Bi-Weekly Topics

Writing by the Ecotone Blogging Community, June 2003-January 2005

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On Coming To Write About Place

Bi-Weekly Topic for June 15, 2003

My Place in the World of Places

By travelertrish

I belong, though in a tangential and mystified way, to a group of folks who do weblogs about place. We're supposed to write on the topic, "How I started thinking about place - and why I started writing about it."

Here's my contribution:

I started thinking about place because I'm not from anywhere, something I noticed fairly early in life. My father was an industrial adventurer, a foundry equipment salesman who kept moving the family from the South, which was my mother's Place, to the North, which was his place. I don't think they ever thought much about how their "mixed marriage" was affected by their respective places. That is, I know they had that semi-subliminal reaction one gets in a "foreign" place: "These are not my people." Did either one of them go beyond that? There isn't any evidence of it. I know my father tried to ingratiate himself to the Southern Family, and my mother did her best, with several years in the north. But their major response (and I don't think they really THOUGHT about it in cultural terms), was to move back and forth, back and forth--two or three years in Michigan, two or three in Alabama, etc.

When you're not from anywhere, you notice things about people who are. They have place memories--drug stores where they bought phosphates, shoe stores where they were made to buy Buster Browns, drive-in movies and drive-in restaurants. They remember back roads and canyons, river banks and cliffs from which they swung their legs and told their friends lies. They remember houses, rooms, trees that got bigger and bigger as they aged. They remember vacations from which they came "home," which means something definite to them. Those of us from nowhere in particular sometimes long for those kinds of memories, but we'll never have them.

I have houses, plural, from which I date the events in my life. We were living in the big Victorian house in Ohio when my father bought his first Thunderbird and I started a club called the Knights Explorers Club. We were living in Birmingham, Alabama when I tried out for Miss Alabama and made the semi-finals. JF and I were living in a tiny pocket-handkerchief apartment when my first child was born.

My view of place, then, is skewed by the fact that I don't really have one. Because I will never really belong anywhere, I am fascinated by those who do, and by the stories that emerge when they do. And because I am not from anywhere, I can see layers of culture that are invisible to most people who haven't done much traveling. So much of our behavior is culture-bound and that fact is mostly invisible, subliminal. Because I have to pay attention to what I say and do

(since I'm not from here), I often see what is invisible to others.

I write about culture and about place from my peculiar vantage point because I'm obsessed with it, fascinated by it, drawn again and again into its stories. I once read that people write because of some lack in themselves, and this might be true of me. I have fallen in love with a place-- the Berkshires of Western Massachusetts. I have given it years of myself, years of words and praise. And married a man who can't STAND it there. Too cold. Terrible people, according to him. And so, the one place I might have claimed as my own is denied me, as long as I stay married to this guy, at least. Which looks likely. He's a misplaced person, too. Born in Algeria, transplanted by violent politics to France, and transplanted again by love to the States.

Source: http://www.livejournal.com/users/travelertrish/51898.html

Blogging About Place

By under the fire star

Some people writing online have gotten together and formed a wiki, a collective website, called Ecotone: Writing About Place. Most of the current members of Ecotone are living in and writing about rural places, but I wanted to join them because I have a strong sense of this very urban place where I live, Chennai, India. When I first began to think about what I wanted to do with a blog, the thing that came to mind was to chronicle a particular life in this particular place.

The Ecotone members decided to write collectively about "how I started thinking about place - and why I started writing about it." The results are here. If anyone reads this and finds the idea of writing about place compelling, we welcome you to join the ongoing discussion. I would particularly like to see some more urban places represented: the meadows, streams and forests are lovely, but I also want to breathe city-grit, and walk on uneven paving stones!

Anyway, here's my contribution to the topic:

Most people don't really see the places where they live. I'm so lucky to have pulled up my roots and transplanted myself to a strange place. No matter how long I live here, it will always be somewhat exotic to me. I **see** it. Little things tickle me - or annoy me - every day. It keeps me on my toes. Because things are so interesting, peculiar, irritating, I want to share them with others. Look! Can you believe this?

I live in an ancient culture, which has taken in many invaders. Yet it remains itself. I am fascinated by the modern things that have ancient roots. I want to tell you about them.

Chennai is changing rapidly. India grows more prosperous, the outside world enters willy-nilly, old buildings are torn down. I want to chronicle the buildings and customs that I care about before they disappear .

I grew up in a small city, Alexandria, Virginia, just outside of Washington, D.C. I could look out of my door in Old Town and see the Potomac River. It was a beautiful place. I was conscious of

being lucky to live in an old house, looking out over the broad river. It always seemed to rain on weekends, just to spoil them. Now I live on the seacoast, in a not-very-old house, in the tropics. In spite of the poor drainage, and mess, and flooding it entails, I long for rain, for the monsoon. In my mind, the monsoon has become a season of romance, when peacocks dance in the forests -- even though the only peacocks I have seen have had their tails plucked out to sell to tourists...

This place is such a mixture of **everything**, I feel compelled to talk about it. I guess that's the real reason why I write about place.

Comments:

A bunch of the questions I have would have been answered if I continued reading yesterday. As you answered some of them here.

I totally understand your feelings about place. You wrote: "Most people don't really see the places where they live." I understand this as I have had the same feelings. I gained this perspective from traveling the world and living overseas. In Japan, my life again became full of wonder and magic, feelings that I had lost since growing out of childhood. Every thing was new and interesting. I am ashamed at times that I can't find that feeling back home in the U.S. My home country must be too familiar and can't capture my imagination. I hear that most people want to come here, especially Indians…I want to leave...
M.Hood | 03.17.04 - 7:11 pm | #

cont..

To sum this up, you and I have shared the same feelings on this matter. Maybe that is why I like your blog so much. I have to admit you expressed yourself in a elegant manner that I would like to learn. It's hard to convert true spirit or feelings to text with accuracy. You seem good at it.
M.Hood | 03.17.04 - 7:11 pm | #

It's *extremely* nice of you. One thing that inspired me was reading blogs by good writers (like Adieu.nu and the Cassandra Pages). I noticed that the ones I liked tended to write pieces with a beginning and an end; and they paid attention to each word, as though the entry were a poem. The Ecotone blog (see my sidebar) has some very good writing about place, and most of the writers are writing about America. They have a fortnightly 'assignment,' to which all are welcome to contribute.
Nancy | Homepage | 03.17.04 - 9:40 pm | #

Source:
http://underthefirestar.blogspot.com/2003_06_01_underthefirestar_archive.html#200426176

How I Started Thinking About Place - And Why I Started Writing About It

By London and the North

(Responding to The Ecotone: Writing about Place)

As a kid I was fascinated by what was there - around you - but not visible: darkened stations which the tube passed through without stopping, lost rivers with names now operating as sewers, tracks on the moors which were once old coaching roads, mounds of grass covered rubble in remote places which we were told were the remains of Roman Forts.

I have developed the phrase "mental landscape" to describe "my" world - landmarks are significant others (role models, friends, colleagues and family), places - marked by event, emotion, story (mine or another's).

I'm sure I have been influenced by my family's hesitation to mention the holocaust which led to their last minute emmigration from Berlin to Bradford in late 1939. They needed to live in the present as opposed to the past. I liked to peep behind hanging curtains covering shelves of old books on the top floor of my grandmother's house in Yorkshire and take down a book written in German or Hebrew and just wonder about times past and places lost. To fill in the gaps, make sense..... I needed to turn up the edges of the carpet and see what exactly was underneath. And still do. (Actually, it is really hard for me to go along with my desire to put down carpet over the old Victorian floorboards we have worked on in our current house.)

This aerial view of the village and moor showed me quite a different view (more like the crow's) than my own eye-height view. I heard this week about a woman artist who put a camera on her dog's head for a day and was amazed by his view of things. However, no matter what's on the map, there are only certain places I am allowed to walk. My own map of the same space is anecdotal: the place where I saw the barn owls, the place where the dog lost her ball, Chill Out Rock, Bilberry Row, the Redpolls' trees and so on.

I guess the shift into postmodernism has invited people into more of a critique of what place means to them as opposed to just accepting that "the map is the territory". The London tube map, for example, is and has always been an important place on my mental landscape. Coloured criss-crossing lines with great names, obscure names, places you think you'll never go but do thirty years later quite by chance.

In the Saatchi Gallery, which I visited this week, I spent some time looking at a work based on the same tube map. Simon Patterson had renamed every station with some lines seeming to have comedians as station names, kings along another, footballers, actors, pop singers and so on. It couldn't have been as random a naming process as it seems as he had named John Barnes, an English footballer, as Finchley Road where there used to be a great old fashioned department store there called John Barnes. I got my first store card there in 1976 when I was a college and once a year, when I had paid off all one hundred and twenty pounds, went and bought a new lot of clothes. Interestly, the bloke, Beck, who designed the tube map as we know it now only had a blue plaque put up last year.

Actually, Beck had a brother who also drew the tube map - but what a contrast! It's not at all the lean, simple diagram of his brother. It's a jungle of images of places found "above ground" at those sites. It's just wonderful, albeit not that easy for travellers at a glance. I saw this map in an

exhibition of old maps in the British Library last year.

I like going to the Reading Room in the British Museum and to the British Library. They have such amazing books. In particular I like the ones with maps and illustrations trying to depict place. Old maps are fascinating because they were so subjective - meaning that they were operating within the limited knowledge they had but I guess they were struggling to describe a relationship between places which was inconceivable to most people. Stars that could not be seen by the naked eye, continents brought to life by cloth and spices and tales of "natives" and their ways. God only knows what the colonised heard and thought about the murderous and pillaging British.....

My partner, Paris, was in London this week. She saw a bloke get off a bus who was wearing a t-shirt from the Whitney Museum in New York. Across his chest it read "Site Specific Installation". That's me and my weblog - a site specific installation, an illuminated manuscript - a way of mapping time and place, emotion and fact.

Thanks for reading and do talk back if you feel to.....

Source: http://www.airenet.co.uk/alife/2003_06_01_archives.html

On Coming to Write about Place

By Other Wind

Ecotone Topic—On Coming to Write about Place: How I Started Thinking about Place and Why I Started Writing about It

We moved around when I was growing up, from Indiana to Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee. I had a home in all these places, but never a hometown, never any roots growing. My parents both had hometowns, mom in Indiana, dad in Virginia, so I felt at home through them, on vacations and holidays, but I never got to stay long. I don't regret moving. I think it was a blessing. It helped me become more open-minded, more diverse in experience and thought. Moving around made me less frightened of change, and may have even made me a change junky.

Still, moving around had an opportunity cost. It left me slightly rootless. For roots I have memories, each home a different flavor, each its own lovely tone. I have rare visits with old friends left behind. I have my parents and my family, the strongest and deepest roots I know. Yet, I am native to nowhere really, and I can't return home. So, I've always dreamed of far away places, places that could perhaps be mine. First it was the ocean. We'd go to the beach on family vacations, and I'd feel such a pull from the waves, their constancy and vastness. I belonged there. Then I became a reader and fell in love with the British Isles. I just knew I'd be at home on the moors, or on the cliffs by the sea, with the witty Brits. In college, I spent a semester in Wales. I fell for the cliffs on the Gower Peninsula and for just about every person I met. I swooned for that place. I told a Welshman the Gower was the most beautiful place I had ever seen. He said I should see my own country before making my mind up about things like that. So then I had visions of traveling west, to the pacific coast, to the desert. I had only crossed the Mississippi

once, yet the Appalachians, where I had lived a good portion of my life, didn't even cross my mind.

Lately though, they've been crossing my mind a lot. A little over two years ago, my husband David and I went to San Diego on our honeymoon. It was March. Spring was barely springing here in East Tennessee, but San Diego was in blossom. The colors amazed us. I dreamed about what it would be like to live that close to the ocean. Yet when we came back to Knoxville, I felt comfort at seeing the trees. Here were my trees, so many and so striking in their late winter starkness. They washed over me, like coming home must feel. I don't think I realized before right then that I had formed such an attachment to this place. I even like bluegrass now, and fried squash, and I feel a little bristled by big cities that host large numbers of people perfectly comfortable being rude to each other. (Of course, Knoxville is a small city, with its fair share of rudeness.)

Now, even though I still dream of other places, of making changes and traveling, the pull to stay and live in this region grows in me. I can think of many reasons why I've finally felt a profound connection. I've lived here longest. I spent my childhood (or at least the part of childhood during which I went outside) in West Virginia, another piece of Appalachia, so many of my happiest memories contain the same imagery by which I'm now surrounded. I've married a man who could never really seriously think of leaving this place. Whatever the reasons may be, a new sense is emerging in me, and I want to hold it, to know it better. Sometimes, I write it down—see that tree there, that hill, they look like this, feel like this. I want to remember each time the sense of home tiptoes up on me, each time I know that I am kin to this beauty all around me. I claim this place with my words. I am making claims now, tiny claims of nativity.

Source: http://otherwind.fademark.net/archives/000277.html#000277

Water and Old Stones

By Feathers of Hope (Pica)

This entry is part of the first collective blog on place that is being organized through the Ecotone Wiki. We are all writing, today, about what led us to think and write about place. The wiki can be edited by anyone, so please join in if you'd like!

In November 1991, recovering from a marriage that began in Cambridge, England, and ended in Cambridge, Massachusetts, I went to Venice (Italy, not California). I had travelled quite a bit, but I had never taken myself on vacation before--I had never been alone in a new place recreationally--and I equipped myself with a notebook, some rolls of Tri-X, and contingency plans to visit friends near Milan in case I got too lonely.

Foreigners have been making the pilgrimage to Venice since at least medieval times and have written exhaustively, sometimes well, mostly not, about this unique city. Rather than oppressing me, this knowledge was quite liberating: I was absolved of the need to say anything original whatsoever. What I did not expect, though, was how great a teacher Venice would be in the art of opening my eyes.

I anticipated writing, introspectively, finding myself (whatever that means), basically wallowing in this somewhat decaying, watery city of boats and old stone. The act of walking and seeing and looking and walking some more became more joyful and exciting with each step (and there I was, hoping for some good old-fashioned melancholy!). Every street held a surprise, each canaletto reflected a minor balcony above it, every photograph was perfectly pre-framed by the city. Take nothing, nothing at face value, look harder, she whispers. It's a mask. Look behind the wall, up the stair. In the boatsheds by the water... It's so trite, it's so unoriginal, but it's so true: Venice is a magical city. She's also by far the most prominent personality in her own history (which could never be said of, say, Florence).

My journal scribblings were hastily reworked one afternoon in my tiny hotel room as I pored over them. They can get organized differently! I need not be tyrannized by dates! There are themes! Burano is not Murano because... Torcello watches them all from afar... Venice is like an abalone shell... I dashed out that evening on the vaporetto to buy some blue hand-marbled paper and I began taking photographs differently: I was going to make my first artist's book.

I did not neglect the oceans of Tintorettos but found myself getting impatient to head back outside, to see the light at ten, noon, three, six... to see the fishermen coming in from the lagoon. To see the women negotiating the floods on rickety planks during the aqu'alta without ever getting their expensive shoes wet. To watch how this city just HELD itself in its setting, in its history, in the tragicomic knowledge of its future demise. In its place.

I have the Venice Book, still, a large and unwieldy affair with a blue calfskin spine (inexpertly thinned with a skiving knife) and an italic calligraphy whose spikiness makes me wince, just a little. The photographs stand up twelve years later, though. Whenever I see the book I relive that tiny epiphany in that tiny room.

The question as posed -- How I Started Thinking About Place, And Why I Started Writing About It -- tempts me to start cataloging a list of thank-yous, academy-award style, to places I have known that have taught me, well, place--the pre-Roman ruins at Tiermes in Spain, the Cotswold rookeries, the salt marsh between Cohasset and Scituate, Massachusetts. But for me the writing came first, and Venice taught me the connection between them. By writing I learned to think about place, which in turn made me SEE it. And the cycle continues... looking makes me listen, makes me alive to the infinite transformations around me that make a place THIS place.

Comments:

I love what you wrote here. (I also want to tell you that I've never learned how to skiv leather properly!)

It's wonderful what's happening on the wiki. I'm thrilled, and also touched by what people have written.

Beth

Posted by: beth at June 16, 2003 04:38 AM

You've got to read this article http://www.canadianart.ca/articles/Articles_Details.cfm?Ref_num=125 about the artist Jana Sterbak and her canine cameraman, Stanley. One of the places they capture on film is Venice,

Italy, turning the notion of Venice as a place that can't be seen in an original way upside down. I found it by reading another Ecotone blogger, Coup de Vent at http://www.londonandthenorth.com.

Maybe we could have a glimpse of one of the pages someday...and you hint at the existence of other books. Something to look forward to if you write about those as well...

Posted by: Lisa Thompson at June 16, 2003 07:30 AM

Lisa: that article is incredible; thanks for the tip.

I will indeed be doing more with my books on the blog--most of my work is very miniature now and often difficult to render in 2D, but it's certainly possible to get a sense. I did a "pink" book about Santa Barbara once--City in Pink.

Posted by: Pica at June 16, 2003 01:10 PM

Dancers really understand space intuitively as they move their bodies from place to place with feeling. And so it is with my early training as a dancer that I enter my garden and feel the space, all the while reminded of what Luis Barragan, the great Mexican Architect said, "In a beautiful garden, the majesty of nature is ever present, but nature reduced to human proportions and thus transformed into the most efficient haven against the aggressiveness of contemporary life...To the south of Mexico City lies a vast extension of volcanic rock, arid...While walking along the lava crevices,under the shadow of imposing ramparts of live rock, I suddenly discovered, to my astonishmment, small secret green valleys. The shepherds call them 'jewels' (because they're) surrounded...by the most fantastic, capricious rock formations, wrought on soft, melted rock by the onslaught of powerful prehistoric winds. (This) unexpected discovery... gave me a sensation similar to...one experienced when, having walked through a dark and narrow tunnel of the Alhambra, I suddenly emerged into the serene, silent, and solitary Patio of the Myrtles, hidden in the entrails of that ancient palace. Somehow I had the feeling that it enclosed what a perfect garden no matter its size should enclose: nothing less than the entire Universe."

Posted by: Barbara Shawcroft at June 20, 2003 04:26 AM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2003/06/15/water_and_old_st.html

Sunday, June 15, 2003

By Cassandra Pages

Today some of us are writing collective blogs on the topic "How I started thinking about place – and why I started writing about it". You can read others at the Ecotone Wiki, *and I encourage you to do that; there are some fine writers and thoughtful place bloggers out there – not just from America, I might add - and this is our first effort to blog collectively.*

Wally with Diamond, Beaver Meadow, N.Y., c. 1900

Somewhere in the family photo archives, there's a picture of my grandmother, my great aunts Inez and Minerva, my mother, and me - as a little girl - prowling through the underbrush near a small creek. It was taken during a family picnic in Beaver Meadow, New York, in the mid 1950s.

The photograph above was taken half a century before, in the same place. That's my great-grandfather with his horse, Diamond. On the back of this photograph of her father, Inez wrote, "I read Dickens' *History of England* under the tree at the far right, and under the tall elm, my cousin and I had our wilderness camp in 'Indian country'."

Beaver Meadow is a tiny hamlet in the hills of central New York. It hardly exists anymore, except as a crossroads, but that's where some of my ancestors settled. The picnic I vaguely remember must have been one of the last times we visited the family farm. My grandmother reluctantly sold it not long afterwards – the family had moved "into town" years before, and her parents had died. But all my childhood I heard about that farm, and Beaver Meadow, from people whose lives had been shaped by that particular place with its trees and hills, the rhythm of the farm and the seasons, the neighbors, the pets and livestock, the secret hiding places of children. It was simply their way of thinking about identity – that you belonged to the place where you lived and knew it intimately, because it was worthy of your attention, study, care, love, and memory.

This older generation passed their love of place on to me, even though their notion of "place" become larger after they moved down into the broad valley of the Chenango River, exchanged horses for automobiles, began to travel, and saw the world expand through two world wars. "Place" was a fluidly expanding and contracting concept: it might mean the America written about by Willa Cather – the Plains where one great-great uncle had gone to settle - or the southern cities of Tennessee Williams that my grandparents visited on their road trips. A different kind of "place" also existed vividly for all of us in far-flung books and in imagination:

thus my great aunt's *History of England*, read under a tree in the pasture, and her imaginary childhood "Indian country" beyond. But just as easily, it could turn into my little patch of mint under the grape arbor behind the barn, where a wolf spider lived; or the fur-lined rabbit nest in the perennial bed, carefully protected by my grandfather.

When I was twelve, my great aunt Inez, who was a history teacher without children or grandchildren of her own, gave me a book of stories she had written about her childhood back in Beaver Meadow. Even at twelve, I understood that this was more than another installment in the collection of American history books she had already given me. Of course I didn't appreciate what she had done until much later, when I had moved pretty far away myself and was starting to think about my own identity and where it had come from. When I re-read her stories and journals after her death at 88, I also found a long, evocative description of life on the family farm in the 1880s, written by her mother. My own grandmother, who wrote me letters about her garden until she was 90 years old, and my mother, who just sent me an email about finding gooseberry bushes in the woods across the road and with whom I've prowled countless woods and shorelines, also conveyed the same messages about the importance of place in the midst of chaos, confusion, and change.

It's taken me a while to begin the grasp the nature of the torch I'd been handed at age twelve. I eventually discovered that the point was not to go back to Beaver Meadow and retrace my heritage, or even to write in the same descriptive vein about my adopted home in New England. It was to enter as seriously into relationship with my particular place in time and space as these women had, to learn from it, and to find my own ways of passing it on. What they had done was to capture the beauty of lives lived simply and attentively, and in doing that to tell me, "Here is something that will see you through".

I write about place, in both a particular and a broad sense, because I've realized that I was given something precious that most people in our culture simply don't have. A sense of deep connection and belonging -- to nature, to place, to the mystery of existence and creation: these are our birthright as human beings. There is no greater evidence for me of the alienation of modern life than the fear most people have of nature, co-existing with an equally intense sense of hunger, longing, and homelessness. As we've paved over our meadows and plastic-wrapped our foods, we've obliterated the paths designed to take us back to our origins and the truth about ourselves; we've encapsulated our souls. The enormous sense of loss I feel, observing the changes in attitudes and destruction of the environment that have taken place since my family left the farm in Beaver Meadow, is nothing compared to the collective loss I feel for the souls of humanity.

And so I write about place in the hope of awakening that inborn spark of recognition; of de-mystifying the web of connectedness between 21st century humans and the living earth; and of perhaps offering a safe passage, comfortably cushioned with words, into silence, wonder, and love. Without those, I don't think there is much hope of awakening a sense of responsibility toward this fragile earth.

