said, "Mary, it's okay, don't you worry a bit. Just bring in the other turkey."

So in the interests of all our "other turkeys", I can say I'm glad it's December. I am certain now that the string theorists are right about parallel simultaneous multiple coexistent universes. Recently in my very own family, my daughter had a whole BOX of Tupperware lids disappear. This may also account for why you only see ONE shoe in the road and why socks never go missing in pairs. It also accounts for books that go missing, only to reappear after you've said the Magic Words, "I GUESS IT ISN'T HERE!" and then, in the blink of an eye, there it is. I suspect that is just a taste of how weird things are going to get in the not-too-distant-future.

You all remember, I hope, that on December 21, 2012 there is something very peculiar predicted to happen (by

the Mayan and several other ancient calendars) which looks an awful lot like the "end of the world" but which others say is "the end of time." I expect it will get extremely weird as Terence McKenna said: "So weird you will feel like you are shaking apart," or something along those lines.

So, you better be wearing clean underwear that day and have your kitchen drawers and closets all straightened out because you never can tell what comes after the "end of time." Maybe it means the gangsters will start wearing their pants not-around-their-knees and their hats turned around frontways and so we won't be able to tell them from the nongangster people. Maybe it means God will arrive in a flaming UFO. Or maybe it means that time just ends. Blink. Our whole scientific world is premised on one time-related discontinuity, you realize--the big bang. With the exception of that one event, everything else is supposedly predictable and regular. I don't believe that any more than I believe that reindeer don't poop on the roof.

So, just to be safe, I got tickets this year for the Rickreall Christmas Pageant, a local splendiferous event at the old school (c.1912) just up the road and am eager to find out why it has an overflow crowd each year. Rickreall has two tractor stores, and two feed stores and a huge dairy operation that is recycling its cow-waste into methane, and it also has a post office, a gas station and a coffee drive through. So it's only natural they have a Christmas pageant that draws literally thousands of people. Huh?

Unless time comes to an end in the meanwhile, I'll report back to you after I've seen this highly acclaimed event.

Since we're talking about schools, I must say it makes me wonder why American education is doing so badly. We dump an awful lot of money into it, and it doesn't seem to fix anything. The teachers continue to make spectacularly inadequate salaries. The kids don't learn basic information they need on Jeopardy like the times tables and what the capital of Indiana is. The bus drivers have all been trained in conflict mediation and who knows what the cafeteria ladies are up to. Too much innovation and experimentation and not enough good old fashioned straight-line learning. Geez, kids don't even learn handwriting skills much less polite discourse. I wonder if it's this way all over the world? Maybe we ought to quit feeding the kids crap and make them eat curry so hot it would melt their earwax.

Since the meltdown of this calendar year is almost upon me, I must admit that at the end of each year, I always look back and wonder what I did with it. This year was editing, writing, reviewing, reading, teaching, traveling, and all sorts of non-weird stuff. Next year I plan to be a Writing Seminar junkie like a wonderful lady I met in Albuquerque many years ago--Magnolia Trotter--who made it her job to attend as many writing events as she could. In her memory, I hope to do the same.

I hope the writing workshops start with good coffee, however. At home I have this crappy Toastmaster Coffee

Pot I bought when the old one from the thrift store died. It is so poorly designed that I think perhaps bankers and subprime mortgage lenders were involved. If you go to buy a coffee pot, do NOT buy one from Toastmaster even if it is the last one on Planet Earth. I should have known better. You wouldn't buy a toaster made by Mr. Coffee, right?

I'm trying to pay attention better. I figure it will improve my writing. I have noted lately that every barber shop I've ever come across is called Tony's or Leo's. Is this a rule or something? Is it related somehow to the fact that all trailer parks are named "Oak Tree Estates" or "Elegant Acres"? and is it related to the fact that Queen Elizabeth carries a purse wherever she goes? You look at her newsreels and she always has this big honkin' purse no matter where she is, or what she's doing. I wonder, really, if she carries it to breakfast in her jammies. What in the world could the Queen need to carry around in her purse that her courtiers don't have available for her? Aspirin? A red cell phone? Drugs? A gun?

Like the Queen, I'm counting myself not only as an officially old person (because I feed the birds) but also because I get to stay up and read at three in the morning and sleep late the next morning. That's retirement, folks. It beats the heck out of going to school or work at 7am. I think we could fix American education in a week if we let the high school kids show up at ten, the junior high school kids show up at 9:45 and the elementary kids trundle in at

9am. And if we go back to calling it Junior High, not middle school. Sounds like Middle Earth. It's JUNIOR high, folks.

It all came about, you know, because some doodoo-head in Bay City, Michigan invented the "middle school" in 1950. He was probably under the influence of an overdose of Brylcreem or Aqua Velva. Let's go back to K-8 schools with less than 300 kids. Whose idea was it anyway to have elementary schools with 1200 kids in them? You can fix this. Go make noise at your local school board meeting. Shake them by the tail and threaten to take away their gavel. Small schools, accountable to the parents, not the administrators, and education will shape right up. Tell them I sent you.

Somebody asked me what I want for Christmas and the first thing that popped out was, "to sell the house in Texas." It's a lovely home with 3 bedrooms, 2 baths, on an acre, with a fenced doggy run and a doggy condo that's air conditioned. Two car garage. A laundry room that's positively Martha Stewart. Terrific kitchen. Great fireplace. A pantry. Nice neighborhood--Forney is an eastside suburb of Dallas. Let me know if you can grant me this one wish, Santa.

On the reading list for December, I highly recommend *Hannah's Gift: Lessons from a Life Fully Lived* by Maria Housden. I also am reading *The Wisdom of Your Face: Change Your Life with Chinese Face Reading* by Jean Haner. It's as revealing as handwriting analysis, and much easier than psychiatry. For my armchair travel, I loved

Rick Steves' *Postcards From Europe* and may just have to read all of his books even though the chances of me going on such a jaunt are somewhat remote. On a different tack, Paul Devereaux's *The Long Trip* was an enlightening look at the ecstatic quest throughout human history and makes me take a new look at ruins and what was actually going on at places like Mesa Verde and Chaco or Tikal or Catal Huyuk. There seems to have been an awful lot of energy going into contacting the dead ancestors and it makes me wonder what sort of information they needed (or got) that made it all worthwhile.

My little book of family memoirs, *Down the Shore 1956*, seems to have pleased some readers, evidently it even made some laugh so that milk squirted out of their noses. So with that as encouragement, I've launched into my scandalous memoirs called *Welcome to Wounded Creek*. When I get done with the first draft, I'm either going to have to change all the names and information to avoid legal consequences, or perhaps make it available only if you sign a hold-harmless agreement first. Also in 2009, look for the new revised edition of *The Secret Diary of Nikola Tesla*, and a supporting website full of cool stuff that will probably get me in trouble with the CIA, the NSA, the FBI, and every other agency you can think of.

The other day in a store I saw a video of a fireplace with Mozart's Greatest Hits playing in the background. It made me think the world would definitely be a better place for dogs if there were a video of squirrels frolicking naked on the screen to incite lust on the part of weener dogs. But

since that's not likely, I'll leave you with holiday thoughts and a picture of the crane putting the Christmas lights on my own personal 200-foot tall tree at WOU, just across the way.



My Christmas tree being trimmed