Source:
http://cassandrapages.blogspot.com/2003_06_15_cassandrapages_archive.html#105569663511199761

June 15, 2003

By Bowen Island Journal

This is the first of an ongoing series of collaborative blog posts written alongside members of The Ecotone blogging community. This post is a reponse to the question of how we came to write about place. Other writers on this subject can be read at The Ecotone wiki.

When I was a boy, probably aged 11 or 12 I had a strong experience of being and ex-patriot. I was living in England at the time, and not getting along very well with several of my school mates in the boy's school I was attending. For many of them, small differences were enough to put targets on one's back, and I suffered some fairly alarming indignities at the hands of a few louts.

It was just after one of these episodes that I was sitting in a music class, idly flipping through a book of folk songs, when I stumbled across "Un Canadien Errant." It's the song of a rebel, exiled after the rebellions of 1837-38. If you don't know the words, the English goes like this:

Once a Canadian lad,

Exiled from hearth and home,

Wandered, alone and sad,

Through alien lands unknown.

Down by a rushing stream,

Thoughtful and sad one day,

He watched the water pass

And to it he did say:

"If you should reach my land,

My most unhappy land,

Please speak to all my friends

So they will understand.

Tell them how much I wish

That I could be once more

In my beloved land

That I will see no more.

"My own beloved land

I'll not forget till death,

And I will speak of her

With my last dying breath.

My own beloved land

I'll not forget till death,

And I will speak of her

With my last dying breath."

I wept reading these words. I had never before read anything that evoked in me a sense of place so strongly that I wanted to return. From that moment I became a keen reader of things which evoked the sensations of Canada, the feelings I was missing living thousands of miles away.

After I returned to Canada and as I grew through my teen years, I paid a lot of attention to reading and writing. A part of me always has always sought out writers that connect their words to the land, and especially northern lands. Farley Mowat, W.O Mitchell, Alice Munro, Margaret Laurence, Hugh Brody, Stan Rogers, Bruce Cockburn, and Barry Lopez all held me spellbound with their songs and writings about the place I lived in, the Canada I knew. Many of these people were writing about the towns I knew in Ontario, giving them a whole new treatment in my mind's eye.

I was also a fanatical fan of Morningside, a program that ran on CBC Radio from 1982 until 1997. For much of that time it was hosted by Peter Gzowski, who was a remarkable man. He made his major contribution to Canadian life by interviewing our people and telling our stories back to us. And his attachment to First Nations communities gave him a particular insight into what it means to have an attachment to land and place. He was a major influence on how I and many others grew to think of Canada, and how we were situated in it.

In 1994 I moved from Ottawa, Ontario to Vancouver, British Columbia which is five thousand kilometers away. In many ways this part of the country is like another world. Geographically I am as far away from my birthplace in Toronto as London is from Cairo. When I moved here I had a very strong sense on myself as an outsider, and the gift of this perspective is that I am able to see things here almost like an anthropologist. I am no longer a fish unaware of the water. My writing immediately began to take on the flavour of a participant-observer account of my life, and that perspective stays with me to this day.

Moving to Bowen Island in 2001, combined with the samizdat opportunity of blogging led me to start this weblog to capture my experiences for myself, for my family who are scattered across North America and for friends in Israel, South Africa, America and the UK. As I have been writing about my life here, I am increasingly conscious of how blogging has brought a sharper awareness and attention to my life here. For me, blogging place is drawing attention to links in the elements that make up the landscape. As this blog has evolved, I have become acutely aware of the landscape that is forming in my mind and heart of who I am and what Bowen Island is as a

place and what relationship exists between us. I have even begun posting stories of my life here on an interactive GeoLibrary which in essence returns the stories to the place that birthed them, and coincidently introduces my readers to these places in a more concrete and connected way.

A project that started in exile, now continues with an exile's eyes, writing a landscape that surrounds and holds me, and constantly inspires.

Source: http://www.chriscorrigan.com/miscellany/bijournal/2003_06_01_archive.html#956904

Of Space and Place

By Feathers of Hope (Numenius)

Here is another entry for today's collective set of weblog posts for our Ecotone wiki. *Excerpts from these posts can be found* here.

A year ago last November, it was late in the afternoon in a meeting in Houston on Internet map services, and drifting off, I wrote the following *tanka*:

Glowing screens -- managers stare

World a geodatabase.

Putah Creek saunter --
A hawk enters my haiku.
Who is the wiser?

The division, which my little poem hints at, between modern spatial technologies and the almost mystical striving for awareness of a particular locality is what is leading me to write about place. As somebody professionally involved with the former, I find I need the latter for balance.

I have always been interested in natural history, and aware of the long tradition of natural history writing. This led me to study zoology in college and for awhile in graduate school before realizing I wasn't meant to have a career as an evolutionary biologist. My search for another discipline to enter led me to geography. Why not? I liked the holism of the field, and have loved maps since the beginning (the tale is that I taught myself to read at age three or so from studying maps). I could combine interests in conservation, maps and mapping, and computing, by working on geographic information systems.

But I also began to read more widely in geography, and learned about the humanistic side of geography in addition to the technical side in which I was specializing. Authors such as the landscape historian John Stilgoe and his teacher J.B. Jackson became favorites of mine. My old interests in natural history thus expanded to wondering about the cultural meanings of a landscape.

The danger in our modern world of geodatabases, remote sensing technologies, and GPS mapping tools with sub-meter accuracies, is that what cannot be conveniently georeferenced and placed in computer maps gets forgotten about. These spatial tools are eminently technologies for

the managerial mindset, designed to support the archetypal 'decision-maker'. Lost here is any notion of place as narrative, or place as history.

I was always one for a saunter anyway. As John Stilgoe puts it, cycling along at 11 miles an hour is an ideal way to explore the landscape (at such a speed one can gaze straight through picket fences), and wandering on bicycle or foot is deep in my bones. If every place has tales, trying to write them down is a worthy way to bring them to light.

Comments:

I'm interested in your relationship with maps and mapping and in what you were saying about the quest for what one might call "absolute geography". I guess the idea of discussing place in the wiki is part of countering / counterbalancing that social development and technical push. I look forward to reading more.

Posted by: Coup de Vent at June 15, 2003 11:38 PM

Interesting. We are exploring this connection is some detail on the Bowen Island GeoLibrary which you can find at http://www.bowenisland.info.

Several stories from my blog are already posted there, and my group blog effort yesterday touched on it too.

Posted by: Chris at June 16, 2003 01:52 AM

I don't think we're very far off from having narrative-rich geographies emerge from the grassroots side of the Web. The technical elements are there and developed, just somebody has to put them all together. The Bowen Island Geolibrary is an example of this sort of thing, and I hope the wiki will encourage interest in this kind of thinking.

Lots to explore and write about, that's for sure!

Posted by: Numenius at June 16, 2003 08:15 AM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2003/06/15/of_space_and_pla.html

Some Thoughts On Place

By Pure Land Mountain

I was a traveler for many years, started young (perhaps there's a traveler's gene that somehow got very turned on in me), have lived and worked in many places, and would no doubt be traveling still if time's road had not in the nature of things turned me toward having a family, which is travel on another scale altogether. Starting early in my travel time, though, I began to keep a journal (I think travelers come to need their own company perhaps more than stayers ever do), and one of the recurring questions that arose was: what is different, really different, about this place I am now, as compared to my home town, or to where just I came from? Why did I want to leave there and come here? With the variety travel exposes one to, one sees rather quickly that the external things, the cultural, the human adjustments, only comprise a small part of the big nature of a place. The real power of a place is time, and what it has done with the geography, the

history, the culture of a place; its traces can be felt everywhere. I could see that dwellers in certain places were in love with places I did not find very appealing, whereas others disdained places I took to be paradise. I learned that much of our place relations are illusions that we bring to bear from whatever source we've gotten them. And when at last I learned to seek right away for the roots of a place, its deepest, truest roots, I found that each place required a change in me, a devotion in a way, an erasure of preconceptions, to be able to see the place as it truly was. That has become for me the value of places: we may change them, but they change us more. And to remain subject to change, and thus the possibility of growth, throughout life-- who could ask for more? Especially a traveler. So it was really quite organic for me to write about place, in this case Pure Land Mountain where I live, beside Lake Biwa in Japan, and to bring to that endeavor what I had learned. I hope it is of some use to others. Posted on the collective Ecotone blog, where Place Bloggers gather to offer and share their thoughts on the spirit and mystery of place.

Source:
http://www.pureland.blogspot.com/2003_06_01_pureland_archive.html#10558162587170301

Writing About Place

By Pax Nortona

I think and write about place because it's there. Those who thwack at the skull, rend the writing of others into something other than the writing in the name of appreciating it won't like this answer much. I'm not interested in motivations as much as I am interested in the details that fall together, like the grains of sand that collected here during the Eocene, cemented together, and became the hilltop on which I live.

Anyone who lives has a sense of where he or she exists. This is where the thinking comes from. The writing about it happens because the writer decides that the details are worth telling to the world. What we pick and choose tells others about us, whether we're sexually charged, spiritually moved, or scientifically curious.

As I said at the beginning of this short and disappointing* essay, I write about place mostly just to pass on experience. Some say that the roots of our sense of place are in our childhood: of course this is true because we were all children once and it was during childhood that we first became aware of where we are. There's a belief stemming from this that all writing is a returning, a bending back of the great life serpent to chew a bit on the tail. I do return in my writing, but I write about place as well as other topics just to live right now. We need not erect a mystery religion around an oak tree: just look at the tree, its slotted leaves, the acorns, the trunk, and the branches. Write about that.

* Disappointing to others. I feel well satisfied with what I've said here and the length to which I've spoken to the topic.

Comments:

beth Says:
June 24th, 2003 at 5:27 am

Not disappointing to me! Glad to have you onboard the wiki. I like your site and your writing a lot; was here the other day and am looking forward to reading more . Please think about some topics for future collective blogs too.

fredf Says:
June 24th, 2003 at 7:35 am

There seem to be quite a diversity of points of view about place along the objective-subjective continuum. Yours seems to come more from the objective, and all of us need to be able to see our physical contexts through a nonjudging lens that simply records the details of leaf and acorn and bark. The extreme end of that side of the realm perhaps is a Mr. Spock recording of mere facts. Attachment of meaning and aesthetics is at the opposite end, and for this too, there is a place, otherwise we would never have known poets or painters (except perhaps realists).

Nancy Says:
June 24th, 2003 at 9:13 pm

I'm with you, actually — I want to present my place, more than to analyse it. But it's fascinating to see how many different ways there are to approach place. And the exercise is helping me to look more systematically - I hope! - than I did before. It's good to have you in Ecotone.

Source: http://paxnortona.notfrisco2.com/?p=1301

Discussion

This page is for discussion of the June 15 biweekly topic: "How did you start thinking about 'place", and why did you start writing (or blogging) about it?"

When you read the essays offered in this first-ever Ecotone blog group topic, do you get a sense of recurrent themes, forces, needs, passions or purposes in our relationships with place? If part of our purpose in these pages is to better understand this type of writing, this type of thinking... what could we extract from these essays, taken together, that would allow us to say "This is what drives writers about place", or "this is their destination"? What stands out in your mind when you read these pieces?

- In our times, sense of place is elusive, a longing-for rather than a posession. We pay a price for our mobility, our rootlessness. Few have a 'homeplace' to go back to, or even the pictures that Beth can hold in her hands and say "this is, or was, my place". We create a sense of place and attach it to our present-day surroundings as a way of creating identity. Perhaps this is central: we exist in context of place, take from it our notions of who we are. FF

- The traveling 'outsiders' point of view on space is interesting... a sort of commensalism where the traveler borrows from the 'place-ness' experienced vicariously in unfamiliar communities. FF

What strikes me when reading these pieces is that there doesn't seem to be any connection between a sense of place and a sense of rootedness. Some of us are strongly rooted, others of us are given to peregrinations, yet we all write with a strong awareness of place. Rather, it's as though there's a faculty we've all developed to a good degree, call it geographical curiosity or geographical imagination. --Allan

Two things immediately strike me.

First, it seems as if our love of and connection to place is informed by childhood experiences. I am wondering why that is. I suspect it has something to do with the fact that as children we are very connected to the places where we live. If we grew up in rural environments, or out of doors at all, we will have an innate sense of place, the rhythms of the landscape, the animals and plants that live there, the effect of weather and seasons on us. At some point it seems that we "get eyes" or what Fred calls "a lens" and we are able to dissociate from the landscape. This allows us to then write about it becasue we can finally "see" it as seperate from ourselves. The fish can tell you nothing about the water, but it knows everything about it intuitively.

And that leads to my second point. So much of this writing touches on how we became aware of "place" as a concept by moving away from the places where we were born. Only one or two of the ten entries are from people who have a deep and constant connection to the place they live in now. I doubt if any of us have stayed in one spot for our entire lives. The result of this is a form of dissonance that in hearing it, we note immediately how our current place is different from the places in which we grew up. For me certainly, this perspective of the exile has informed much of my writing about place because I can see things from "above" and I don't have to work so hard to get perspective on the subjects of my writing.

I have noticed however, in the 2 years since I have been keeping [Bowen Island Journal] that my writing has moved from something of an "objective" perspective to a much deeper narrative of place. At one time the salmonberries made a good subject to write about. Now it is more about my relationship to them that matters. As I become more and more attached and rooted in this landscape, my writing starts to come out of deeper and deeper places. -- Chris

I think childhood experience is crucial, in some way, to a sense of place. I've been spending time in Maine at my sister's with my cousin who is developing a curriculum for Chinese 8th-graders that focuses on sustainability. Their first lesson, the first module, is called "Sense of Place." She has been using some of the ideas developed by David Driskell of Unicef (author of *Growing Up in Cities*) on place. In workshops he asks people to remember a place from their childhood. Almost never does this turn out to be a playground, a schoolroom, or anything remotely connected with learning, so his point is that we need to redesign schools so children feel safe and

rooted there. By extension, if the entire environment of a child is not conducive to sense of place, it raises serious issues about the child's ability to fulfill his or her potential.

I'm very excited to be finding out about this just as the wiki seems to be entering orbit... -- Alison

Your second point is well taken, as well, Chris. As I think back over the past two weeks in a writing workshop (as a student) surveying the literature of Appalachia, I'm impressed by how many poets and writers live in other parts of the country and the world now, but write with passion about their home's hills and hollers and homefolk back in Tennessee or Virginia. Certainly, moving away does offer the chance to 'rise above your raisin', in that it allows one to see familiar places from the vantage point of an outsider, seeing it again, for the first time. -- Fred

I was really moved by the posts; what a wonderful launch for this idea! Chris, I think you make some excellent points. I didn't think about that whole concept of "home" or being shaped by a landscape until I moved from it. People also push us into examining our identity and sense of place. Like Traveler Trish, I married into a Middle Eastern family. They immigrated here in the 1940's and became a mirror for examining my own many-generational background and questioning all sorts of things I'd always taken for granted. They also had an entirely different sense of place and way of carrying it with them wherever they went that was fascinating to me. -- Beth

Robert you make a valuable point: "And when at last I learned to seek right away for the roots of a place, its deepest, truest roots, I found that each place required a change in me, a devotion in a way, an erasure of preconceptions, to be able to see the place as it truly was. That has become for me the value of places: we may change them, but they change us more." Maybe this gets close to the heart of an ineffible concern I have in our relationship to place in the States. It seems to me that many see themselves merely as objects within place, places that are artificial, often ugly and energy-draining, perhaps engendering a protective blindness to the subjective state in which we see ourselves as not separate from but belonging to, changed by, part of 'place'. Tourist travel can easily turn place into object, and tourists can be mere objects within it. I feel more and more than even life-residents in many places are becoming tourists there. I need to think about this more, and write more clearly. -- Fred

Fred, is a corollary of what you're saying about people seeing themselves as objects within place is that people do not see themselves as *actors* within place? That people have lost the sense that they can *change* a place to suit their own desires and imaginations? Perhaps the sense of belonging to a place goes hand-in-hand with a knowledge one can work on behalf of a place, whether this means planting valley oaks or campaigning for skateboard parks.

I've been diving back into the place and space literature. One book I just turned up, but haven't seen a copy of yet, seems apropos: [The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class]. The author, Dean MacCannell, is at UC Davis, but I don't know a thing about him. -- Allan

Fred here. Just responding to Joel's recent entry, as I posted on his comments: "There seem to be quite a diversity of points of view about place along the objective-subjective continuum. Yours seems to come more from the objective, and all of us need to be able to see our physical contexts through a nonjudging lens that simply records the details of leaf and acorn and bark. The extreme end of that side of the realm perhaps is a Mr. Spock recording of mere facts. Attachment of meaning and aesthetics is at the opposite end, and for this too, there is a place, otherwise we would never have known poets or painters (except perhaps realists)."

And Allan, it seems to me that more often than not, Americans typically see ourselves outside of 'place'... ready to change it, seeing it as an object, a source from which to suit our whims and needs for comfort and stimulation but perhaps unwilling to 'enter' those places and become 'subjective' to it's restraints and limitations and hazard. We may have largely lost the vision of people as agents of beneficial local change (or for preventing harmful change) such that place retains its own character for its own sake. Thus, we are not subject place, but it rather is an object to be adapted to our needs. I am assuming that by and large, those who write about place come at it more from the point of view that there is something to be enjoyed and learned from it, and that we may many times need to adapt our lifestyles to place rather than modifying it to suit our greeds and wants. I'm still very much in the pondering stage with this thought. -- Fred

Let's think how would we formulate a topic on this point, because it's a central one to the sense of dislocation/alienation/uninvolvement from the place one is living that we see in so much of society. Some people today seem to see themselves as butterfies, moving from flower to flower in a fixed landscape, while others see themselves as bulldozers -- and there is a full spectrum of variation in-between. I'd also like to suggest that sometime we blog on "Landscape and Memory". --Beth

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20051217215546/www.magpienest.org/scgi-bin/wiki.pl?DiscussionJune15Topic

How We Are Defined By Place

Bi-Weekly Topic for July 1, 2003

Monday, June 30, 2003

by Cassandra Pages

ECOTONE TOPIC for 7/01/03: How are we defined and shaped by the place we live?

The first twenty-five years of my life were spent in the rural, dairy country of central New York State. For the second twenty-five I've lived in Vermont and New Hampshire, also in fairly rural areas, but ones that had different landscapes and social personalities from rural New York. That was true when I moved here, but today this place has become far more influenced and pressured by urban sensibilities than the one where I grew up. I've taken on some of the characteristics of my adopted home, but I think I remain, at my core, a product of the place I was born and an alien here – well-adapted and content, but alien all the same.

Everybody comments – or used to, when it was more homogeneous – on the laconic nature of New Englanders: there are hundreds of jokes about the "aye-yup" that's all you get for a positive response when doing your best to start a conversation, or the way new neighbors up here don't say much, or drop by, or even ask you over – although they'll always show up in an emergency. Coming from a place that is far more Midwestern in hospitality and open friendliness, I remember being shocked at first when my naturally friendly overtures got so little response. After a while, when the natives figure out that you're staying, there's a thaw leading to acceptance and affection, but even after living here half my lifetime I know I'll never feel native – despite the fact that my ancestors came from here back in the late 1700s!

I've been wondering about how the land shapes its overlying social fabric. Life was certainly no less hard for the early colonists of New England than for the folks who traveled a few hundred miles west. People needed each other just as much. But the land here is so different: the valleys narrower; the mountains higher and more difficult to cross; the rivers wide and filled with difficult falls; the climate harsher; the earth rockier; wells harder to dig; and the growing season considerably shorter.

On a macro-level, travel and (practically everything else) was difficult. So was building an infrastructure. Actually, there are a lot of dirt roads here still, and many of them aren't maintained or passable in the winter. Paved roads suffer a lot of damage every year from frost heaves, so it's understandable why they aren't built unless absolutely necessary.

On a micro-level, it's even difficult to see your neighbors here, except of course if you live in town. The way the land is shaped, you don't always get clear sightlines across a broad open field to your neighbor's house or barn; there are always woods in-between, and hills, and rocks. Nothing is flat, or even rolling, especially, and the bony skeleton of the earth is always sticking up a shoulder or elbow right in your way. So while there's a long tradition here of cooperative barn-raisings and town meetings, I think the land had a lot to do with forcing people into self-sufficiency and a private pride that shaped speech patterns and social interaction.

Back in central New York, there aren't mountains. The sky is bigger, travel easier, and you can't help but see your neighbors. My great-aunt and grandmother told of constant "visiting" between members of the extended family, spread over the same hills and valley, and they knew every neighbor – and every neighbor's idiosyncrasies, as well as their horses and dogs.

Things haven't changed that much back there. People drop in constantly, and you know everybody's business because people talk to each other, and because social life is central in a place where people tend to stay put. But also, I think, you can see what people are up to. As a result, excessive desire for personal privacy or unwillingness to "be social" is seen as aloofness or quirkiness. Instead being left alone, people like that tend to be coaxed or teased into interaction. Likewise, there's almost no tolerance for dishonesty, secrecy, or phoniness because it's quickly discovered and exposed.

In the case of central New York, not many people move in or out. Those who come do so because they want that kind of environment – or they quickly leave when they find out they've moved to a fish bowl where joining the "school" is a lot more important and acceptable than being a big fish. But up here in northern New England, the tradition of privacy is now attracting a certain kind of wealthy person who is escaping urban life. They already feel separate and, often, superior, so why should they want to enter into a community – especially one which seems diffuse and hard to understand? They want their big house on top of the hill, or at the end of a long winding driveway. The land offers them what they want, and they have the money to buy its beauty and the privacy it affords; if it costs a small fortune to drill a well through ledge, or construct a half-mile driveway up a mountain, that's simply not a problem.

For a decade or two, these immigrants to New England have been a minority, lacking power in local politics and eventually retreating into isolation or adapting to the underlying culture. But now it's changing. The influx of so many suburban and urban escapees into certain areas is creating demand for sophisticated services and products: a transplantation of urban amenities. The best valley farmland is now worth far more as condominiums and office complexes; box

stores with national franchises fill sprawling malls and empty the traditional downtowns; and growers, bakers, and crafters bring their products to fancy "farmers' markets" on Saturdays – a favorite "quaint" place for the new residents to bring family and friends visiting from the city.

New residents often come here for good jobs in technology, medicine, and education in a place that's beautiful but not uncomfortably far from major East coast cities. Like so many Americans, they don't grow roots and stay a lifetime. In our area, the average stay for these migratory residents is seven years. I doubt if they are comforted, really, by the natural landscape, although they may admire it. For so many, what seems to be comforting and grounding is the created landscape of malls and interior spaces that look, feel, taste and sound alike everywhere.

Yesterday we drove in back of yet another giant concrete box, going up in a field above the river. I used to watch great blue herons there, and once a bald eagle – now it's an asphalt desert, and a memory.

The land used to shape and define us. Now we're shaping the land.

Source:
http://cassandrapages.blogspot.com/2003_06_29_cassandrapages_archive.html#105702339215029107

How We Are Defined and Shaped By the Place We Live

By Feathers of Hope (Pica)

Thinking about this question on the plane from Philadelphia to Sacramento over the weekend threw me into a panic. Why?

Because: I'm not, I don't think.

I'm sure, at least, I'm not *defined by* the places I've lived: not by Davis, nor by Santa Barbara, nor by Cambridge, Massachusetts, nor Cambridge England, nor Paris, nor Birmingham (UK, university), nor Montpellier (junior year abroad), nor Derbyshire (boarding school), nor Madrid, nor least of all by Tiburon, Tiburon in Marin County, California, across the Golden Gate Bridge from San Francisco, where I spent the first five years of my life.

I have two passports. One corresponds to the country of my birth; the other to the nationality of my father (British). It's handy, this land/blood dichotomy: it opens up the world to you as a place to live and work. It also left me at an early age with an identity crisis: I was always defined by somewhere OTHER than where I was actually living, especially in Spain where no matter what we did or wore or ate or said we were always, ALWAYS foreigners. Even today, my hybrid accent sets me apart (I'm well aware it also confers on me a certain status in this country of rampant, albeit often undeserved, Anglophilia).

Being a "Permanent Expatriate" (sometimes I think I should have this stamped on my forehead) is quite different from the experience of being a refugee. Refugees have few choices. They are at the mercy of the authorities of the places they end up in, where the culture is often completely alien, the language is different, the food, climate, customs, expectations, manners, plants, landscapes, buildings, graphic design, EVERYTHING--everything that combines to make a

place what it is to inhabit--is unfamiliar. It is very hard for mainstream American culture to understand the unwillingness of certain ethnic groups (the Hmong, for example, who fled Laos in the aftermath of the Vietnam war having fought and died for the CIA with the promise of a new life in the U.S. and who have settled in large numbers in the Central Valley of California) to assimilate. Why, this is the melting pot! We welcome all comers! Bring us your weary, your destitute...

Only, of course, it's not really true, is it. Bring us your white, well-educated, well-spoken, polite, PRODUCTIVE, portfolio-endowed, expatriates in ones-and-twos and we'll be welcoming and admire your nice British accents. Otherwise, we'll growl. We'll inflict our cumbersome bureaucracy on you. You'll have to wait in long lines in emergency rooms and we'll make you walk through nightmarish hoops to get your food stamps. We'll give you work, maybe, and then at minimum wage. And when we wave our American flags in your face by the dozens, the hundreds, the thousands, or by the millions, you'd better cheer and holler (even when we bomb your country of origin) or we'll place you under surveillance.

There is little doubt, though, that the places I've lived have somehow contributed to who I am today, the kind of person who might produce the above rant, for example. The kind of person who might subsequently feel it important to apologize for it (being half English means you often have to preface a question with the word "sorry," as in "sorry, would you mind if I opened the window?"). And the kind of person who could segue, neatly, into a parallel track, one which is far less likely to cause offense.

Such as:

The connecting thread in my life for all the places I've lived and even visited has been birds. The birds of Europe are very different from the birds of North America, but they're all birds, and they don't know or care what passports I carry. I look at birds while I'm walking, bicycling, driving, or riding a train. The sight of a flock of white-faced ibis that flew southwest over Sacramento Airport on Saturday evening as I waited for the shuttle brought the first smile to my lips after landing--saying, I suppose, I'm home. Home. Not the home of flag-waving bigots, the home of the white-faced ibis. The home they share with me. The home I will fight to protect -- the landscape that is falling piece by piece to developers of tract houses.

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2003/06/30/how_we_are_defin.html

Comments:

Birmingham? England? MI? AL?

I understand your bird-bond. For me, it is wildflowers, that, fortunately, are much the same throughout the southern Appalachians where I have migrated to find 'home' a half-dozen times (with my roots in Bham, AL). While not as vagile as birds, to be sure, they show up in upexpected places and bring a smile that only I understand. And maybe you would, as well?

Posted by: fred1st at July 1, 2003 07:30 AM

England. Thanks. I'll fix that...

Yes, I think the smile's the same.

Posted by: Pica at July 1, 2003 08:51 AM

I'm fixed on the geology, myself, the pressures that tumble mountains from their lofty heights, the weather that lacerates them, the crawl of the continents at a rate equal to the growth of your fingernails, and uplifts caused when the earth abcesses and a boil forms. The soil determines the patterns on the hills and the the plant life determines what niches are available for the plants, the insects, the birds, the mammals, and the fungus -- all living things.

Posted by: Joel at July 1, 2003 05:35 PM

God can I relate to your post! I am a German/ Filipino/ African-American who grew up in the Japan, the US, and Germany. Like you I have never really felt defined by any one place, but rather somewhat detached and completely involved all at the same time with every place I've lived in or visited. The feeling of being a "foreigner" everywhere I've been, especially Japan, but even the US, where Americans just can't seem to understand that I am not the same as them and that I have no wish to be part of any "melting pot". (It's sort of the opposite of when some African Americans insist they are African, when in fact they have never been to Africa and if they had they would find that culturally they are completely alien).

One time I was having a deep conversation with a good American friend who kept insisting that I had to carry some sort of idntification with *some* place, that I couldn't just live my life seeing myself as aimless all the time. It was an emotional discussion, and not without some heated responses, simply because this sense of identity is essential to all of us and when someone treads on it, it hurts, especially when that sense of identity has never been defined. However, that day an interesting thing happened: while we were talking, my friend brought out a globe, the kind you keep on your desk. I was dumbstruck. I turned to the photograph of the Earth that she kept over her desk and pointed at it: "There, that's where I belong. That's my home and where I identify with." I promptly broke down weeping. It was quite overwhelming to discover where you belong if you've never felt you belonged anywhere.

But, like you, it has always been the animals, especially birds and insects, that have knitted places together for me. The first thing I do when I visit a new place is to get up at dawn and go for a walk. I listen for the new sounds of birds and peer at tree bark or leaves to find insects that I can name. With the gained familiarity of newly discovered birds, a place settles into something less ethereal. Birds make a place real, especially their calls.

Spain still comes to my mind as the place where Pallid Swifts and Alpine Chough live; the Shetlands "Maalies" (Fulmars), Gannets, and "Bonxies" (Great Skuas); Singapore Black-naped Orioles, Greater Coucals, and Pied Fantails; Japan Azure-winged Magpies, Brown-eared Bulbuls, and Rufous Turtle Doves. All these birds have drawn me into these places and I became part of them.

Posted by: butuki at July 1, 2003 07:45 PM

But Pica, of course you are shaped by place, exactly as the birds are.

Rather than rootedness, you have been shaped by the tropes of migration, flight, bones full of air, feathers of hope.

The ironic impermanence of nesting.

The citizens of nowhere, dependant on every stop they make for sustainance and rest.

I get it...beautiful.

Posted by: Chris at July 1, 2003 11:37 PM

I really enjoyed your post and connected with aspects of it. It's so important for all our different experiences to be accounted for and in our own words. Loved the connections with birds too. There's a number of bird aware persons in the wiki. Thanks for being so outspoken, clear and direct.

Posted by: Coup de Vent at July 2, 2003 10:45 AM

Maybe people who aren't tied to their places through heritage or "patriotism" see their places in a more bare bones way. They form easier attachments with the natural, non-cultural signs of home. You drove this point home to me with "Not the home of flag-waving bigots, the home of the white-faced ibis." I've had this feeling too, but you put it in words for me.

Posted by: Wendy at July 2, 2003 04:50 PM

Creatures feel connected to place because they can feed off of it and take shelter in it. The snowy egret walks the tall grasses, sometimes even in the dry around here, because this is where it can find food and this is where it can hide.

Humans, perhaps, have lost that direct connection to the food-bearing properties of place. What's a grocery store compared to a marsh? Perhaps we invented stories on the day that we moved into a house and had food brought to us instead of eating it in the bush.

A wild fantasy, not especially accurate, but evocative.

Posted by: Joel at July 4, 2003 01:03 AM

Human Cormorant

By Pax Nortona

Ecotone Topic for July 1: How are we defined and shaped by the place where we live?

Rude me thinks of stumping Socrates with the counter-question: “Define definition.”

I don’t see the place I live as a definer but more of a limiter. Right now temperatures are in the seventies and it is a little after three in the morning. The climate contributes to my decision to be up at this hour: during the day the sun infiltrates the Spanish tile roof and bakes whatever is inside. The cats sprawl on the floor, barely conscious of where they are. I take benadryl, xanax, and do the siesta thing when our stucco broiler runs on high.

I’m neither this address nor is this address me. We’re converging facts

and when we brush against each other, we make changes. Where I sleep, where I shop, where I take my walks depend on what is near to this place, to a large degree, but then I have decided to

prefer places that are nearer to me. I do more to my extreme locality — the wall where I hang my silly stuff, the top of the monitor where I have five Chinese boddhisatvas helping me, the desk where I lose things. We kept the paint and the wallpaper that was here when we moved in: we plan to replace the horizontal Venetian blinds with vertical slat blinds so that the cats can move between them and the window without destroying them.

My effects on the larger landscape are much more subtle: our cars contribute to the haze over Mount Santiago. This typing may disturb a skunk or a raccoon who is wandering through the complex. Our trash gets taken away to an unseen landfill. I'm not just shaping this place, in my own small way, but I am shaping sites beyond my vision, my hearing, my sense of smell, my taste, my touch. I am one of millions in this moon-shaped plain running from the Santa Monica Mountains to Camp Pendleton. I'm a human cormorant, discharging my guano, whiting the landscape.

Someone throw me a fish, please. Salmon is nice.

Comments:

fredf Says:
July 1st, 2003 at 7:40 am

I have some sardines with Louisianna Hot Sauce.. will that do? And do come to my garden with that whiting, I hear it is great fertilizer. And: how far away is the hill in the photo?

Joel Says:
July 1st, 2003 at 4:44 pm

The "hill" is Mount Santiago, which is nearly 6000 feet high and located about ten miles from me as the crow flies.

Pica Says:
July 2nd, 2003 at 6:50 am

Great image, Joel. Cormorants are great because they operate in salt, brackish, or fresh water, highly adaptable and unruffled. Except maybe by Santa Ana's…

Coup de Vent Says:
July 2nd, 2003 at 12:32 pm

I'm enjoying the irreverent responses to the subject. It does make you think and question. Glad to have happened upon your musings. Especially liked the description of the desk area….

Source: http://paxnortona.notfrisco2.com/?p=1327

Shaped by Place

By Fragments of Floyd

It is the year 1803. I am a Scots-Irish immigrant seeking independence and a few hundred acres to farm, so that I might carry on the traditions of my ancestors, in the western wilderness of

America. I hold here a handbill stating that there is cheap land available in far western Virginia, along the New River. And everything I will do and where I will go and how I will get where I am going... all of these are determined by the nature of the place. The pitch and grade of the primitive trail determines where I can and cannot go as I move generally westward. And it limits the size and weight of my wagon, and therefore the belongings I can bring with me. The weather and season effects when my animals can find browse, when dry paths will allow travel, when I must seek shelter or die. My destination of three hundred acres of my choosing on the newly acquired Indian lands will be absolutely mandated by the nature of the place: where will I and my animals find water; how does the land lie for crops, can my oxen clear the forest; is the soil rich and deep; and where will the staples that I cannot make or produce myself come from? From day to day, once I arrive and over the years make my home, my life and livelihood will be determined by the nature of place: I must have a lover's knowledge of every fold and hillock and holler around me, because it is from this physical place that I kill game for food, find herbs for medicine, select just the right kind of wood for the tools I craft in order to survive. Place determines whether I live or die, and I respect it's limitations, honor it's provision and will spend a lifetime living in an uneasy balance with it and seeking to understand it.

It is the year 2003. I am the direct descendent of the settler from two hundred years ago. I live near where my ancestors settled in Southwest Virginia. His notions of dependence on the providence of place is foreign to me, neolithic and repugnant. To assume that place shapes us and constrains us in any way is to acknowledge that there are forces or conditions imposed on us by our physical surroundings. This is a very alien and archaic way of thinking in our modern age of freedom from the effects of place upon people. In my day, it is place that is subject, and places that are being changed, shaped, altered by our living here, as we think best. This is the modern way of thinking about place. If there is a mountain where we want a city, we take it down. If there is a stream where we want a road, we divert it into underground pipes. We modify and control every aspect about where we live... our microclimate, ambient noise, the texture and color and order of everything from our clothing outward... to suit our vary narrow tolerance of comfort and preference and pleasure. Indeed, it is this capacity to alter and control our place, our world at all levels for efficiency, economy and predictability that epitomizes mankind's ultimate conquest and dominion over his environment. We need accept none of the givens of where on the earth we live as my forefather was obliged to do, since nature is subject to our whims and malleable to the power of our technologies. What higher good is there than this, than to be free of the constraints of place?

How we think about place has undergone a sea change in two hundred years. Basic human biology and the fundamental workings of nature have not. We have allowed ourselves to be dulled to complacency by the prevailing political hubris that the health of humanity is measured more by the economic than biological yardstick. This is a dangerous delusion to which we have succumbed. I fear for our future if the physical world... our forests, parks, seashores, prairies, pastures and woodlots...continues over the next two hundred years to be reduced to nothing more than a quaint backdrop for SUV commercials or pleasant scenery for our brief vacations away from the narrow comforts of our manmade cocoons.

I am pleased we are asking this question of how place shapes us. And answers will come from a better understanding of our dual role as both object and subject in regard to place... learning how to better live in it, and let it live in us. Our ancestor of 200 years ago understood his physical, emotional, spiritual and re-creational needs and attachments to place that we poorly understand, but can reclaim.

Source: http://www.fragmentsfromfloyd.com/fragments/2003/07/shaped_by_place.html

Comments:

Fred: it's amazing how you get this landscape to have a *personality*. I hope you will keep this in mind as you get your book together: it's very compelling. The personality shifts depending on the viewer--depending on the viewer's era--but it doesn't disappear. Good work.

Posted by: Pica | July 1, 2003 08:39 AM

I cannot read the first portion without my mind tagging on a brogue. Then the tone changes, subtley yet undeniably. And then, again you come in with a bit to say that is still different in tone than the rest. Three completely different voices. I think I will be shaking my head on that one for some time. "How did he DO that"? :)

Having read a number of these responses to the "about place" question, I find it interesting that quite consistently the reader learns more about the internal landscape of the writer than the external. And I've noticed a similarity in personality among the folks who think themselves the least defined by place. I did not expect the emotional responses this question has provoked. It's really interesting and thank you for making it so easy for us non-writing blogger-people to participate.

Posted by: lisa | July 2, 2003 09:20 AM

Hi Fred,
Found the style as well as the content really engaging. I guess we are writing as generations of experience and it's good to find ways of releasing that, letting it through.....

Posted by: Coup de Vent | July 2, 2003 03:39 PM

There is a different take on place in NPR's Susan Stamberg's collection of interview excerpts, "Talk". In her introduction to a conversation with Tom Wolfe (January 1978), she writes, "Always, on a story, we look for natural ambient sound that we can record to give listeners a sense of place." And, later, "Sounds ought to be distinctive to a place...."

Posted by: Cop Car |

Tuesday, July 01, 2003

By London and the North

How I am I shaped or defined by the place(s) I live in
(Participating in The Ecotone: Writing about Place)

At the weekend I went to a conference called Not Just a Change of Address. It was for people whose parents had survived the holocaust. It was interesting to hear anecdotes of how others live their lives affected by the stories or lack of them about what happened.

When I was at art college I made a painting, a self portrait, larger than life size and in black and white. It may have been my first self portrait. I drew myself staring directly into the camera - without any clothes except my running shoes. Ready. Ready to run.

When I first moved up north a few years ago I was unsettled and found the weekly train trips to London quite unnerving. I just wanted to stay put and put down some roots. Instead I felt forced to get on a train and go. With time the panicky feelings as the train doors shut subsided. Now I enjoy my trips to London. My rucksack is a temporary home.

I bought this rucksack in 1988. It is my most preferred address. My security blanket. I can carry almost my entire world in there.

Left pocket:
Cheque book, tickets, sunglasses

Middle Pocket:
Three kinds of pain killer, various other pills, mustard, toothbrush, pencil sharpener, pencils 3b, 6b and water soluble, an eraser, timetables, fountain pen, ink cartridges, tea bags, plasters, pain balm, lipsalve, spot make-up, keys

Right pocket:
Phone, reading glasses, hairbrush, spare batteries

Main Space:
Psion (or new laptop), cushion, tissues, water, fruit, underwear, sleeping t-shirt, fleece, sketchbook, reading matter, camera, diary

At home, in my living room, everything that can be plugged in is connected. And has its place. Therefore this is where I live. I can tell you which plug is for which appliance. And I like turning things on. And off. You can bring other worlds into your own small space. And then turn them out when youve had enough and want to be alone again.

Outside the house, there are several selves. In the village I am known as duck saver, ofcumden, dog owner and camera. At work locally I hide most aspects of myself and of my world. Up here, up north, there is little opportunity for a common language. I sometimes imagine that I could stop any number of people in the street in London, ask them for a paragraph about my lifestyle and values and they would give quite credible responses. Up here, the landscape is exquisite but culturally unfamiliar and sparsely populated with familiar others. I have found myself creating a mental landscape populated with all those I admire dead or alive, famous or known to me. They are those with chutzpah, critique, concern, creativity, challenge. They know at least part of what I face in all these different environments. Mobile support wherever I am. My true home, where I feel I most comfortably belong, is on that map.

Comments:

Lovely post CdeV. I like the bounce between spaces and the inner space of the rucksack that accompanies you to the various arenas of your identity.
Posted by Chris(www) at 1:17 2/7/2003

English mustard actually. If I've not got food with me and need to buy 'train food' when I'm en route it can be so utterly bland. Tasteless. So mustard helps.
Posted by Coup de Vent(www) at 9:15 2/7/2003

Mustard is exactly what I wondered too. Thanks Chris.

I love the "poised to run" image. Also the counterpart of your ability to blend into the background in London but not in Yorkshire and your choice to be in these two places almost simultaneously. Or perhaps choice is the wrong word? Drive? Need? Wot?
Posted by Pica(www) at 15:33 2/7/2003

I enjoyed looking inside your rucksack and your apartment. What you say at the end, about belonging on the map of your own choosing and creation, really hits home with me. You express the feeling very nicely and uniquely.
Posted by Wendy(www) at 0:51 3/7/2003

Source: http://airenet.co.uk/alife/2003_07_01_archives.html#105709895461753472

How are we defined and shaped by the place we live?

by Other Wind

This question is a hard one for me to answer, for two reasons. First, I've lived in several places—suburban mid-sized towns, a real "suburb" of a large city, a small city. North. South. Homogenous. Multi-Cultural. So, I haven't had one place erode me into form over many years. However, I think being submersed in the cultural habitats of several types of places and of different regions has made me more open and curious. It has made me more comfortable with change and left me the ability to greet new situations with hope and ease. Also, experiencing a diverse range of places has made me more aware of oversimplification and prejudice. I can't say that I never fall prey to stereotyping, especially in regards to cultures and places I've never experienced, but at the very least I am aware of our tendency to oversimplify and prejudge. I observe this tendency on a regular basis living in the south, being not quite a Yankee but not southern born. I hear the stereotypes from both directions.

The other reason this question is a hard one for me is my relative youth. I can't yet see how I'm being formed by my home in this Appalachian valley, in the small city of Knoxville. I haven't lived here long enough, or lived long enough at all, I think, to have enough vantage. We can't help but be formed, wherever we are, by the individuals we know, the culture that envelops us, and the moments through which we move. We are tied to place, since our activities and chances are tied to place. I'm still too close to see my big picture, but I know one is forming. So, I keep an eye out.

I can answer the question, however, on another level. Imagination is a vital force in my life. I spend a lot of time in my mind, or in the clouds, as a writer, a reader, and a daydreamer. My imagination formed in the woody mountains of West Virginia, when I was a child—when I had an unforced, unguarded, and unanalyzed connection with nature. The imagery of childhood is cradled in my brain as a gateway to imagination. The secret closeness of the woods. Quietness broken with leaves crushing under footsteps of my friend Todd and me. Crossing the barbed wire fence beyond the hilltop, invisible in the trees until it's right in front of us, not knowing what lies on the other side. Damp leaves dusting air with scent, covering. Snowy hillsides. Clutching saplings in dry dirt to keep afoot on the way downhill. These scenes mark my birth as a pretender, as a person lost in fantasies of her own making. They have settled into the sediment of my mind's fertile ground. I am tied to the feeling of those woods—those hiding places of branches and slopes, where I could never see very far but had so much to see up close.

Comments:

Wendy, I agree that age does change our vantage point regarding place, as Beth and I (the ruling elders in the Ecotone group) have remarked to each other. Perhaps a future biweekly: Age and Place?

Posted by: fredf on July 1, 2003 09:04 PM

"not quite a Yankee but not southern born": this is a very interesting concept, Wendy. I'm curious to hear more, from you and others, about what that means in American culture--I mean I know on some level, but I'm outside it. I was thinking about this kind of thing in relation to California, which is not the West, but west of the West--and how so many of us writing about place seem to find ourselves in borderlands, either geographical or imaginative. Perhaps this is a necessary element in being able to see place at all?

Posted by: Pica on July 2, 2003 09:56 AM

I'm starting to think that there are a lot of Ecotonites out there in the woods - a spiritual home! I feel that the things you addressed in the last paragraph are very rich and I look forward to reading more at some points.

Posted by: Coup de Vent on July 2, 2003 03:52 PM

Source: http://otherwind.fademark.net/archives/000304.html#000304

Natal Aesthetic

by Feathers of Hope (Numenius)

This is another post for today's collective blogging endeavor at the Ecotone Wiki.

I travel with the image of the place I grew up in. The house -- built on a slope, with five half-levels descending from the front entrance, stairs opening to a church-like living room resplendent in wood, beams peaking to ceiling nearly twenty feet tall, the deck at back overlooking a little canyon where I could scramble and slide to the creek below through toyon and fallen oak leaves with spines that always got you. The streets winding along the contours of the hills, interconnected by many dozens of paths cutting straight down, their steps often now warped and broken by the processes of soil creep and tectonic movement. And a canyon but twenty minutes away on foot where I could walk in solitude and wildness for hours and miles. It is a walker's landscape, a landscape where the winter greening of the ridge across the canyon from my grammar school spoke of possibilities -- not to mention hikes where boots would get all sticky with clay.

The Berkeley Hills landscape I describe, I now know came about through an early twentieth-century aesthetic and image of place, the Arts and Crafts movement finding its way into California architecture and urban design. The house I grew up in was designed by Bernard Maybeck, whose work stressed organic form. Maybeck was an important figure in Bay Area architecture and a founding member of the Berkeley Hillside Club which had a large role in the layout of the streets and houses of North Berkeley. The paths of Berkeley, which I would follow on innumerable meanders, were an integral part of an urban landscape designed before the popularity of the automobile, their role being to provide rapid pedestrian access to the electric trolleys of the Key Route System running up the several main streets into the hills. And though many battles would be fought along the way, something about the culture of this aesthetic movement together with the nascent environmentalism of John Muir and kindred souls would eventually ferment in the remarkable preservation of so much open space in the Bay Area.

I carry this image with me; indeed it defines the sort of place I aspire to live in. A house, not a large one, built with character and craft. Places to roam -- a walker's landscape, not one solely for the automobile. Nature, both in the backyard and nearby. Hills to climb, cycle up, and cycle down. And when I fancy myself an inheritor of the Arts and Crafts tradition, I needn't look far from home to realize why.

Comments:

You know the Carolina hills and forest. Did you feel closed in by this? Was the heavy forest comforting or claustrophobic, coming from a place so different? Just wondering about your experience 'out East' back in your salamander-hunting days.

Posted by: fredf at July 2, 2003 03:54 AM

Hmmm. I checked out some of the links and they were interesting. Also interesting to hear about the politics of access to the countryside. The London tube promoted its early development heavily on easy access to the countryside surrounding London. Now it's all built up suburbs. Have you got pics to show of the house you grew up in or your arts and crafts influence at home now?

Posted by: Coup de Vent at July 2, 2003 10:40 AM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2003/07/01/natal_aesthetic.html

How are we shaped by the place where we live?

By under the fire star

The people at Ecotone: Writing About Place decided to write today about 'How are we defined and shaped by the place where we live?' If anyone would like to write on this topic, they are welcome to add a link to the Ecotone site. The page for this topic is here. I began to write about this, and then wondered whether I could really say anything at all. It's just a beginning.

The first thing about this place is that it is in the tropics. It is hot here, all year round. We are fortunate to be able to run the air-conditioners every single day of the year. (That may not always be possible - India relies on imported oil, and the price of electricity has been soaring.) The vast majority of the people here cannot shut their windows and turn on the air-conditioner - they wait for the sea-breeze to set in and give them some relief. In America I loved to walk. Here, I stand at the window looking out.

The second thing is water: this place is always on the border between having just enough and not enough water. It is dependent on the two annual monsoons, which sometimes fail. The groundwater resources have been severely strained by over-use. Here on the edge of the sea, as fresh groundwater is depleted, sea-water is beginning to push in. Our well water is more brackish every year. Some of the plants in the garden are well-adapted to brackish water; the more delicate ones have died or are dying. The preciousness of water is always on my mind. I worry about it, try not to waste it. When I visit America, I see water gushing out of taps, left open while people chat. I see people drinking tap water directly, without boiling it first! I've forgotten these luxuries. (Even as I write this I'm worried, because no water has come through the city pipes into our underground tank for the last two days. I'm afraid we'll have to start buying water by the truckload again. That water is pumped out of suburban wells. The quality is uncertain, the water is expensive, the trucks tear up the city roads.)

To these most elemental facts, add human beings. There are so many of them. Too many for the land or the sea to support, and yet, somehow, they scrape by. They are adapted. I'm like one of

the fancy plants which are dying out of our garden. I am expensively watered, fed and temperature-controlled. I am always aware of this.

In the morning I looked out the window at a bougainvillea in brilliant bloom by the gate. I went out with my camera to photograph it. The street was empty except for a knife sharpener, who carried his grinding apparatus and called out the name of his trade. As he passed me he said, "Grinding?" I shook my head. I recently read that this trade is dying out as better knives have become cheaply available. I looked at him through the filter of the article. He walked in the sun, his green plaid lungi tucked up around his knees, the heavy wooden stand containing the grinder and a few knives for sale on his shoulder. I photographed the bougainvillea and went back inside, through the garden to the big house.

14.7.03 **in Chennai |**

Source:
http://underthefirestar.blogspot.com/2003_07_01_underthefirestar_archive.html#1058156311704024http://placeblogging.com/how_we_are_defined_and_shaped_place_we_live

Thoughts on place

By The Coffee Sutras

The question submitted to the Ecotone wiki group is "How are we defined and shaped by the place where we live?" I'm turning in my homework one day late. The cats ate my rough draft.

Nursing my penchant for making needless distinctions, being defined and being shaped strike me as two different processes. Each may operate simultaneously. And nursing a secondary tendency toward making sweeping generalizations, it seems to me that we might say that defining is a process that operates largely outside of ourselves, for purposes which may not be in accord with our intentions. Shaping, on the other hand, is at heart a creative process. While shaping, too, may operate outside ourselves, through factors we cannot control, at best this is a co-creative enterprise, in which we participate as artisans in making ourselves into something new.

Here's an example of defining: the place where I live is, most would say, a suburb. That has not stopped the combined city and county government, however, from classifying my neighborhood as part of the "urban services district." This means that we receive free garbage pickup and that we are on the city's primary water and sewage system. You could say that, from the vantage of local government, I have been defined by my capacity to produce waste. The fact that we make do with one small trashcan and dutifully recycle more than the city is willing to collect through its curbside recycling program does nothing to elevate our stature or change this definition.

In similar ways, I am defined as a parent at the local middle school for which my child is zoned, as a voter of a particular precinct, a patron of a particular post office, and a frequent customer of what I've come to call the Kroger in the Barrio. (We used to shop at the Kroger in the Hood.) These definitions may not seem relevant to the question posed, but I think they are: externally imposed definitions of who I am demographically, justified or not, have the effect of creating or

negating my potential to make choices. If I want to cook Mexican, I'm in great shape. If I want to cook something Mediterranean, I've got to drive to a different part of town. If I want my child to go to a better public school I've either got to move or be sure she's got the grades to get her into the magnet school lottery. Then I've got to get lucky.

From the mundane (you are what you eat) to the profound (my role as a parent), place matters socially, politically, and economically. It's important to acknowledge these dimensions of place, the many voluntary or involuntary associations that come with occupying a certain tract of land. These associations bring out my inner anarchist.

When I think of being shaped by place, on the other hand, my mental associations are not as riling.

The dominant image that comes to mind is the clay vessel on a potter's wheel. I occupya fixed position, if I've been thrown correctly, at the same time that I am in motion. I am shaped gently by the hands of a potter who has committed, as I am committed, to bringing inner truths to outward form. In such a scenario, the potter, unknown to me except by the touch of her fingers; the clay, which has been dug from the earth, made particular, kneeded, worked with, and prepared; and the wheel that holds the world all collaborate in the process of creation. Artist and material become one, time drops away, everything that matters is herenow.

These are "flow" moments, and they are rare. In such moments, only the most localized space matters. I might discover the fingers of the potter reaching out from a lily, reaching downward pristine white from a weeping cherry, or resting as glaciers on a mountain. I've seen these fingers in the crosses on Iona, reflected as trees in the bowl of a lake, or burning with inner fire as a stick of incense.

If I had to I could probably count the moments when I have been one with and changed--irrevocably--by place. My spiritual interests may have been decided when I took my first communion in a Catholic church in a Buddhist country, living for two years as a child in Bangkok. They were confirmed and enlarged taking long walks on the land surrounding Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, a Shaker village, and again roaming the knobby hills that comprise much of the land owned by the Abbey of Gethsemani. Again, my contemplative nature may have been developed by moments of wonder gazing at mountain vistas while hiking the Appalachian Trail in Virginia, or of ecstasy observing the tides that beat against the rocks of coastal Maine, considering the way those waves have worn rock to smoothness. Here in the suburbs, I have fallen in love with particular trees, and mourned their passing, or have seen myself changing slowly with the changing light of each surprising season.

The place that forms me now, at this daybreak moment, is alive with birds and their sounds. Whether here or somewhere else, I've learned that what matters most is receptiveness. On a spinning wheel, I long for the potter's touch.

Posted by Kurt at 08:48 AM | Comments (4)

Comments:

I will have to reexamine my existence here through the lenses of 'shaping' and 'defining' as you have described them to see how this changes my point of view.

Posted by fredf at July 2, 2003 11:12 AM

I like to move between the political critique and the spiritual. And "inner anarchist" - isn't that the only option on your side of the Atlantic?!

Posted by Coup de Vent at July 2, 2003 02:58 PM

meant to say "the" move.....

Posted by Coup de Vent at July 2, 2003 02:59 PM

Your description of "flow" really resonates with me. I recently read the book "Finding Flow" by Mihaly Csikszentmihaly, but never really thought about "flow moments" in connection with nature and place. Csikszentmihaly describes the flow that occurs when we are engaged with our work and our play, but the engagement he describes is an inward engagement, the kind in which artist become lost to time and the world outside. Your post has made me realize that some of my most cherished moments, moments in which I have become more a person of my own place, are moments in which I've had flow, or engagement and "receptivness," with my surroundings.

Posted by Wendy at July 2, 2003 06:26 PM

Source URL:
http://web.archive.org/web/20030828141222/sainteros.com/weblog/archives/2003_07.html

A Dancing Flame

By Laughing Knees

Moosehead Lake at dawn, Maine, U.S.A., 1991

It's a little late, but I just discovered the wiki Ecotone: Writing About Nature and Place where there is an ongoing series of writing projects. The most recent topic is titled "How Are We Defined and Shaped by the Place We Live?" was due July 1st, but I want to see if I can still contribute to the discussion.

Back in elementary to high school, at St. Mary's International Boy's School, Tokyo, Japan, I was one of the "Others". This meant that those of us who belonged to this unofficial group basically didn't come from one of the *significant* countries, like America or Britain or Australia, or, to a lesser extent, even though we all lived here, Japan. Usually us Others had dark skin, we played soccer or table tennis, instead of the more macho basketball or wrestling, we ate weird food at the cafeteria tables, and we had to be sanctioned off into the "Non-Christian Religion" class, the other two being "Catholics" (the *best* denomination) and the "Protestants" (the tolerated denomination). Since a majority of the students hailed from Asia, Africa, and South America, the disproportionate weight of our numbers had to be counterbalanced by strict reference to the West as the basis of our education. We spent seven years studying American history, one year world history, six months Japanese history, six Chinese, and one year Roman history (in Latin, of course).

Now I wasn't the sort of person who kowtows to convention, and since I had enough conflict with the American and Australian bullies under the great camphor tree behind the school, I spent whatever time I had away from the school out in the fields and woods around Tokyo, hunting insects, kneeing through the susuki grass, and walking the trails around the rice paddies and the hills and mountains. This is where I was at peace and where the world made sense.

As a German/ Filipino/ only-discovered-at-twenty African American who grew up in Japan, the States, and Germany, who has been traveling since he was two, and was stateless until twelve years old, places as defined by humans, such as the arbitrary endowment of nationality or the invisible barriers of borders, never gave me any sense of belonging to a place. Even today the fervor that people build up in mindless displays of nationalism, such as the madness that seems to have overcome the U.S., makes no sense to me. The way I see it, the mobbing arises out of a herd mentality, each individual feeling safer with companions nearby and most importantly, companions with whom they are familiar. That these people declare American or British soil as the container of their identities seems, to me, to get the picture backward. Places have always seemed to work more as catalysts for identities; after all, the Native Americans developed a completely different world outlook from the immigrant Europeans, and even modern African Americans bear little resemblance to Africans from the continent, both culturally and often physically.

As I grow older Asian influences on the nature of existence and identity take greater and greater precedence in how I view myself. The Buddhist, Hindu, and Taoist idea that the self is no more than an illusion, and that all of creation is but a flicker of a dream, makes sense and seems to explain a lot of the dilemma of body/ soul, life/death, mundane/heavenly, and human/ divine that Western philosophy seems unable to resolve. Buckminster Fuller put it succinctly: "I seem to be a verb". Lately I've begun to see myself, my whole being, as a series of actions and ideas, constantly fluctuating, always becoming something else, but in the end, not having been anything but some dancing flame.

Looking back over my life, I often wondered why it has always been the wild, healthy places, or on occasion some well-designed garden or structure, that held sway over me and kept me coming back or stopping me dead in my tracks with awe and delight. If it is that I am just a dancing flame and that places around me just shifting veils of illusion, then what is it that arouses such wonder in me? What is the relationship between beauty, health, love, and place? Why does a beautiful place universally draw people, to the point that they will travel around the globe to see it?

Perhaps it is that when a place and an individual (or group) participate fully with each other, a recognition of the inseparability of each awakes in one's consciousness. That is my experience at least. Throughout my life I have always felt most in tune with a place when I forgot myself and just "let go" into the elements. Walking a ridge, gazing from a boat window, crouching in the garden observing tiger beetles, or even drifting off into a deep sleep.

Life begets life. Though I have lived in disparate places, thousands of miles apart, they have all been linked, mainly by the forces that greet me each time I wake, like wind, sunlight, rain, trees, birds, insects, and fellow people. All these things have always moved in and out of my life, like seconds in a continuous curtain call. What happened in each of these encounters amassed into the theme that I play today. And tomorrow it will change again. I feel the restlessness that

characterizes us humans and will probably move away from Tokyo, to be shaped yet again. A constant honing:

...walking in the woods of Germany with my grandfather, who taught me to find wild blueberries and hazenuts...

...hunting butterflies and rhinoceros beetles in Karuizawa, Japan...

...bicycling the gravel roads of the 1970's Hokkaido, Japan...

...arriving in Oregon from Japan and dumbstruck by the hugeness of the douglas firs...

...strolling the same azure and corn yellow lanes of Arles, France, that van Gogh frequented...

...watching a hundred humpback and fin whales amidst a thousand common dolphins, all cavorting in a copper-colored, mirror-still sea in the Stellwagon Banks, off of Boston...

...bicycling to work in a blizzard along the blue ghost of the Charles River, in Boston...

...sitting silent all day on a cliff in the Shetlands, watching fulmars and puffins and razorbills...

...paddling a kayak across the Suruga Bay, Japan, with my first encounter with deep sea swells, like the earth heaving...

...falling asleep beneath an ancient cedar and waking up to Mt. Fuji bathed in gold...

...running along the Noh River near my apartment, as pipistrelle bats loop above...

...pulling weeds in my garden with mosquitoes biting and cicadas singing...

Anecdotes, but like a string of pearls. These make up my world and my mind. Places drawing through me, more like lines than points, and insisting that I dance along.

I am that blue marble hanging in the darkness. The Earth that shapes me. Perhaps a song. And finally, nothing, nothing at all.

Comments:

It's a wonderful list you have of encounters with place and the elements. I'm curious what you think about the discussion going in the wiki about beauty and meaning in the landscape. At what point is beauty something that is learned, like Fred's contrary example of early explorers finding the Blue Ridge Mountains "most awful in aspect", and at what point is it something that simply hits us at a deep and primitive level?

Posted by Numenius at July 5, 2003 02:19 AM

It is interesting how the first Europeans perceived America. I think there is a real difference between how the Spanish saw it, the French, the British, and the Russians. The Russians saw nothing new, and thought little enough of it to sell Alaska at a bargain. Big open spaces were routine for them. The French took to the Indians with a lot more empathy than the others ever

did. The British were terrified of the huge spaces and unending horizons. Of all the groups they were the most close-minded and destructive. And the Spanish, very interestingly enough, saw reflections of their landscapes back home, so much so that they even had the vocabulary for the landforms, like canyon, arroyo, and mesa. Of all the groups that came over, perhaps the Spanish perceived the most beauty, because they were familiar with it.

Perhaps beauty only arises when one feels safe and at home, when the familiar greets the eyes?

Posted by Miguel at July 5, 2003 04:05 AM

The photo of Moosehead lake brought me back to forgotten times. I remember spending time up there in the summer at a friends camp, fishing for perch (but catching eels!), swimming out to sleep on the floating dock. Spending an afternoon in a Boston Whaler going off in search of Frye's leap...
Beautiful place, Moosehead lake...
Beautiful photo

Posted by Steve at July 6, 2003 08:08 PM

That trip to Moosehead Lake was one of the best memories I have of that time. I was thrilled to drive so far out into a remote area and the night was so still that the moon was reflected as clearly in the lake surface as if there were two moons. I had rented a canoe so that I could paddle along the coves in hope of photography a moose. No such luck.

Three days later my girlfriend and I drove to the coast and spent the day exploring Isle au Haut. Wonderful place!

Posted by Miguel at July 6, 2003 11:58 PM

Source URL: http://web.archive.org/web/20041206232452/butuki.com/archives/2003_07.html

July 1, 2003

By Bowen Island Journal

How are we defined and shaped by the places we live?
My response to the latest subject being contemplated by the Ecotone blogging community.

When [a bhikku] dwells contemplating the body in the body, earnestly, clearly comprehending, and mindfully, after having overcome desire and sorrow in regard to the world; when he dwells contemplating feelings in feelings, the mind in the mind, and mental objects in mental objects, earnestly, clearly comprehending, and mindfully, after having overcome desire and sorrow in regard to the world, then, truly, he is an island unto himself, a refuge unto himself, seeking no external refuge; having the Dhamma as his island, the Dhamma as his refuge, seeking no other refuge.

-- Buddha, Mahaparinibbana Sutta

I am standing on a beach on the south east corner of Bowen Island in the protected cove of Seymour Bay. It overlooks the Queen Charlotte Channel that separates us from the mainland of

continental North America. Out at the mouth of the channel, little Passage Island sits, battered by waves and wind rolling up the Gulf of Georgia from the southeast. To the east of Passage Island, the towers of downtown Vancouver rise in the distance against the darkening evening sky.

What becomes immediately clear is that this whole scene unfolds from the surf line at my feet moving further and further "out there." The limits of the view are defined by the rising peaks of the Cascade Mountains 100 miles away. I can take in the sight, but then I have to turn back to get home. It's clear that I don't live "out there" anymore. I live "in here" now.

This island is a rich psychological metaphor. We turn inward to go home, peering ever outward from our shoreline at the world beyond. Taking trips to the ends of roads that terminate in beaches that sink into the frigid waters of Howe Sound. Living beyond our boundaries is fantasy. Living within our skins is real.

Moving to an island affects us deeply. We cannot escape the idea that our connections to the outside world are severed, and we turn instead to the inner connections for our reliance and sustenance. For me, physically moving here was accompanied by an psychological and spiritual inward turning as well. It invited me to explore my inner resources and creativity. And this whole place is populated by many people who have taken this triple journey inward, so we invite each other to play with the notion continually. We hold storytelling sessions, coffee houses, concerts that marry classical music with Brazilian instruments and African dance. Poetry that accompanies art that depicts the landscapes we inhabit daily.

We are trained to wring meaning out of every experience. Our eyes become accustomed to reading the place as a canvas for the play of our spirits. We drink in observation and churn through ideas, looking for a myriad of ways to express ourselves. Our raw materials are the land, the people, and our connections. Our outputs are our art, our structures and our communities.

Everything about this island invites us to go inward. One cannot help but follow the physical journey with a spiritual one. We retreat into our selves, examine what we see there and find ways to bring it forth into the world. Being an islander does not mean isolation; it means knowing where your edges are and constantly creating connections, following trails and exploring details. You grow aware that the limited landscape in fact draws you deeper in so that it becomes an infinite journey through fractals of detail. The island and the soul become holograms, every part reflecting the whole and encompassing the perfect fullness of its presence. It's impossible to live for long on the surfaces.

Eventually, we take the shape of the island itself: windswept shorelines exposed to the elements, and rich and verdant interiors full of growth and solitude.

Source URL:
http://www.chriscorrigan.com/miscellany/bijournal/2003_07_01_archive.html#105704326734210620

7.01.2003

by Field Notes

Sometimes I think of this as the edge of the world. I live in one of the last homes in Inverness before homes give way to parkland and beyond that to the Pacific. We're only an hour and a half from San Francisco or Berkeley, so bookstores, restaurants and the shows of the city are easily gotten to. But the thing is, I don't want to leave. Many days, I never leave the enclave of Teacher's Beach, and mostly when I do, I only go so far as the town of Inverness: a market, post office, gift shop and an eatery. Driving to Point Reyes Station, fifteen minutes away, where the stores are slightly bigger and the produce is organic, becomes an event I work myself up to.

This feeling of isolation is helped by the setting of my home. Even the neighborhoods here feel rural, but within the neighborhood I'm in, my home is apart. To find us you have to travel a private road, and my cabin isn't to be found until the road turns downward. From here I look out my high windows over a sea of trees, and know that beyond them lies the sea itself. I rarely hear cars, or any of the sounds of man leave the quiet hum of my computer. When I walk down the path from my house to the beach, I am alone with the trees, the creek, the birds and the knowledge that only a few of us ever walk this path. As it slopes downward I see the water lying before me as I approach, and I know what the tide is. Prints in the sand are more often deer or raccoon than human. And I know by sight most of the humans who walk on this beach, even those who cross at low tide: I know their shoeprints.

I don't begrudge them their passage.

The people who share Inverness, Point Reyes Station, and all of west Marin, share this bond with the land. Walking with any of my neighbors and friends always includes a moment when we say, My god we're lucky to be here, or, It's just so beautiful, isn't it? I feel that every day. Every day I'm informed by gratefulness. It's a love for place that grows: it includes a fierce protective sense, a duty to preserve.

The people who live here include ranchers, artists, buddhists, naturalists, writers, craftspeople, and various professionals and workers. Each town has its unique flavor. In Bolinas, some folks I met said they refer to Inverness as Inwardness. It's quite accurate. They wondered where people gather, asked me where the center of town lies. You see people at the Inverness Store, but the gathering place would have to be over in Point Reyes, at the Dance Palace, or the Bovine Bakery. We have to leave Inverness to seek a gathering place, except for the most intimate of gatherings. That suits us. If you walk the roads of Inverness, much is hidden, kept inside. You see glimpses through blackberry brambles and viney garden gates of people's lives, but much remains private, solitary.

I haven't spent my whole life here like many have. There are long-lasting friendships and neighborhood links all around me. But informing those relationships is a tendency to the solitary. It's palpable. In Ireland, they say that it's the job of elders to be weird, to stretch your being out into the furthest reaches of your most particular self, in order to show the young that it's okay to explore the eccentricities of the soul. Well, you see a lot of that here. Even the flyers on the post office bulletin board reflect a rich, weird inner life.

For myself, I say that here I've found my voice. I'm listening hard to the songs around me, the rush of the northwest wind through the trees, and the rhythmic tapping of woodpeckers as they

store acorns in my cabin walls; to my footfalls on a redwood path and the gentle parting of water around me as I swim. I'm following those voices that call my heart to sing, or that break it open into tears. I'm listening for ways to become weirder.

*

Please visit us at Ecotone today as we write about How We've been Informed by the Place We Live

posted by Lisa on 8:42 AM link | Comments

Source: http://field-notes.net/2003_07_01_archives.html#105707412940416397

Discussion

Offer your comments, remarks and opinions. Discuss the posts on "How we are shaped by place".

We also shape place; one of the great English local traditions is the *invention* of tradition. -- [D'log], 17th April '04.

I was talking recently with a very educated and well-traveled friend about the Ecotone. I had a hard time explaining to him what 'place' was, why it mattered, and why it was important to reflect on our shaping of place and it's forming some of who we become. I don't think I was that inarticulate in my explanation, but he just did not get it. Is he typical of people outside your immediate circle of contacts who have never considered any of the issues and interests we focus on in this group, or do you find your acquaintances generally have a understanding of 'place' as a matter of discussion? Just curious. -- fred

I just say "look around you. Describe what you see and how you feel about it." -- Joel

Just had an email comment re this week's group topic, will snip relevant parts...

..."Having read a number of these responses to the "about place" question, I find it interesting that quite consistently the reader learns more about the internal landscape of the writer than the external. And I've noticed a similarity in personality among the folks who think themselves the least defined by place. I did not expect the emotional responses this question has provoked. It's

really interesting and thank you for making it so easy for us non-writing blogger-people to participate".

Just to let you know that we do have a few 'outsider readers' who are benefitting from our discussion. Hopefully we can work to widen the circle, once the final page structure is in place in another undetermined bit of time. -- Fred

To which I reply...of course it is about the internal landscapes. In fact, and perhaps this is coming clear with Ecotone and this topic in particular, landscape only really exists inside. It is the connection we make between the elements of the physical world and the meaning we give them that creates the landscape. Why is a mountain view beautful? It has nothing to do with the mountain, only with the meaning we pile on that mountain. In fact the word "view" should give it away. Our view of things first causes us to perceive the world around us and then we shape it, and in so doing, shape ourselves. -- Chris

Wow, Chris, that's good: this is why some people, who have developed a specific aesthetic, can see beauty in a garbage dump, for instance--it's all in your perspective.

I'd like to think this perspective can be altered over time and by the perspectives of others. If not, nobody would ever go to a photography or landscape painting exhibit -- we seem to have a need to see through the lenses of others. Which is why I believe this wiki is really on to something.

Who was it -- Nancy from the Fire Star -- who spoke of seeing the knife grinder through the "filter" of this assignment. That's kind of how I feel, at the moment -- everyone here, collectively, is giving me a new lens or series of lenses through which to view not only the environment here, with which I'm quite familiar, but the environments of others, some of which I've never seen. -- Alison

Being "outside" of my "own" place right now, I find myself looking at Montreal with new eyes too. I'm feeling grateful for our discussions and writing; it is making me more perceptive and questioning of my own notions, and also making me think more about how to communicate these inner relationships (thanks, Chris!) that are are so important to us but perhaps not to others. There's a huge photography exhibit here called "Je suis Montreal" and I'm looking forward to seeing that - if we actually go so far as to say "I am 'xyz' place", that is a real extension of our current topic, isn't it!

Hey that was a good collection of responses today 1/7/03. Coup de Vent.....

Beth in Montreal--glad to see you made it up there and found a computer to work from! (You didn't sign your post but I'm sure it's you...) Let us know how the exhibit is. -- Alison

Chris really hits on something above when he talks about beautiful views being attached to the meanings we "pile on" them. I remember going to an art auction or antique store of some sort with my parents as a pretty small child. All of the adults were fussing over this picture of an Appalachian mountain in Autumn. I couldn't see what the fuss was all about. It was just what the outside looked like. (I thought the picture nearby of a strikingly red rose was much more beautiful, perhaps because I hadn't seen many roses.) Now, however, I would see the picture with different eyes. As children, we can't pile meaning on top of landscapes because we haven't fully separated out from the landscape into people who have to pile yet. As adults, we become more self-focused, and we must form meanings to relate ourselves to the outside world. Perhaps this is why people tend to connect so deeply with their childhood landscapes, the landscapes in which they didn't have to think as hard to start connections.--Wendy

To better see both landscapes, it is necessary to filter out the noise and write about what's there. I model much of what I write about landscape after Japanese nature poetry, concentrating on images and avoiding philosophizing except in very short bursts. To understand where we are, we must, I think, list. -- Joel

Joel, maybe this is part of the difference we see between younger and older writers about place. My list is old and long and more complete than one who has just opened their eyes to the objects in their place, and so I am more likely to want to understand their meaning, let those listed things help me put myself in context of the history, natural and human, and the economy of my place. This is harder to do when young, though some, like Annie Dillard, have have these visions of 'the tree with the lights in it' at an early age.

Shifting gears, I wanted to point readers to Notes from an Eclectic Mind where Rana Williamson thinks and writes (July 02) about ["Little Town"] in Texas and the role it has played in her coming to be who and how she is today. She kindly points her readers to the Ecotone, and I have encouraged her to enter our discussions and biweekly topic essays. Please contact others you surely know who could come and further enrich our exchange here, which, by the way, is most encouraging to me.

And re Chris's 'beautiful mountain' in the mind of the beholder, agreed. I was shocked the first time I read of the early pioneers, who crested the first peak in their westward migration into the Blue Ridge, and upon seeing ridge after blue ridge receding into the distance pronounced them 'most awful in aspect'. Mountain wilderness back then was not phrase carrying positive connotations, and promised difficulty, danger, hardship, not beauty and quiet reflection. -- Fred

The older I get the more I want to weed out the white noise that I call meaning. I wrote a lot about that when I was younger and more self-important. What does meaning mean anyways? Better just to live in and love the Universe, I think, that to lose sleep over interpretations. Those may or may not come, but the live oaks and the white alders are here when I look. I just be with them. Maybe they will tell me a secret. Maybe they will just delight my eye. - Joel

Fred, thanks for the pointer to Notes from an Eclectic Mind. I think we should pick up on her cue and add "Coffee Shop as Place" for a joint topic down the line... perhaps even "High Lonesome," though I'm not sure I can rustle up the necessary cowboy genes. But then, she's worried she doesn't have a creek or very many lizards, so it would be more democratic, maybe.

Several others have noticed us, by the way, not at all place bloggers: [Interconnected] (Matt Webb), [Braggadocchio] and [Interconnected] by Matt Jones, via [Boynton].

-- Alison

I do coffee shops as place. At least once a week. Brownies or cheesecake are an important part of the scenery for me. Joel

Well at least it's not fried Mars Bars, or the American equivalent (fried Snicker Bars, fried Twinkies). I kid you not. I met today with four colleagues to discuss Harry Potter V at the local, for Davis, fish & chip shop (staffed by Asians) where they were offering these delicacies. I thought this was just an Edinburgh speciality, but apparently it's migrating. Nobody tried them. --Alison [btw Joel did you get my email? Your spam software is VERY persistent...]

A tangent to the "coffee shop as place" theme: in the student union on campus where I get my lunch (very down-to-earth, cheap fare, prepared by the student staff), there's a little bakery where people get muffins, cookies, cakes and of course their coffees when they're running between classes. What is striking to me is my sense that this bakery itself is too small for me to consider it a "place", whereas the student union in which it is set I find I have a very definite sense of place. What is this sense of dependence on scale about? Is there some sort of minimum size or activity (or lack thereof) threshold before a spatial location gets promoted to "being a place"? --Allan

Hello all, Rana here. I was pleasantly surprised by Fred's inclusion of my post over at Eclectic Mind called "Riding High Lonesome" in my ["Little Town"] category in your discussions here. I have been lurking on Ecotone and trying to catch up with your flood of ideas, impressions, and interpretations. The mental energy here is staggering! Lord knows as the reigning queen of Starbucks I would be in a position to write about "coffee shop as place." I also appreciated the comments left by some of you on my blog pointing out that because I live in an urban setting I am not excluded from participating here.

As I read along with this discussion I felt compelled to say that I am currently being shaped by "places of memory." If you poke around my blog a little (from the November 2002 archives forward) you will find it to be a drawing board for my manuscript in progress of a small town memoir. All the places about which I write are real but to a large extent now exist only in my memories because the people who made them significant to me are gone. Since my father's death my mother and I have fallen on rocky times. She cannot see that the only Main Street of my

home town I can walk is the one in my mind because the street that bisects the Little Town now is not the one that existed in my childhood. All the players, the sounds, the smells, the surroundings have changed and with it my perception of that "place."

These ideas might be a little ephemeral for what you are trying to accomplish here at Ecotone, but I suspect we all have a "place" we can only go now in our minds. Might be an interesting something to tackle out there in the future. I'll keep reading and lurking, hopefully participating more. I fully support this wonderful effort at insight and focus in the often chaotic blogsphere. -- Rana

Rana, welcome! I've added CoffeeShopAsPlace to our list of topics; you have a while to think about this one (Nov. 1). -- Alison

Alison: Which one? The last one I received was about a comment I left on your blog. You should have no problem as long as you keep using the same email address. (I like the persistance of my spam email software. But I've cleared both your email addresses so you shouldn't have any problems.)

Fried Mars Bars? Um....

In other news, since starting my participation here, I've found two long lost friends. Interesting how we arabesque into these encounters. - Joel

I primed for "Coffee Shop as Place" Have a look at the recent war of words I got into with Starbucks Customer Relations at [Parking Lot], one of my other weblogs. -- Chris

Fred: re the pioneers redefingin the word "crestfallen" (:-)

When George Vancouver ploughed through these waters off of Canada's west coast in the 1780s looking for the Northwest Passage and naming everything in sight, he stopped at an inlet up the coast aways, which is still kind of in the middle of nowhere. With the prospect of fjord after fjord in front of him and behind him, all of them ringed with impenetrable mountains he finally succumbed to his true feelings and named one of them ["Desolation Sound"]. Today it is a wilderness tourist destination, and a place I visit every year for its sheer beauty. But had I been half way around the world in a sailing ship during the rainy season with no prospect of my journey's end in sight, I might have felt the way Vancouver did. -- Chris

Fred;

When I was first working toward launching Faultline in 1997, I often telescoped the informal working mission statement into a phrase along the lines of "A place-based environmntal journal

for California." I found that either people got it immediately with no explanation necessary, or did not understand it no matter how thoroughly I expanded on the elevator version.

And some people are outright hostile to the idea! At that time I had a friend who was working with a writer's group, and place was a continual bone of contention in the group. She grounded her writing in scene-setting to be told that the others weren't interested in "riding off into the sunset prose". Their work, it seemed to me, could have been set in Manhattan, the moon, or the bottom of a mineshaft in Idaho, and it would have made no difference to the story. It was noteworthy that the few times one of them wrote something set in some particular place, an important detail of that place would be gotten seriously wrong - like having Interstate 680 run through Livermore. Somewhere along the spectrum that sloppiness grades into inauthenticity.

Gary Nabhan has talked about this phenomenon more compellingly than I could, predicting that this rootless late 20th/early 21st century literature will eventually be thought of as an aberration, and that what we awkwardly confine to the insufficient category "nature essay" will constitute the chief English Language literature of the 21st. -- Chris Clarke

I run into that same thing in my writers' group, Chris. I tell people that I think it is important to set the scene and to describe the elements more completely than saying "low scrub covered the hillside". One guy tried to run me out of the group (he was insane). I am still there and still struggling to create unique works in which place and telling details figure.

Janet Fitch's **White Oleander** strikes me as a work in which the author includes a sense of place. She includes a wonderful character -- a little boy who loves to know the names of the plants and animals in the local wash -- in one of her bad homes. He is shown to be two things: compassionate and a survivor. It's clear that Fitch likes people who take the time to know their place. She's often cited as a pioneer in reclaiming California fiction. Folks like you and I should read and support that kind of fiction. -- Joel

Joel, I may be one of the participants here who writes more about "meaning" than is to your taste ;) but I am 100% with you about the importance of location- and detail-specific "place". Maybe because I am a visual artist too, it seems important to me to try to paint the picture, to really get it. You do run into the problem of "listing" a lot of plants, for example, and maybe there's a risk in that of losing some readers, but I think it's OK. Personally, one thing I love about good writing - even when it's not specifically "nature" writing - is good description. Tolstoy, for example. I can feel Russia and see Russia through his eyes; he framed it, immortalized specific times and places. Sure, it's work, but that's part of learning this craft. It starts with putting down the pen and observing. --Beth

I don't think readers will fully relate to or see a character unless that character is in a specific place that is made to live through the writer's description. Place affects people on a grand scale and a small, daily scale, so how can real characters exist outside of it?

I've been thinking about "meaning" lately, in response to the discussion here and elsewhere. I recognize that our meanings are artificial, but I find it hard to discard them. In some ways, the need to find meaning can harm our relationship with the outer world. We find it easier to ruin and abandon that to which we don't connect, animals that aren't cute or flowers that aren't gorgeous, people who rub us the wrong way. We'd be better off if we could see things cleanly. Yet, I am attached to my self and the meanings through which it sees the world. I feel things, just as I did when I was a child, yet I can't stay connected with them as long. I am separate. My mind moves on, but I can remember the connectedness because I can think about it, and attach lovely words and feelings, my own special importance, to it. (These attachments do not exist outside the mind, but we are mental as well as physical creatures, and our imaginations create new worlds and new effects in this world. Our mental worlds are just as real as the outer world, sometimes beautiful, sometimes ugly. Reflection is one of our ways of "being.") I see connected moments as times when I am fully living, without the veil of thought. Yet, I am glad I can think about these moments later and see their reflections, when I have other quiet moments away from the bustle of daily life and mind. Some people define escaping from the bustle as releasing self, but others (like the "weird" Irish wise ones Lisa evokes at field notes) seem to define it as escaping into the self--perhaps as releasing the real self, or mind, from the "put on" self that plays games in the social world. If you become comfortable with your loosest, truest, most connected self, with all of its whims and contradictions, its unique reflections, and live in it despite fear of alienation, perhaps you're approaching the same sort of oneness that people approach when they seek to forget the self. --Wendy

Beth: "Joel, I may be one of the participants here who writes more about "meaning" than is to your taste..."

Beth, how would you differentiate "place" from "meaning"? Not nitpicking here: honestly curious. -- Chris Clarke

Beth: Thanks for seeing that it's a matter of taste and not a commandment when I state how I go about it. -- Joel

Chris, it wasn't so much "place" vs. "meaning" as a question of whether to write about "meaning" at all.I was referring to Joel's comment earlier in the thread: "The older I get the more I want to weed out the white noise that I call meaning. I wrote a lot about that when I was younger and more self-important. What does meaning mean anyways?" Joel has a somewhat different approach than mine (and I happen to like his a lot). What I think he is doing is trying to let an oak be an oak, a branch be a branch, and not go a lot further - in other words, point the reader toward the importance of SEEING, the kind of non-thinking, senses-only, fresh, initial thinking that Zen stresses: what happens before we start to interpose labels, associations, and interpretations based on our own set of filters. (Joel, forgive me and correct me if I haven't got that right!) My own personal take is that you can't write well - no matter where you intend to go

in the writing - if your view doesn't start (or try to start)with this kind of swept-clean, fresh, "beginner's mind" observation. What I often do in my writing is to go further and find associations, relationships (Wendy, I like how you describe this process)...and I think that territory is what Joel may be calling "meaning". I threw out thousands of words earlier in my life because that kind of writing was just what he objects to: self-important and self-conscious. I think writing that says, essentially, "Look!" is wonderful. I also think some people need and want to write (and hear) is "and this is why" or "and this is what I find in it." Both approaches are valid, but only work when they come from a very authentic place within the author. --Beth

Just want to add my thoughts to yours on this. As I'm thinking about it, the difference between writing about "place" and writing about a spot on the earth is the insertion of the "I". Place is where I intersect with the earth. I bring my history as a fourth-generation californian and my personal history as an expatriated los angelena, my memories and sensibilities, my love of the water, my hitherto unknown proclivity for the community of a small-town life, the ideas that spring forth between the authors I'm reading today and the particular shape of the land I'm walking. And I'm intersecting with a community of people who also inhabit this place, whether they're full-time residents of park visitors just passing through. This culture informs the place, just as the place informs the culture.

I think it's a valid approach to try to separate one's self from writing about an object in nature, like image poems attempt to do. For me, it's extremely difficult. But what I find most interesting in writing and reading about place is the interplay between culture and nature, like Wallace Stevens' jar on a hill in Tennessee. --Lisa

I like what Beth and Lisa have said here. And speaking of guys named Wallace, Wallace Stegner [felt much the same way] Lisa does.

Maybe it's my journo job, and all the time I've spent arguing about the Myth of Objectivity, but I don't see any way of completely divorcing the first person from writing about a place. Even a very technical, dispassionate list of flora is shot through with human perspective. I think further that most people aren't at all interested in reading material that isn't a story, and stories have protagonists. Not always human protagonists, as Rachel Carson showed well, but someone to whom events occur, even if those events are entirely mental.

That said, there is a hell of a lot of goopy, drippy, sentimental, self-indulgent writing out there that claims to be about nature but which is actually mainly about the writer's obsession with self. Some of it isn't even on MY blog. The point is balancing the narrator with the story. [Ellen Meloy] comes to mind as someone who - while she does show up in almost every paragraph she writes - balances this well. [Colin Fletcher] comes to mind as someone who doesn't. -- Chris C.

I have no problem with people writing about the inner landscape, the thoughts that pass through them as they view a landscape. Nor do I have problems with writing in which the self is the center of focus. Writers such as Wallace Stevens and William Wordsworth both cagily hid

personal philosophies inside of their "nature poetry". There's no erasing them from literary history and there's merit in examining what they did and emulating it.

What bothers me is when someone sees a rock in the sea and thinks "Oh dear. I'm going to write about it. *What does it mean?*" This is where what Beth calls my "Zen sensibility" comes into play. If we honestly record the inner landscape that occurs when we view the object, we may find very little. For the rock, I think what you would extract from my mind is a sense of the waves sometimes swamping the mosses growing upon it, sometimes retreating to make it an island or headland at the end of a penninsula. There are emotions associated with that. The best way of exciting them is to tinker with our words and to describe the sensations of viewing that rock.

I'm one of those people who writes very freely about the emotions in his head, the angers and the joys when it is appropriate. If this turns out badly at times, it turns out badly at times. "Do I repeat myself?" Walt Whitman exclaims in *Leaves of Grass*. "Then I repeat myself." The writing continues, pouring all over the landscape of my weblog, perhaps frightening some.

As for Chris's fable of the impossibility of objectivity, I must treat this as a journalist cliche. I believe that there's Truth out there and that we see it. But in my reviews of literature through time -- keeping in mind that exagerrated metaphor is a device used by many to touch emotions that the mere recitation of the facts cannot elicit -- I must conclude that the facts and the account are not necessarily mutually exclusive -- as in the case of Creationism vs. Evolution where the latter theory and its associated Law of Species Changing Over Time do a far better job of describing the world as it is. Not all accounts are equal, not everyone lies or misperceives. Clearly, some do a better job than others. We as writers should strive for that when we write factually. -- Joel

Joel--I don't think Chris's raising of the impossibility of objectivity was a journalistic cliché, but rather the major ontological debate of the twentieth century. I for one am hoping for a plurality of views on the wiki. Everyone is welcome to express their opinion on their own blog, and I think we all do that. But a statement such as "we must be scientific" is fraught with problems, not least of which is that we didn't agree collectively that the wiki was a scientific endeavor. We may yet do that, but it's clear that there are different (and, I'd add, valid) approaches to place. Nor is it clear to me we've agreed to write "factually." We are all welcome to do so if we choose, but it doesn't mean that other approaches are "wrong" or "bad" or "less."

What is so exciting for me in the two collective blogs we've done so far is precisely these multiple approaches we all have to place and the discussions they have generated afterwards. I don't see people here agonizing about what a rock in the sea means. Maybe I've missed something??

-- Alison

Alison: I didn't seen many people putting out "goopy, drippy, sentimental, self-indulgent writing" for my part. I figured that Chris was just using example to express his philosophy of writing. I didn't take it personally and I used the metaphor of how I look at a rock to explain how

I went about it. Believe me, when I mean to criticize specifically, I point. (And I pointed to the one thing that I disagreed with Chris on. Are we in this collective not allowed to disagree?)

[Removed as an act of reconciliation] -- Joel

[removed in like spirit] - Chris C.

I'm shrugging my shoulders over this whole thing. I'm giving it twenty four hours to think over. -- Joel

In less than 24 hours, I've come to this inner peace: I never meant to "attack" anyone else or misrepresent them, merely to express where I stood, the emotions I had, and how I personally resolved issues. I respect diversity.

I have decided to do this: I am withdrawing entirely from any discussion about the direction the leaders of the wiki seek to take it. I will make no more suggestions for future topics nor respond to anyone's writing here. I will not take part in discussions about topics or anything else at this wiki. I will only post excerpts from my blog. I will not initiate anything new.

The feeling that I have is of being unfairly singled out by some, attacked bitterly by others for unknown things that I did ten years ago. It has been repeatedly insinuated that I am trying to control conversation and repress "diversity" which is simply not true. It seems to me that there are a vocal few do not want constructive critical input of the type that I have to offer.

For any of us to speak our mind entails the risk that someone will not like it. Chris Clarke -- whose reasons for disliking me from ten years ago remain entirely dark for me -- went too far last night on expressing her/his dislike not just of what I said, but of me. No one has the right to dismiss another person like that. But that's my last say on that whole matter. I will no longer participate in these things because it is unhealthy for me to dwell on the hurts.

It remains healthful for me to write to the topics.

I see nothing that I need to apologize for. You have the right to disagree with my take and I honor that right.

The floor is open for either response or silence. If you expect answers from me, send email to gazissax@best.com. You will receive private responses. -- Joel

This is Lynn Gazis-Sax, Joel's wife. This is my one and only comment here (since I don't seem to be able to communicate with Alison by email).

Chris Clarke has gone completely overboard, and read an attack where one was never intended. Neither of us has a clue who he or she is, or what incident from ten years ago he or she is still so angry about. It wasn't at all clear that "goopy, drippy, sentimental," etc. was something Chris was referring to him/herself, saying that people haven't been writing a lot of such is hardly the kind of

blast that should bring charges of making the site unsafe for Chris to post; I was even sitting right next to Joel when he posted that, and he wasn't the least bit angry at Chris. Joel sure wasn't carrying any grudge form ten years in the past. Now, after flying off the handle and accusing Joel of a violation of trust (as well as sending even nastier private email), I really think that Chris owes Joel an apology.

That's all I'm going to say here. I'll note that Joel, for his part, has recused himself from public discussions here.

Lynn

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20051221155518/www.magpienest.org/scgi-bin/wiki.pl?DiscussShapedByPlace

Suburbs

Bi-Weekly Topic for July 15, 2003

Suburbs / Thiruvanmiyur

By under the fire star

Ecotone: Writing About Place decided to blog collectively today about Suburbs. You can see what others have written here. (People tend to trickle in over a day or two -- if you don't see any other entries, come back later!) I'm modifying this topic a little, to write about Thiruvanmiyur. When I first saw it, Thiruvanmiyur was a village on the southern edge of Chennai. Now it has been swallowed up as the city expands to the south. Here are some impressions of Thiruvanmiyur as I first knew it:

Chickens roll in small piles of ashes and fluff their feathers. Goats stand on their hind legs to tear at the lower branches of trees. Dogs dig holes in the dust to lie in, for coolness' sake. The street is always full of children, crying out to me over and over -- "Hello, hello, hello..." "Good morning, good morning..." If I respond they greet me more urgently, trying for one more response. Animal shit stinks, and human shit too, in the sun. Ten women stand in line at the communal pump, but dozens of brass pots are piled one on top of the other, waiting their turn.

I am sitting on the 23A bus, listening to the slap of clothes being washed on the steps of the temple tank. The water level is low, and red lotuses float on its surface. Men bathe, boys stand in water up to their chests.

Men call out their trades as they walk down the street:

DIT-ti-le, dit-ti-LE, da da da, da da da, da da da, da da da, da Dit-ti-LE!
Va-LAI-ya! Va-LAI-ya pa-LAM!
uppaway! uppaway!
Paper! Paper!

A day for men in costumes. In the afternoon two men collected money for Mahashivaratri. One was beating the drum, and the other wore a rearing gold-foil cobra on his head, from which hung many garlands made of bits of cloth, gathered to look like flowers. They fell to the ground, and more hung from his waist. He wore a brilliant yellow veshti. From across the street he looked like a bride.

Later I went to the beach where a crew was shooting a mythological film. They must have just finished for the day -- a group of fairly ordinary looking people gathered around big pots of food. Then the star appeared from behind a sand dune, in a gauzy veshti covered with gold, his chest and large belly adorned with fake gold ornaments. He wore a wig of long curls and carried a gold helmet. He was twice the size of everyone else.

The next day a whole monkey army was on the beach -- men in knee-length skirts with long tails coming out behind, blue plastic helmets and big, false-looking blue plastic maces. There must have been at least a hundred of them.

How brightly the stars shine now that there is no moon. You can see the Milky Way. It is so quiet that the only sounds are the fan, crickets, and occasional drumbeats from the Mahalakshmi temple. In the field cows stand still as statues. If you turn off the fan you can hear the ocean.

When you go out at 6:00 p.m., the sun is still burning hot, but it's focussed, so you feel that the heat is coming directly from the sun, and not from air, from dust, from every side and all around. The loose dust of the road to the village is marked with the tracks of bicycles, cars, hoofprints of buffaloes and goats, footprints of dogs and bare human feet -- but it is almost always empty. An old woman might stand by the roadside and stare, or an Ayyar from the kitchen might ride by on his bicycle. That's all.

I just saw my first lunar eclipse. Somehow I thought the moon would disappear in blackness, but it's a dull, orange brown, burnt out and dead. No wonder it arouses fear. Tonight is the wedding of Shiva and Parvati in the village temple, but they'll wait until the eclipse is over. Black, cloudless sky, the sound of the ocean, and subdued film music from the festive village.

Tamil New Year's Day -- the village is full of *kolam*.

kolam, made from rice flour#

Source: http://underthefirestar.blogspot.com/2003_07_01_underthefirestar_archive.html

Foggy Culture

By Other Wind

I talked with my husband a few years ago about instant teleportation, the ability to travel, to be anywhere, immediately. He loved the idea, but my first reaction to it was grief. I love to travel. How wonderful would it be to broaden the possibilities? Yet, isn't physical distance a crucial part of traveling? If we could be anywhere instantly, would the exotic, the diverse, survive? My husband didn't agree with my concerns. Why lament the loss of separateness? The more connected people are the more they understand each other. But to me, the differences that have arisen from being away from each other are exciting and rich. Cultures have gradually become different because of their separateness, so erasing the distance between disparate places might eventually homogenize us all. This process has already begun in the developed world even though we have much more primitive devises of connection than instant teleportation. Why is homogenization such a bad thing? At the time of the conversation with my husband, my reason was that "diversity is necessary in the cultural world just as it is in the ecological world." I still

believe this, but I don't think global culture and diversity have to be at odds. Diversity does, after all, exist within cultures.

Perhaps what really unnerved me was the idea of the whole world becoming just like my world. I am suburban by nature and truth be told, I am at home in my world, so I will defend it before I pass negative judgment on it.

I like going to the mall. I like movies (not just "films") and the Super Target. I like the fact that I am connected to a vast number of people across the country and the world through TV and pop music, through toys we all had as kids and food that we all eat. The manufactured Big League Chew bubble gum of my childhood, pink and stringy, is as tactile a memory as any homemade apple pie could be.

I am glad that I can travel on the interstate—the stronghold of suburban connectedness, and that while doing so I can find a bite to eat without thinking or planning too hard.

The insinuation that suburban people are drones irritates me. Most people—urban, rural, small town, suburban—fit in, whether by choice or automation, to the culture in which they live. The desire to be the same is a strong force in most communities and most of us are drone-like at some point or in some fashion. We are also unique.

The claim that small, independent businesses foster better, friendlier customer service than suburbanized chain stores seems forced to me. I've been in plenty of locally-owned establishments where the owners and employees haven't taken any interest in providing a good service and in plenty of chain stores and restaurants where employees really care about doing a good job, about making the customer experience a warm one. Disparity in service has more to do with the individuals giving the service than it does with the type of establishment in which the service is being given.

Yet, while I know suburbs aren't the horrors they are sometimes told to be, I must say the dwindling of opportunity and encouragement to experience elsewhere and other in the suburban world troubles me. I might enjoy suburbia with its comfort and ease of use, but I don't want it to overrun its welcome. Malls are fun and interstates are nice to drive, but in general, they are shallow. Their emphasis is replication, quantity, speed. They don't go deep like two lanes or like a thrift store in the old part of town.

The more suburban a place becomes, the less real energy it seems to have. It becomes more rote and more sanitary. Its people box themselves up in cars and houses or in malls. We get connected to the TV, to the Internet, to trendy clothes and toys, and forget to look outside and connect with the people in our own community and to the land over which we commute. We float on top instead of swimming to the bottom and looking for pearls. Floating is fun, but so is diving.

Away from the workday (which is not pleasurable to many of us), we spend much of our time taking in the breath of others—their presentations of things to buy, things to watch, things to like, things to distract. Many of us are losing our drive to breath on our own. Finding our own air is perhaps too hard in this world of manufactured ease. We are displaced, more connected with an abstract whole than the here and now, and this displacement is dangerous. It is a blinder, keeping us nice and easy despite all the noises we hear. The environment, the changes we'd like

to make in our lives, the government, the making up with loved ones—all these can wait until the next commercial or until the clearance sale is over.

So, I suppose a better cause for the grief I felt upon the conversation about instant travel is not fear of homogenization in general, but fear of this specific foggy brand of culture growing unchecked. I fear one big mega culture of distraction and over-stimulation, of controlled experience, in which most people are stifled. In this sort of society, most of us might not go any deeper into the world outside our boxes than a glance out the window, and we would deceive ourselves in our separateness from that world.

Source: http://otherwind.fademark.net/archives/000333.html

Suburban Bird

by Other Wind This is a guest post is by David, who wanted to post the following image in honor of the Suburbs Ecotone topic:

This picture was taken the morning of July 4, 2003. I have often noticed birds making nests in the signage of stores like this Walgreens' store. I was lucky to have my camera with me this time. I am glad that some animals can thrive in developed areas. I suppose maybe birds don't mind at all how ugly strip malls are. Their presence adds a lot of beauty and always makes me smile.

Source: http://otherwind.fademark.net/archives/000334.html

Life On The Margins: The Necessity Of Neighborhood Wilderness

By Fragments of Floyd

Ms. Dickenson may have been on to something with her prairie that consisted of only one flower and a bee. When I was new to the world, a quarter acre vacant wooded lot and one small boy was enough to make a wilderness.
I grew up in the city limits of a sprawling Alabama city, but I was happiest when I imagined myself to be surrounded by 'wilderness'. In the leafy chaos of vacant lots and wooded neighborhood margins I was able to pretend to be a pioneer... like Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier... to imagine that I existed for an afternoon in a place that was just the way God had left it. Playing in the woods--even though it might be just a fraction of an acre-- I could imagine that there I was closer to 'native land', and so I was closer to being a native myself. Playing 'cowboys and Indians' in those tiny woods connected me to an earlier time when men were more in touch with the land than any of our white-collared fathers were.
As I grew older, I found I needed more of the unspoken nutrient of wildness than my small neighborhood woods could provide for me. I went to summer camp and there found my backyard forest magnified a thousand fold. Living for a week smelling of creek water and pine straw with a hundred other feral children made me feel more connected to the larger life of the world than an entire summer of chlorine-smelling swimming pools and organized, sanitized sports ever could.

I fished. Fishing possessed its own sense of isolation and otherness and was its own foreign country fit for a young explorer. Mostly I fished alone and from the shore, and more often than not, I'd find myself thoroughly distracted by some little thing in the woods along the lake and forget fishing entirely. It was not the fish I was after, after all. I tried hunting, but killing things was not the manly adventure it seemed to be when Davy killed him a 'bar' and so I never became a hunter either.
And I played golf. Like many of my friends, I followed my father onto the golf courses that spread into the countryside with the expanding city. Our dads went there to find tranquility, solitude and serenity by chasing behind a little white ball. I worked on a golf course one summer, but I'd wander off into the rough turning logs for salamanders. I decided that for me, just being there was the point-- and guns, rods and reels, clubs and other toys were merely visible tickets into wilder natural places, icons required by a society that seems to expect grown men to display a reason for going happily out-of-doors.
All of the tiny wilderness sanctuaries of my childhood are paved over now, locked behind guardhouses of gated communities, uninviting and forbidden domesticated places. Even the margins and edges from youth were not far enough away to provide lasting wildness. Maybe it has been this experience that has compelled me to find remoter places when looking for a place to put down roots in our later years.

And so today, we live every day well beyond the edges of a town so small there are no suburbs. I have a vast woodlot around me, two creeks full of bright fish and sunlight, tranquility by the sky-full, and no neighbors to disturb in my rambling walks. This little valley may be the 'place' I felt I belonged to long ago. And I have to wonder if I did not start moving to Floyd County while picking berries with small hands, behind my suburban house in a secret patch of woods where natives lived.

(This is the original radio piece (before edits for length) that aired today, now posted for comments, ripe tomatoes and open for the astutidity of Fragments readers... Pascale tells me that astudidity is not a word, but what she means is that it didn't used to be. It's my creation and I'm sticking to it.) Astute Seth writes to remind me to post this-- thanks.)

Source: http://otherwind.fademark.net/archives/000334.html

Growing Up in the Suburbs

By Feathers of Hope (Pica)

This post is in response to the third Ecotone Wiki joint blogging topic, Suburbs. Other posts on this topic can be found here.

When I started to think about suburbs for this piece, the stereotypical "kids and cul-de-sacs" image surfaced. I pictured green lawns, children being ferried to soccer and ballet and camp and swimming and all the other activities that people--mostly mothers--at work recite incessantly, half with pride, half with resignation. I pictured single-family homes with two vehicles, neither of which fit inside a garage filled to bursting with the detritus of contemporary consumerism. I pictured something alien: not somewhere I'd fit in, feel comfortable.

I hang my laundry on a line outside our front door (front, not back) -- this would probably be enough to get me arrested if I lived in Mace Ranch, not four miles from here. I have no interest in mowing lawns, in washing my ancient car on a regular basis (the summer dust in Davis ensures that this is an essential activity for anyone caring to have a shiny car, to look "respectable"), or in worrying about whether or not I'm conforming to the expectations of the neighborhood. It feels oppressive and confining to me.

Yet I grew up in suburbs. We moved to Spain when I was four from Tiburon, a suburb of San Francisco. Rereading my grandmother's diary of that trip--across the ocean on the Nieu Amsterdam from New York to Southampton, the drive south through France where I apparently got appendicitis, the arrival in downtown Madrid on a hot, sweltering day in early August--I see the anxiety that must have plagued my parents (and grandparents, who were on childcare detail) to find somewhere suitable to live. Suitable: meaning suitable for children, American children, not the immaculately dressed Spanish children in the playground outside our downtown hotel where the ground was dirt, not grass. Not one of those four adults thought we could possibly adapt to living in an apartment, which is how most Spanish people lived. We weren't immaculately dressed. We had different needs, it seems.

There was one place they found that conformed to their expectations of suitability: Mirasierra, a small area to the north of the city (in 1964 Madrid still had sheep regularly crossing the Paseo de la Castellana, sheep having the right of way over cars, to go and graze in the field in front of the Real Madrid soccer stadium). They scoured Mirasierra for a house to rent. We moved into a red-shuttered, granite-and-stucco three-bedroom with a "maid's room" downstairs (where my brother, the youngest, slept, to the absolute horror of Francisca, who wore widow's black and cleaned up after us).

There were shops at the top of the hill on Calle Nuria, which we were allowed to walk to by ourselves from about when I was seven, as long as we stayed on this side of the street. We walked barefoot (no Spanish child would EVER be allowed to do this) to buy our polos de naranja (orange popsicles) and black-market American comics on the diamond-patterned cement sidewalk and splashed in paddling pools and walked across the street to see if Annie or Robbie could play (the neighborhood was filled with foreigners, most of them executives from English,

French, German, Dutch, Swiss, or Italian companies--and their children, many of whom by the time they were six could speak three or more languages). We had puppies and a rabbit and a chicken (neither of which survived very long and ended up in Francisca's pot: we couldn't eat them, of course, being unadaptable foreign children). We caught mumps and chicken pox and minnows in the mucky stream further west beyond the grapevines.

Our third Mirasierra house had a pool and we bought it. Franco's Spain was unairconditioned apart from movie theatres, and stiflingly hot nights were mitigated by frequent dips in the pool which my poor father labored to keep free of leaves, lizards, wasps, ants, coins, bobby pins, and hair, hair, hair. We became the envy of friends--many of whom lived in apartments closer to their father's office or to Runnymede, the English/International school we all went to--on account of the pool, and summers were filled with friends of various ages who came over, towels and bathing suits in hand. My mother ferried us to ballet and riding and orchestra practice, just like the Mace Ranch mothers do today.

I loved growing up in that place. The memories serve to soften my reaction to the aspirations of families with young children to live in a safe, green-filled environment, however Stepfordian I might find it. But I don't have children and I don't ever want to mow a lawn, and I like the smell of air-dried sheets too much to give that up. So we live nestled in among the landlord's son's beekeeping equipment in the back, with the walnut tree and the peach tree and the nectarines and plums, with a good view of the fields and the railroad track and the hills off to the west. The cropdusters are at it again. The field workers will be out early in the morning because it's going to be in the 100's again tomorrow, so I need to be somewhat appropriately dressed as I dump the compost onto the field before seven. This is not Mace Ranch.

Posted by Pica at July 14, 2003 09:00 PM | TrackBack

Comments

I have mixed feelings about the "stepfordian" nature of suburbs too. Perhaps children, more free by nature, aren't as stifled by it as some adults are. I like living near downtowon Knoxville, where suburban life, urban life, and rural life all seem to mingle and keep the town from becoming too bland, alhtough I'm sure some people would claim it is bland. Your place certainly doesn't seem bland, with the dust, the air dried sheets, and the bee-keeping equipmnent.

Posted by: Wendy at July 15, 2003 06:48 AM

I wonder, Wendy, if large 'small towns' like Knoxville dont have a human scale and an accessibility to 'wild places' that too-large cities somehow lose. Birminghams was like that, a large small town, but now is a large large town, if you know what I mean... it has overgrown its edges and there is not much 'native ground' left, and as I wrote today, so much the pity for our children.

Posted by: fred1st at July 15, 2003 08:39 AM

I suppose children make their world wherever they happen to be. I enjoyed reading about yours in Spain -- it revived my envy of the Foreign Service brats I knew outside Washington, DC -- knowing at least bits of several languages, and at home / not at home everywhere.

Posted by: Nancy at July 15, 2003 09:19 PM

As someone who grew up much as you did, in several countries, and as an outsider, I often wonder if people who don't carry the steady memory and experience of one place see the world in the same way as someone who is "part" of the community? What exactly does it feel like to "belong" somewhere? Where people never question your presence or look twice at you because of your looks?

Yet, as your essay describes, your experiences of the place you grew up in are no less vived than that of any other person. You even see things that they cannot.

I've always loved Spain and have often thought of trying to live there. Your essay brought it alive for a moment, and carved out a few sharp details that have made it a more vital world in my eyes.

Posted by: Miguel at July 16, 2003 09:46 AM

really cool weblog - loved it

Posted by: online casino at April 9, 2005 09:14 AM

robert allen
multiple streams of income
robert allen real estate
http://robert-allen.4t.com

Posted by: robert allen real estate at May 7, 2005 04:01 PM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2003/07/14/growing_up_in_th.html

7.15.2003

By Field Notes

I've never known any place the way I knew Lubec Street. I knew it as the center of the world, before I found out that the center was someplace below, and that I was alone on the earth's spinning surface. I knew that street from the ground up.

My memories are still there, tethered to the house, to the front lawn. To find them I need only go back to Lubec Street. We played baseball in that yard, climbed avocado trees, played games, hide-and-seek. I remember taking my first solo bike ride across that patch of grass, but that might be my brother I see riding unsteadily across the grass, triumphant and vulnerable. The outdoors was our own domain, theater for neighborhood alliances and the small betrayals of early friendship, and the easy-flung daggers of brother and sister. We didn't consider the exposure, didn't need walls to hide our games, not then. Later, back yards were better.

But early the front yard spilled easily into the street and onto other patches of grass, some not as well kept as ours. But I only notice that looking back now. In that neighborhood time, the only distinctions we made were between parenting styles. Our friends across the street, exotic and Greek, had stricter parents than the rest of us. Their home was more mysterious, dark inside, and we never played there. But their backyard had frogs, and it led through childhood corridors to the

backyard of Billy and Jon's house. Billy and I were going to marry and live at Big Bear. I can still feel him whispering in my ear, then see him dive down into the otherworldly blue green waters of his backyard pool. Their Mom taught them the song 'Billy Boy' but inserted "Bill and Jon" instead. So it went like this, "Can she bake a cherry pie, Bill and Jon, Bill and Jon?", and I could never convince Billy that it went any other way.

Lubec Street was an almost parentless place as I remember it. The parents were in the background, feeding us, arranging overnights, buying our toys and tucking us in. The pools were cleaned, meals cooked, mortgages paid and birthday parties thrown. I remember one pool party though: a little kid was in the middle of the pool being held under by a struggling toddler. For long moments, we watched. Then my mom, glamour queen, threw off her wig and sunglasses, dove in and saved them. I remember her rigid determination, the set of her mouth. Life had prepared her for a moment like that. Ocassionally a parent would star in our world for a moment, but they always sat back down with their magazines and their drinks and their chatter so we could get on with the important commerce of neighborhoods: occupying the small spaces, the hollows under hedges, the shaded places between houses, the underwater Marco Polo worlds, places where adults didn't ever go, didn't want to know.

All that was before. Before Dad left. Before we moved to the city away from the swimming pool and the shiny new cars in the driveway; away from the neighborhood where every porch, every lawn and shrub and tree, every hiding space was ours, and where the constellations of childhood were unbroken and steady, watching children run across the lawns of Lubec Street as a small girl counted out to one hundred with her eyes closed, hands pressed into the bark of an avocado tree.

Source: http://www.field-notes.net/2003_07_13_archives.html

Suburbs and Place: An Ancillary Ecotone Entry

By Notes from an Ecectic Mind

Some words cannot seem to escape their associated stereotypes. When the Ecotone bloggers announced "Suburbs and Place" as their July 15th topic, I immediately thought of Malvina Reynold's song "Little Boxes." The lyrics speak of houses made of "ticky tacky" that all look "just the same." An anthem condemning 1950's suburban conformity, the song epitomized the reaction of the generation that came of age in the Sixties to the post-war bubble of contentment from which they sprang.

Well, let's face it. Little Towns just don't have suburbs. When I contemplate the word I envision rows of houses sitting too close together looking as if an architectural cookie cutter produced each one. I think of the home Aunt K. and Uncle C. shared in Odessa on a parched postage stamp with a zero lot line.

I didn't grow up in the suburbs, but my father, like many suburban dwelling heads of the house, came home from World War II, took out a G.I. loan and built a house for his wife and young

daughter, my older sister. In that white wooden dwelling with a climbing yellow rose bush by the back door they passed the decade of the 1950s.

Papa didn't wear golf sweaters and Mother didn't meet him at the door each evening with a martini. They both drank bourbon and he fished passionately, maintaining both a worm bed and a bait tank in the backyard. In his workshop he reloaded ammunition and fiddled with various projects. When they added a room onto the house it was a space specifically designed for parties, complete with a hard wood floor for dancing.

In family photos from the period my sister and her friends cavort in penny loafers for the camera. Papa sports endless plaid shirts and Mother was a fashion plate in spreading skirts and petticoats. I don't know those people.

The faces are familiar in their 1950s suburbanesque shading, but they were a family for seventeen years before my arrival in 1962. In a way then, the word "suburbs" connotes a kind of personal prehistoric era for me, a time when a portrait of my parents taken while he was still in his Army Air Corps uniform sat in the living room.

Their lives on South 16th Street were nothing like ours on West Cedar. My childhood passed through the fluorescent toned, Dippity Doo-ed, sit-in dominated decade of the Sixties, a world lit by the lava lamp. My sister had the Mickey Mouse Club and Leave it to Beaver. I had Laugh In and Love American Style. She had a world illuminated by suburban dreams of prosperity and contentment. I had a world illuminated by radical protest and restless societal discontent. And still my Mother cannot comprehend how her two daughters could be so different.

Rather than a concept of "place" then, suburb is for me on one level an idea of time and even of transition, an era people by familiar faces but one I can never know much less fully understand. I envy families with widely dispersed children that manage to bridge the temporal gap and build a cohesive unit. We never managed that admirable feat.

I did grow up in a neighborhood with many earmarks of suburbia. We played baseball in M.'s backyard, roasted hot dogs at D.'s, chased the sno cone truck on our bikes, and played all over Buddy Bob's pickup. We pretended that vehicle sailed the seven seas or hurtled through outer space. Buddy Bob's stepson R. was about as interesting as drying mud, but he had a great dad.

When I drive through suburban neighborhoods now I wonder if parents let their kids roam al over creation the way we did. I doubt it. The world isn't that certain any more. In the Little Town in those years our universe wasn't as complacent as that of a decade earlier. We knew boys who went to Vietnam and some who didn't come home. Our parents predicted the demise of America a the hands of the hippies and every jukebox in town had a copy of Merle Haggard singing "Okie from Muskogee." No one could have been alive then and not have felt the tension in the world, but we were still insulated and we were still safe. Something of that "suburban" security lingered on in our world for a few years longer.

So, if I cannot write of the suburbs as a place, I think I do know them as a state of mind. They represented a brief period in the post-war history of our nation when everything was orderly and all the textures and colors of life matched. They were the calm after one storm and the lull before another. For my family individually the years passed with relative ease until, on the dawn of the new decade, Mother suffered a nervous breakdown, I was born, and Papa's business burned to

the ground. They left the white house with the yellow roses and moved to a red brick ranch style home. Change hit our family hard and fast.

As I thought about addressing this topic R. mentioned that at one time her mother would have given anything to live in the proto-suburb itself, Levittown.

"What on earth for?" I asked, horrified at the thought of life in such a uniform setting.

"Because everything looked the same. No one seemed to have more or less than their neighbors."

But then that was the great allure of that first post-war suburban wave, wasn't it? The illusion of the little boxes. Unfortunately, ticky tacky doesn't stand up to a strong wind.

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20030825043033/www.ranakwilliamson.com/blog/000612.html

Tuesday, July 15, 2003

By Cassandra Pages

My neighbor wears wild grapevines wreathed about his shoulders. He wrestles and pulls, wrenching the honeysuckle from the earth, and vines from the trees where they once hung in wild joyful loops.

Angry, hot, sweating, he sits now and wipes his forehead with the back of a wrist, sets his face and begins hacking again, reducing the terrible invasion to something he can comb and smile at, satisfied, before turning toward his day.

He sees me looking up and tells me what he's doing, as if I too might like to relocate the brambles and their kin which lie between my feet and his to some other neighborhood.

I smile politely and tell him that I like to see the birds that live there.

"Oh!" he says, surprised. "Are there birds?"
--

Twenty-five years ago, when I moved to this small village, the hill in back of our property was filled with goldenrod and woodchuck holes, dotted with a few houses above. This whole hillside was orginally a farm; we planted our garden where the chicken coop had stood. Deer regularly came down to eat apples underneath the old trees in our yard, and in the evenings a reclusive hermit thrush sang in the underbrush.

By the same token, back then you couldn't buy a decent head of lettuce – other than iceberg – from October through June, let alone fresh herbs for your pasta, or a mango, or twenty different kinds of shade-grown organic coffee. You certainly couldn't spend an afternoon browsing the bookshelves and drinking cappuchino at Borders; there weren't art galleries or repertory theater

companies; and there was a lot less choice about almost everything, from housing to housecoats.

The coming of suburbia to rural northern New England is both blight and blessing, and I find myself participating in both. As often as I cry, "I don't want to live in Connecticut!" when I see yet another giant concrete-block box store extending the horrible strip mall further into the countryside, emptying not only the original downtowns but the earlier, now-unfashionable malls, I do go there on occasion and am grateful for some of the amenities and convenience. The fact that my area – and my business – have been largely protected from the economic vicissitudes of recent years is a result of a healthy local economy and continued growth – the same growth that eats up farmland and turns woodlots and wetlands into commercial developments.

This sense of inexorable creep resulting in compromise – compromise of place and of personal values – is what suburbia represents to me. Although we've participated in forums on sprawl, and served on committees to preserve and strengthen local communities, deep down I recognize the insidious and seductive lure of change, opportunity, and convenience. The difference between me and the "flatlanders" – the suburbanites who come here from Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York and New Jersey – is that I'm acutely aware of what's being lost.

Today, the entire hillside in back of our house has been developed. The winding road where I used to walk every morning is filled with whizzing, commuting cars, and the warbler-filledwoods at the top have been cut and replaced with a 50-unit condominium development. And even with our plantings of wildlife-feeding and -sheltering shrubs, and refusal to manicure the underbrush, the deer and the hermit thrush don't come to our backyard any more.

"Oh?" says my transplanted neighbor. "Are there birds?"

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20051217223314/cassandrapages.blogspot.com/2003_07_13_cassandrapages_archive.html

Living on a Ripple

This is part of the Ecotone discussion on "Suburbs".

Suburbs are the ripples of big cities. Here in Southern California where I live, the working definition I have developed is that a suburb is a community that connects to a larger metropolitan area. To tell the difference between an independent city and a suburb, you mark the developments: when there are clear, rural spaces between a large city and a smaller one, the smaller city is its own metropolitan area. Where towns and developments run on and on without break, you have suburbs.

Application: San Bernardino is a suburb of Los Angeles. Bakersfield is not.

Census takers and geographers go to great pains to define where metropolitan areas begin and end. I'm told that there are four metropolitan areas in a region where I mark only one. But then government officials use a different definition that also works: metropolitan areas are not only bunched contiguously around the main city or cities, but they also form an economic and

political community. You can watch the trucks rolling out from and back into the metropoles, see the warehouses clustering near the decision-making centers. Suburbs are the towns which are not mentioned in the metropolitan district name.

I live where the big pond that is Los Angeles ends. Beneath me stretches a network of streets and a complicated patchwork consisting of housing developments, apartments, planned communities, enclosed shopping malls, strip malls, offices, factories, parks, open spaces, greenhouses, avocado orchards, and strawberry fields. Each fits unabashedly in the haphazard scheme.

Conformity does exist and there are communities near me that go to the extreme of setting up gates to keep strangers out. Some rely on magnetic cards, a system which some thwart by simply following someone else in. Others place guards: the entrances look like border crossings where they want to see some identification and have you fill out paperwork describing your reasons for visiting the country within a country. Many developments — including the one where I live — have strict rules that prohibit tampering with the "look" of the place where you live. I can't paint my door a bright purple if it suits me because it is in the deed that I must go with the aesthetic sensibilities of the designers and, their successors, the condominium association board.

But I also see freedom here. The writing groups which I am a member of bring in all kinds of people: a Marine, an English professor, a social science Ph.d who went her own way after her dissertation defense, technical writers, the editor of a sailing magazine, housewives, salesmen, and a painter. We critique together and when we do so, we all respect the fact that we have different minds and different tastes in literature.

The same inner life happens behind closed doors. No one feels compelled to paint their interiors in the same colors as the builders put them up and I've even known people to freely knock down walls and rearrange things inside their condominiums. The creative urge is sublimated. Entering the home of a neighbor is like suddenly finding yourself inside their minds, surrounded by their tastes and impulses. Yet they do not detach themselves from the community: they remain inside it. There's no gap between interiors and exteriors, just like there are no gaps between cities. They all run into each other.

How do I feel about living in a place without lines? I'm searching for words and rejecting them. Ambivalent? Contented? Exhilerated? Disgusted? Naseous? I feel the burn of the air on my shoulders and I feel hot. I have opinions about many elements of the place where I live, but the whole is just the pond. And I live on one of its ripples.

Posted: July 15th, 2003 under Ecotone.http://placeblogging.com/suburbs - comments

Comments

Comment from butuki
Time: 7/16/2003, 10:08 am

When I was studying architecture and urban development in graduate school one of the heated questions we always addressed was what constituted an authentic and natural human settlement. None of us ever came up with satsifactory answers, simply because the variation in what humans consider home are as diverse as the cultures and individuals themselves.

I lived in the States for a total of 20 years. As a very young boy it was all I knew and I loved what I lived in, the suburbs of New York City, but after living elsewhere most of my life, my sense of what feels balanced and what too artificial has changed. I find it funny that Americans speak so highly of their ideal of freedom, and yet in the suburban neighborhoods (much less so in the urban neighborhoods) where I dwelled, I felt much more constrained than I do now in the heart of Tokyo.

So much flickers in the mind of the beholder.

Comment from Joel
Time: 7/16/2003, 12:38 pm

I, too, have often felt an exhileration that I call "freedom" when I have lived abroad. When I have reported this to the locals, however, they've looked at me strangely.

Perhaps it is because as foreigners, we feel giddy, that people make some allowances for us to be a little kooky? Perhaps it is because the thrill of the different excites us? (though given your long stay in Japan, that theory is easily upset!) Perhaps it is because having been raised feeling the chafe of one set of rules, we feel better when the rules are more to our liking?

No answer here. Just questions.

Source: http://paxnortona.notfrisco2.com/?p=1391

The Barley Fields

By Laughing Knees

Open hearth pole from my home, Tokyo, 1984.

This is the 3rd installment of the ongoing series of discussions about place at the Ecotone: Writing About Place site. This week's topic is Suburbs.

On the night my family arrived in Tokyo from New York we were driven into the city from Haneda Airport. It had been a long flight, with a transit in Honolulu for refueling, and we were all tired and a bit dazed. A representative from my father's company met us at the arrivals area and escorted us out to the street, where he had his car waiting for us. The air was heavy with humidity and insects whirled around the street lights over the taxi stand. The air smelled of burning oil and something else, something sweetly organic that a newcomer like me couldn't identify. And all the while a numb sense of dislocation surged up in my belly, like having my

sense of balance ripped out from inside me, a sense of being physically there, but my soul lingering in another time far away. When I think back on that moment, it is curious that I can remember the details of arriving in Tokyo, but can't recall a single image of the moment we left New York...

As we pulled out of the airport and made our way into the city, Tokyo rose around us, the dark walls of the buildings lit up by a carnival of bright, flashing neon lights, every building seemingly decorated with gay, vertical signs to silently cheer our arrival. My father, gazing in amazement with his face pressed to the window exclaimed, "Why do they call New York the City of Lights? This is the City of Lights!"

Tokyo would be my home for the next ten years and would shape me in ways that I could not have imagined while I was still living in New York.

Since that day, Tokyo has grown like an insatiable rabbit unmindful of the horde she has been giving birth to. Areas that I once took the train out to to spend time in the country have transformed into chic shopping neighborhoods where the fashionable meet for Sunday brunch and cappucinos. Downtown West Shinjuku, the heart of big business and government today, with its soaring skyscrapers and wide avenues, still billowed with barley fields when I was a boy. It was a Sunday adventure in junior high school for my best friend Alex and me to spend our weekend afternoons riding all the high speed elevators to the top of the brand new buildings and have a look down. By the end of the day we would head home with splitting headaches and nausea, but heady with the elation of having topped all the tallest building in Japan in one day.

Japan has no American halfway point of suburbs. There just isn't the space. You either build or you don't, and where there are no mountains, every available vacancy is paved over and framed and shored up and walled in. You can take a train ride from Tokyo to Osaka, a distance of about 500 kilometers, and looking out the window, never once see the repetition of single family homes and apartment buildings and factories interrupted by any significant stretches of untouched green. In the outskirts of Tokyo proper, where people used to go hiking in low-lying woods and fields, now housing developments, Japan's closest equivalent to the American Back to the Country movement of the 50's and 60's, gobble up hillsides. Entire chains of hills have been leveled to make room for all the people who want to own their own homes, especially during the heady Bubble era, when no one thought twice about the environmental consequences of all the building they were doing.

I was lucky. Tokyo was still down-to-earth enough in the 60's and 70's to allow me to get dirty in the fields and accumulate a repertoire of close encounters with wild creatures, especially birds and insects. I was lucky to have been one of the last children to watch fireflies winking on and off over the susuki fields by the rivers near my house. I had the opportunity to listen to the sad cry of the dusk cicada (higurashi-zemi, Tanna japonensis. See Cicadae in Japan. Open "Songs of Cicadas", choose your platform sound format, open sound page, and scroll down to "Tanna japonensis". The higurashichorus3.mpeg or .wav file is the best recording.), which is just about impossible to describe to someone who has never heard it (the closest I can come to it is if you take the sound of a pencil being drawn over the slowly moving spokes of a bicycle, alter that sound into that of a locomotive whistle, but with the quality of a harmonica, and multiply the numbers to several dozen all singing together at different intervals) and I feel it is a great loss to

the children of Tokyo never to have the chance to know one of the most beautiful sounds of Japan.

I grew up with walls around me, for towns in Japan traditionally wall the streets in up to shoulder height or more. Streets are enclosed on both sides, with houses coming right up to the edge, and traditionally, the entrance hall open right out to passersby. Neighbors and salesmen and people on official business would step right into the entrance hall without ringing the doorbell and announce their presence. It gave a strong sense of belonging and neighborhood watchfulness, with every one aware of what was going on around them, though, as foreigners, we were more often than not thought of as weird and unconventional. I grew used to the paradox of walls enclosing streets while doors allowed anyone in, so much so that, though I visited my relatives in New York on occasional summers, the mowed grass patchwork that constitutes so many American homes, to this day feels alien and exposed, and yet oddly uninviting.

What Tokyo has become I do not love. There is no longer any heart to the growth of the city. The newly developed area I now live in is made up mostly of young families just starting out with their careers and child-rearing. Most of them intend to move on. Since moving here three years ago, not a single person has ever returned my greetings, and half of them give me suspicious stares. One older couple, which unfortunately lives right behind our bedroom window, went so far as to growl, "Go home you foreigners!" And, seeing that I looked somewhat like a Pakistani or Mexican, added as an afterthought, "You probably don't even have a visa, do you? You're here illegally, aren't you?"

It is not possible for me to find peace with myself in a place that I cannot find the motivation nor means to care about. It is like living a half-life, mostly in my head. And so it may be time to move again, and once more face the tearing feeling of dislocation. But I will always carry the old barley fields in my heart, where my childhood lives and where the old roots still drink up a sense of belonging to this place, whatever the dull neighbors may assume. And the dusk cicadas will always sing where none can hear them any more.

Posted by butuki at 06:54 AM in Hiking, Bicycling, Kayaking | Permalink | Comments (8)
Comments

Fascinating!

Posted by Joel at July 16, 2003 08:38 AM

Thank you for this remarkable & beautifully written glimpse into your city and your memories of it.

Posted by beth at July 16, 2003 10:27 AM

So beautiful…thank you. I'm intrigued by your description of the cicada sound. I want to hear it, so I did some searching. I found this page with many cicada sound links, but none sounds just as you described.
But they are all beautiful in their own way, and interesting, and maybe you'd enjoy listening.
http://www.isis.vt.edu/~fanjun/text/Link_specc02.html

Posted by Lisa Thompson at July 16, 2003 12:48 PM

This is so sharply and beautifully written. And you have such wonderful photographs — thank you! (You remind me how lucky I am to live where being a (white) foreigner usually makes people more friendly than they would otherwise be — an interesting aftertaste of colonialism.)

Posted by Nancy at July 16, 2003 03:00 PM

By popular demand I've added a link to a site with recordings of Tanna japonensis. I wanted to put a sound file onto the page, but I have to hear back from the Cicadae in Japan homepage owner for permission. Also I have no idea how to incorporate a sound file, so it's going to take a few days before I have time to learn how. Anyway, I hope the recording gives a good impression of what I was referring to. Of course, it's just a recording. There's nothing like standing in the woods at dusk, the sun going down, shadows gathering, trees all around, and the cicadas singing in almost a delerium of sound. It's a sound you will never forget.

Posted by Miguel at July 16, 2003 05:17 PM

It's been wonderful to read you and to make all these journeys with you! I've only experienced it before while reading José Mauro de Vasconcelos, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Luis Sepulveda. It seems that you have the same ability of taking us by the hand and help us magically to plunge into your tales. Thank you for letting me to join you.
Yes, I too have known that feeling of dislocation that you felt when you arrived in Tokyo. It is quite similar to what I felt when I arrived in Portugal from Angola. 28 years ago. My roots are still there. Entangled with Mother Africa's Heart.
Fortunately the Earth is immense. Such as our aptitude for to dream and to love.
(Please, excuse me for my English. You know, it's not my mother tongue)

Posted by Teresa at July 16, 2003 10:02 PM

It seems like so much is being lost everywhere.

Posted by bill at July 17, 2003 01:06 PM

your journal is astonishingly beautiful. it makes me think of the flicker of a candle flame behind a paper door.

Posted by tara. at July 24, 2003 06:08 PM

Source:http://web.archive.org/web/20041206232452/www.butuki.com/archives/2003_07.html#000047

our old suburban home

by Prairie Point

This place of ours was once in the "suburbs." Our house was built in 1946, which makes it older than us. Most of the houses around here were built a little later than that, a few earlier. North of here virtually all of the houses are newer. From that I conclude that at the time it was built our house was near the edge of town. By my thinking that means it was in the suburbs, even though it might have been within the city limits at the time.

The man who built this house operated a restaurant in Highland Park Village, one of the country's first shopping centers, a few miles closer to downtown. He had children who attended the local school. In fact I suspect that most of the people who lived around here were young families with children. When we moved here though it was primarily empty nesters or childless households.

If you take suburban to simply mean the new housing at the edge of the metropolis then almost every place around here either has been suburban at some time or will be in the future. Now most people would call our place "inner-city" or even "downtown." Once it was part of a farm and before that it is said to have been an Indian campsite. I can travel 20 miles to the north today and see farms that I know will very soon be subdivided into housing developments or shopping centers.

Age has given the neighborhood character and, in my eye, added value. People have lived here and made their mark on it. That is what makes the difference between a neighborhood like this one and a new one. I think most people though prefer the new.

Comments

I like it that you are able to trace the history of the house you live in with such specificity. I wonder about the "most people prefer the new" and then look at old houses here in Davis from the 1920s which were just north of the town center, and built for workers (but beautifully, in the Arts & Crafts style). They are tiny, usually two-bedroom, one bath, but they sell for fortunes now, because of their age and unique style. Davis has since expanded way north of that area. Will the housing developments of today--ugly, monotonous, overbearing, where the garage is about 1/3 of the footprint--ever be looked at in this way? It's hard to imagine...

Posted by: Pica at July 16, 2003 08:29 AM

Despite its age our house had only one previous owner. I learned a little of the history when I met their son at the time I bought the house and subsequently a little more from neighbors who had known them.

Posted by: bill at July 16, 2003 10:48 AM

You wonder sometimes about the constinuous story we all hear... of the ever growing city. I don't think I have ever heard a story of a modern city turning back and shrinking. It is as if the city is chasing after an older brother or sister who has gone off into the horizon, and the city is dragging everything after himself. Perhaps it is like the rings of a tree, where the core withers and dies and creates a donut effect. Hopefully cities grow stronger this way. It is nice to hear of an "old" suburb that has matured and honed a warm patina of wisdom and richness.

Posted by: Miguel at July 16, 2003 12:16 PM

It's a relief to see a piece about suburbs that doesn't wail about their ugliness, etc. Just telling it like it is is what I like to see, Mr. Bill.

Posted by: Joel at July 19, 2003 12:06 AM

I don't disagree with those writers who think modern suburbs are ugly and inhospitable. I just did not choose to write about that myself.

Posted by: bill at July 20, 2003 07:38 AM

Which is still refreshing to see....

Posted by: Joel at July 22, 2003 01:22 AM

Source: http://www.prairiepoint.net/journal/archives/000109.html

Suburbs

by Creek Running North

[This entry is written as part of a collective writing effort on suburbs. Other works in this effort can be found at the Ecotone wiki.]

Some months ago, I wrote a column for the *Contra Costa Times* on invasive exotic species, and the misguided opposition one can sometimes find to reasonable efforts to control their spread. Some people find uncomfortable parallels between invasives control and immigrant-bashing. The column was intended to point out the differences between the two issues, and contained a few throwaway sentences on the immense value of human diversity to Californian society.

A few weeks after the piece saw print, I started getting hate mail. Not a huge amount, but enough to unsettle me a bit, and from places well outside the *Times'* distribution radius: Iowa, Atlanta, New York. The writers spewed hatred of Latino and Asian immigrants, and generally opined that I must be a traitor, an idiot, or both. How did they all find this column, in the Home and Garden section of a fine but not exactly nationally prominent newspaper? I was perplexed.

It turns out that a man named Walter Pringle had posted a link to my article on a racist website. Walter Pringle, it turns out, lives in El Sobrante, a suburb one valley south from Pinole.

There's a well-worn parable about long spoons, dining tables, and heaven and hell. The punchline is that the only difference between heaven and hell lies in your reaction to circumstances. If Walter Pringle is uncomfortable with immigrants, he must certainly be living in hell: El Sobrante is one of the most racially diverse suburbs I've ever seen.

We decry the spread of suburbs, and rightly so. More and more of California open space falls each year to the spread of the Terra Cotta Carcinoma, the distinctive walled communities that are neither communities nor distinctive, named after whatever it was they killed to build the houses, in the familiar process of necronomination. "Oak Meadow Acres," "Sequoia Ridge," "Bay View Estates."

As a child, I lived in most of the different kinds of landscapes available in Western New York in the 1960s and '70s: farm, small town, suburban development, inner city. From age 8 to 12, I spent non-school hours in a burgeoning suburb outside Buffalo watching lot after lot get swallowed up in colonial revival three-bed two-bath boxes. But still there were buffers. The woods across the road from my house are still undeveloped after thirty years. There was the creek, from which we kids extracted Devonian fossils, where we built tree forts and smoked sections of wild grape stem and snuck nude swims when we thought adults weren't looking. Kids on Manitou Drive still had the freedom to drown or break arms or otherwise interact with nature.

No such buffers exist in many of the suburbs now being built in California. There is open space, to be sure: laws demand it. But that open space is often a lawn, tennis courts and manicured gardens and pavement, or else widely scattered blocks of intact hillside, with distinct separation between wild and tame. None of the little threads of wildness I grew up with are allowed to insinuate their way into the curving grid of cul-de-sacs. No weed-choked frog ditches here. Someone might drown or - even worse - sue.

Older California suburbs are different. The last house we lived in was built, with thousands of others, in a rush to provide housing for shipyard workers in World War Two Richmond. In every architectural respect the neighborhood was identical to some of the most soul-destroying suburbs I knew back in Buffalo.

But 40th and Nevin was not the kind of suburb I grew up with. Leave alone for a moment the fact that our neighbors in Richmond had a far broader range of skin colors and accents than the '40s vintage burbs in Western New York ever allowed in the 1970s: that's a pleasant detail, but not the crucial one. The crucial difference was that we knew the neighbor's names within a week of moving in.

El Sobrante is a bleak-looking place. Its name translates roughly as "the leftovers," the name itself a leftover from the days of the Spanish land grants. Central Richmond was part of the Castro Ranch, Pinole the westernmost part of Rancho Del Pinole. What was the land in between? El Sobrante. Through a car window, it's an unremarkable sprawling collection of ramshackle houses and shoddy storefronts; the kind of place where a roadkilled dog might linger at the curb for days before someone moves it.

But get out of the car, and a remarkable place emerges. An old Foster's Freeze, red white and blue tile decor still intact, houses a Tandoori chicken joint where even the yogurt is made on the premises. A few doors down is El Chalan, which bills itself as a "Peruvian-Italian" restaurant. On the little bridge off San Pablo Dam Road where Appian Way crosses San Pablo Creek - a finger of the wild threading itself behind the luggage stores and donut shops - anti-war demonstrators held quiet vigil through the first months of this year. And up the hill, beaming down on its community like a sun, is the gold-leaf onion dome of the local Sikh temple. I can only imagine what it's like to be an anti-immigration crusader in this little suburb. Me, I'm getting hungry for a Tandoori chicken sandwich. Less than six bucks, and they'll make yours with garlic naan if you ask.

But that's what reinvention is all about, and California is where reinvention was invented. Tomorrow's anti-suburban sentiment will take this riotous, exhilarating diversity for granted, much the way we suburban kids of a certain age assumed the existence of swimming pools in every third backyard. There will come a time, and probably not far off at that, when no one will even notice the spectacle of a joyous mob of White and Black and Mexican and Asian and Arab street kids mobbing the local ice cream truck, its Sikh driver advertising his presence by playing an ice cream truck version of Home On The Range.

But right now, that scene - which played out every day in our Richmond neighborhood - seems as good a summation of the California suburb as one can find.

Posted by Chris Clarke at July 16, 2003 04:38 PM TrackBack URL for this entry:

Source: http://www.faultline.org/place/pinolecreek/archives/000168.html

Discussion

A number of the posts about suburbs are also posts about childhood, and children's love of wild or secret places. That would make an interesting subject for later -- children's places. The other main thing that jumped out at me was ambiguity, which is appropriate to suburbs' between-ness. I enjoyed reading all of these pieces, though I didn't really expect to -- I thought the subject too bland. Which goes to show the narrowness of my own mindset, or the deep cultural association between the words 'suburbs' and 'blandness,' or 'emptiness.' -- Nancy

Good point. And I'm going to add "ChildrensPlace?" to our list. I was surprised too by the breadth of these latest entries. It seems there is also a theme of the loss of freedom, especially for children, that has occured as the suburbs have grown and anxiety increased. Is this partly due to the loss of longterm personal relationships that created a fabric of trust and security? Do anxiety and transience feed on each other? -- Beth

Nancy, I was noticing the same thing, memories of childhood that kept resurfacing and an almsot mournful lament for the poor suburban children of today who don't have what we did, but instead live super-scheduled, over-protected lives. Michael Moore lays the blame for the culture of fear (specifically fear of the African American male) squarely at the feet of the media, but I wonder too whether transience doesn't also make our society more likely to buy into it? I have to say I was in a couple of places recently where I was laughed at for locking the doors of cars--where nobody locks their car or their house, and it made me curious about what different elements in a place make it "seem" more safe. Scale is certainly one. A sense that a majority of people in this place have been there a LONG time. Also, I'm pretty sure, racial homogeneity. I think these places are not inherently safer than others, but there is the perception that they are. -- Alison

I just finished reading [Allan's post] where he asks "What if the tension over urban growth is not about traffic, or noise, or overburdened schools, but instead, at an archetypal level, is really about beauty?" I think he's onto something. The laments in the various posts over loss of rural childhood habitats, lack of freedom in suburban communities, loss of cicada song, hacking away at the understory of our yards, and even the lost feeling of safety all have aesthetics at their heart. The early childhood suburbs that I wrote about with some love and yearning are quite different from the suburbs of Irvine, California (largest planned community in the world) which I inhabited as a very unhappy teenager. That kind of suburb, where there truly is no beauty, no soul or opportunity for soul, are killers of imagination, stealers of the secret places children need, and without those, no child is safe. --Lisa

The observation about beauty, I think, is a good one. A big part of what is so disliked about post-WWII suburbs are the exterior spaces which, even in the residential areas, are places where almost no-one wants to be. It is, I think, very odd--there is more than enough space to dance in the streets only, somehow, people don't. (And the police would probably arrest them for it.)

Ed Allen, one of the great teachers of architecture, argues that architectural taste is largely formed in childhood. The more I learn about architectural visions the more I think he is partly right, and partly...something else intervenes, and people raised in one sort of place discover a preference for others. Raised in stone-and-steel Manhattan, I turn out to have an unexpected sympathy with Japanese wood designs. A woman I know, raised in earthquake-prone, wooden Portland, Oregon, has a feeling for the arches, vaults, and domes of unreinforced masonry.

In discussing suburbs, it's important to distinguish between the pre-World War II US suburb and the post-WWII. Pre-war, suburbs were largely for the uppper-middle class. The primary transit technology was rail, a mix of trolley and commuter. The trolleys gave their name to the urban form; the "trolley suburb." The houses were often carefully designed by architects--names like Greene and Greene and Julia Morgan come to mind.

Post World War II suburbs were intended as housing for veterans. A number of financial and legal devices were put together to make it possible, for the first time, for large numbers of the US middle class to own a plot of land and a small house near a major city. The primary transit technology, pushed hard by automobile and oil industries, was the automobile. And the designs... The buyers--they didn't know what to ask for. How could they? So they got what the builders (who mostly didn't hire architects) gave them. It became all quite the mass manufacturing industry--the main difference between a suburban development site and a factory was that the workers moved from place to place, instead of the work coming to them.

More notes tomorrow, maybe. Meantime, here's some references:

- Rowe, Peter G. *Making a Middle Landscape*, MIT Press 1991.
- Roth, Leland, ed. *America builds: source documents in American architecture and planning*. Harper & Row, c1983. Where to go to read the words of the people who did it.
- Jackson, Kenneth. *Crabgrass frontier: the suburbanization of the United States*. Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Warner, Sam Bass. *Streetcar suburbs: the process of growth in Boston, 1870-1900*. Harvard University Press, 1978.

--Randolph Fritz, randolph@panix.com

Helpful insights, Randolph. Happy you joined the discussion, hope you'll return often. -- FredFirst

Randolph says: "The trolleys gave their name to the urban form; the 'trolley suburb.' The houses were often carefully designed by architects--names like Greene and Greene and Julia Morgan come to mind."

As the spouse of a confirmed roller coaster addict, I should add that trolley suburbs often included amusement parks - Coney Island was one, and there was one on the Key Route in Alameda, CA, several in Pennsylvania, and more elsewhere. Which means that the trolley suburbs were more than places where rich people went to rest... they were public destinations, where families would go to enjoy ferris wheels and other attractions, or stroll on the beach or in the countryside for a weekend, before returning to the cities where they lived.

And I'm with Fred: good to have you here, Randolph. -- Chris C.

The first time I heard the word "ecotone" was from my sister, who was telling me where to look for a home in a mid-sized city 20 years ago. But what she meant was not a place where human development met nature in the suburbs, but a boundary within the city. Now I live in a big, old "trolley suburb" and I'm fascinated to encounter "ecotone" again.

The trolley tracks at the end of my modest street are long gone, but I love the broad old houses that faced them, built of dark brick with deep, turn-of-the-century-style eaves and decorative windows. Towering oaks and mottled sycamores, elderly silver maples and the occasional doomed elm shadow even the smaller streets, where the hoi polloi used to have to hike down to the train stop. The trees and houses all bespeak maturity, stability, like an old-growth forest -- except for the silver maples, which are doubtless waiting for a chance to kill someone with a huge, brittle limb.

Even the wildlife is stable. My own lovely, menacing silver maple harbors exactly two -- never three or one -- aggressive, reddish-gray squirrels. A skunk visits my stoop about every other summer Monday -- Tuesday is garbage day. There is a raccoon out there somewhere. Robins and cardinals patrol my yard indifferent to me in the garden, and sparrows live year-round in my ivy.

But my city is as surely an ecotone as the outer 'burbs that chew up farmland faster than ranchers gulp rainforest. It's a social ecotone, a place where economic, racial and ethnic groups jostle, where a small change in climate can substantially change the landscape.

We have modest wealth and modest poverty. An approximate racial balance on the street is skewed wildly in the public schools, either because so many kids go to church schools or the young families move on after the first five or six years. They leave behind the elderly and the truly determined liberals, and a spirit of community as good as any small town's. The liberals are sponsoring a referendum on a gay-partnership registry. Conservative Christians of all races are outraged. The schools -- well, it's easy for the story to become more political than personal.

I, a child of a small, hill-country town who fought paranoia when moving to a city of only 16,000, probably chose this teeming, scary place not because of my politics but because of my grandfather, who moved into a sturdy, comfortable urban neighborhood like mine around 80 years ago. We kids could roam his wide, dusty back yard while the grownups talked; I remember the pear tree and the long-disused patio in the deep, grassless shade behind the garage. There was a mysterious, forbidden and fascinating attic; crumbling shades on the sleeping porch that flapped terrifyingly on Christmas eve and a faint smell of gas in the cellar. I swear that hint of gas in the cellar sold me on my first house. Moving here, I think I fell for the tree.

My grandfather's house still stands, unchanged and largely unpainted, back in New York state. Money has left his neighborhood for raised ranches and cathedral ceilings in less challenging places. What I have left is a box of his pressed-wax crayons and a disintegrating mandolin -- and, of course, an imprint, an imprint that jibes with my politics (so different from Grandpa's!), that has kept me in place so far. Then again, my daughter is just 6; much could happen still.

Thanks for sharing the forum!

-- P.
Thanks for writing here and for this welcome contribution! It took me a minute to figure out who was writing... but I got there. Can't believe you encountered the word "ecotone" that long ago - I had never heard it until Fred's suggestion. I hope you'll continue adding to our discussion. --Beth

I haven't figured out who it is. But I'd like to know! --Lisa

---

"P." is an old friend of mine - we've known each other since high school. He's an excellent writer and I'm encouraging him to a) write more, as in "here", and b) start a blog. --Beth

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20060115161337/www.magpienest.org/scgi-bin/wiki.pl?DiscussSuburbs

Trees and Place

Bi-Weekly Topics for Aug. 1, 2003

Trees and Home

I have lived a long life among tall trees and remember trees, as much as I recall the Appalachian hills and coves that have given them root, when I think of places I have lived and known. It is individual backyard trees that I first remember as significant markers of place. I recall them as favorite barriers to hide behind in hide-and-seek; branches to climb in and fall out of; horizontal limbs to swing from, letting go the rope and falling into muddy creeks; and of course, for their blessed shade from the blazing Alabama sun. Later on, I have clear memories of the sweet clean smell of pines at summer camp; of arching Live Oaks festooned in a tinsel of Spanish Moss on our deeper-south vacations; and the scrub oak of second growth forest where I often explored with my BB gun-- these forests of broad summertime leaves have become inseparable parts of my personal ecosystem of place.

Few who live here would know or care that we inhabit what forest science calls the Temperate Broad leaved Deciduous Forest-- a living realm or biome that consists of a collection of habitats similar to just a few other forests in the world (see the map). Where I have lived-- in the unglaciated southern Appalachian part of this biome-- is found the greatest diversity of broad leaved trees in the world. These tree species characteristically burst into flaming color in the fall of the year, then drop their leaves and live dormant and bare for six months. This alternate

dressing and gaudy undressing of the forest creates the Jekyll and Hyde vegetative calender and paints the backdrop in which southern mountain lives are lived out. In this, there must be myriad ways that trees create in us a sense of who and where were are, where on Earth we belong, effecting our rhythms and cycles in ways that would be unknown to one living in treeless places, or in evergreen forests that change little through the seasons.

While the treescape that surrounds me here in western Virginia most certainly has an impact on my way of thinking and of fitting into place, the forest -- and this is true of any vegetative script no matter where you live-- is itself the consequence of just so much moisture, a particular range of temperature through the growing year, a certain period of daylight and dark, of soil pH and depth and chemistry, and the effects of succession or change over short and vast stretches of time. And so if we are 'at home' in a world of particular tree species, it is also the climate and geology and history of that forest or prairie or desert that we are connected to by our familiarity with the plant life in those unique places. We live anywhere we chose; plants are tenants who must live where they can get along with the elements over the ages. There is a stability in this that I find grounding and comfortable.

Even though the southern forest was right out my back door while I was growing up, I confess I was an animal bigot for all of my precollege years. I thought plant study was for sissies until I had an eleventh hour botanical conversion midway along the path to a Masters in Zoology. Since that enlightenment in my mid-twenties, trees and flowering plants and lichens and ferns have consumed much more of my attention than snakes and mammals. I have taught field botany to college students, led innumerable field trips, and enthusiastically shown slides of Appalachian native plants to groups young and old. My family will testify that I can barely keep my eyes on the road or the trail for attending the trees and flowers and ferns that go by.

Today from my window, I look out on a vast green forest of rhododendrons and tulip poplars, mountain ash and basswood, spicebush and white pine. I watch the wild flowers bud and bloom from creek bank to ridge top. I can name them, and they are like old friends. The trees from our wooded valley here built this house, where the walls, floors, and ceilings are made of old, slow growing heart pine and the siding crafted from poplar trees that took first root on this piece of land more than 200 years ago. Our forest is inseparable from our weather and our bedrock's history, its trees are built up around me and shelter me, and it is among the whispering shadows of these wonderfully adapted fellow creatures that I feel truly at home.

This essay is written as part of the regular biweekly topic post at the Ecotone, where this week the focus is "Trees and Place".

Posted by fred1st at 06:32 AM | Comments (4) | TrackBack

Comments

RE: Mouth Toys If you arent already familiar with this product, then by all means go get one! http://www.kongcompany.com/ they are the greatest dog toy (especially labs and retrievers and any other mouthy dog) ever. Period. No if ands or buts. Virtually indestructable (I've had one last two puppys now). The dogs love them, and you'll learn to love them too. One of my favorite things to do is to fill them with peanut butter , give it to the pup, and be able to have a nice long 'quiet time' as the pup industriously trys to lick it all out.

Posted by: dave at August 18, 2003 07:50 AM

Yes, we've heard the peanut butter story. Some friends of ours make it last even longer by storing it in the freezer. How the heck do they get it all out? And what becomes of left-over PB inside? Whatever. If it works to preserve my poor hands and forearms from puppy incisors, I'm all for it! He'll have a Kong tonight!

Posted by: fredf at August 18, 2003 09:31 AM

Source: http://www.fragmentsfromfloyd.com/archives/2003_08.html#001359

Tree House

Ecotone Topic—Trees and Place

Trees lined my babysitter Mona's front yard on both sides, each one a different type, and one large tree stood apart from the others at the top of the yard by the fence and the road. I remember a walnut tree—its shells on the ground underneath—and a weeping willow. I can't remember what types the others were. Tracy and I, and sometimes other kids, played house with those trees in the summer. We each claimed a tree as our own for the afternoon. We'd visit each other often, of course, to pretend a lunch or play tea, but then we'd return home and stay alone for a while.

At the willow, we'd try to swing on the drooping branches and fail, but I still loved the willow. Its lashes formed a swaying wall around me, and inside its cave I felt removed from the rest of the yard, secret, in another place all together. I also loved the tree at the top of the yard, huge and alone, its shaded ground the best throne this world could offer, and I a tiny queen underneath, surveying Mona's yard from the slightly higher ground into which it had taken root many years ago. We would cartwheel across the entire yard with that tree as our destination, as our mark of accomplishment.

The early real estate deeds at the Archives where I work mark boundaries with trees. Surveyors used them as solid and permanent fixtures on the land. Steel posts mark my property now, but my home is still defined by trees. Returning from a far off wonderland, I am warmed by the sight of leafy trees carpeting hillsides or of stark bark in the winter spiking up from the ground, intermingling shards slicing the air. And then just add the wind. When it blows, the leaves and the moving air give each other voices, and their sound calls me back, interrupts my messy mind for a moment or two so I can live here, now.

Less often than I should, I lie beneath a tree and search up through its leaves and branches, peek at bits of broken sky above. From my point of view, close and surrounded, the green of leaf and blue of sky are on the same plane, forming one mass of color. I am still and under cover, playing house.

_____-

Read a passage from Mark Twain's *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*, in which the narrator describes the fairy tree of Domremy.

_____-

Read a poem I wrote remembering those times in Mona's front yard.

Comments

I have often said that the quality of my life is directly proportional to the amount of time I spend lying outdoors on my back, looking up. Like you, it has not been enough of late.

Posted by: fredf on August 1, 2003 08:23 AM

Yes, we are tiny queens when we're "inside" trees - these images and memories really resonated with me. And I have been staring at the gorgeous images at the head of this piece - those pinks and rose colors - absolutely beautiful, first thing this morning. Thank you.

Posted by: beth on August 2, 2003 10:44 AM

Source: http://otherwind.fademark.net/archives/000367.html#000367

the largest pecan tree in the world

It was a beautiful Sunday afternoon and we just felt like getting out of town. I had read about a garden in Weatherford that was open to the public and we decided to drive there and see it. With time on our hands afterwards we drove back through town and found a tourist center at the edge of downtown. It was open and we walked into a small room with a counter and an assortment of brochures and guidebooks.

We found somethng interesting. It was a photo-copied page with a black and white photo of a tree and a brief paragraph headlined “Largest Pecan Tree in the World.” There was a little map that showed it was just 3.5 miles north on Highway 51. The guy behind the counter had never been there, but Highway 51 was right outside the door. I pulled the car out of the gravel lot and headed north through the farmland, measuring the miles on the odometer.

I have always been happiest in the company of trees. When I was a freshman in Houston I used to take my books out to a grove of pine and oak in a forgotten corner of the campus and sit underneath a tree reading in the warm afternoons. Sometimes I would pace back and forth and read my essays out loud. I cannot recall ever seeing another person in that grove. Except for the squirrels and birds I had it all to myself. Years later I think I remember the trees better than the books I was struggling to understand. I would stay there until the light played out and then head back to my dorm along sidewalks set between parallel rows of oaks drenched in Spanish moss. In the waning light the trees seemed dark and mysterious and at the same time compelling.

Maybe my affinity for trees comes from having grown up in a forest. The property I grew up on southeast of Fort Worth was part of the Crosstimbers, once an impenetrable forest of trees with wood so hard that it was called the "cast iron forest." I did not realize that it was a forest until years later after the property had been sold. The trees were post oak and blackjack oak, what some call scrub oak because they are small and scrawny. Of course they had been thinned out to make room for suburban housing. My parents planted their own favorites - crepe myrtle, redbud and two tall pines in the front yard - but it was the small oaks with lichen-covered bark that I played under and learned to love. I have driven by the property recently. The pines now dominate the street, but the oaks all still seem to be about the same size. They are probably much older than their size would make them seem.

We passed a small sign by the side of the road that said “big tree” and had to double back. We saw a small farmhouse with a driveway, but we were reluctant to turn in there. The paper we had picked up warned that the tree was on private property but said the owners welcomed visitors. A couple hundred yards further I turned the car off onto a dirt road between a ploughed and fenced field and a pasture. The road wound past a barn and then toward a clearing in a line of trees. That looked like the destination.

But as we passed the barn I saw in my rearview mirror a man waving his arms. Apprehensively I stopped the car and got out. It was the farmer who owned the place. He knew we were looking for the tree but sure enough he did not mind. Although it turned out we were heading the wrong way and he would prefer that we park the car and walk before we got it stuck. He pointed the way and we set out across the field. We crossed a dried-up creek on a footbridge and passed into the woods.

The trunk of the pecan was huge and gnarled. It's enormous branches dipped low to the ground. Tricia and I stood at each edge of the canopy and tried to guess how far apart we were. The literature said the tree was 91 feet tall and over 200 feet across. It was believed to be over 1000 years old. We looked for pecans underneath and found a few but they were old and broken. It was not the right season.

A grove of trees always seems like a special place. Prairie Point is such a place. Over 150 years ago pioneers established a church there in a grove of oaks. The church closed its doors long ago but people from all over still gather there every year in July for a picnic. They bring food and set it out for everyone to eat on long boards nailed between the oaks. After they have eaten and socialized most head for the cemetery beyond the fence where they have friends or relatives.

Groves were some of the earliest sacred places. My ancestors worshipped the spirits of trees in ancient European forests, as have people of many other cultures. Maybe they were on to something. Touching the trunk of the big pecan it was hard not to feel that there was a consciousness there that transcended our own.

We walked back to the car and drove to the farmhouse. We signed the guestbook on the front porch and petted the dogs and then got back in the car and drove back the way we had come. We stopped at a farmers market and bought a watermelon. Weatherford is famous for its watermelon. Back home we sat outside in the warm evening under our own much younger grove of pecans and ate watermelon and spat the seeds onto the lawn.

This is part of the discussion on "trees and place" at the Ecotone wiki.

Posted by Bill Hopkins on July 31, 2003 08:28 PM

Comments

Mmmm. Now I want some watermelon. 1000 years old. I remember touching the stones of castle ruins in Wales and feeling excited to be connecting to the past. Touching a tree that old must bring an even greater connection, to the past and to the present.

Posted by: Wendy at August 1, 2003 08:36 AM

Really? A thousand years old? I know you're glad you went, what a great memory.

Posted by: fredf at August 1, 2003 08:37 AM

Bill, I'm so glad you mentioned groves, because they are so special, so memorable. It's no wonder we humans have often considered them sacred. I hope that pecan tree is still there too.

Posted by: beth at August 2, 2003 09:49 AM

I've been smelling pecan pie ever since I read this the other day.

How many pecan pies could it theoretically make in a good year?

Posted by: Joel at August 3, 2003 01:29 AM Source: http://www.prairiepoint.net/journal/archives/000124.html

rubysuz

the place whispered to my soul, the grounds sprang up around my feet, the dense moss drippy canopy climbing upwards like graceful old cathedral spires, this alaskan coastal forest breathed so heavy with life, it left cray-pas stains on my hands. settling down to its winters rest, the forest was no less alert, no less piercingly perceiving the pervasively pristine perspective. shhhh. i find forests so comforting in their group embrace, neighbor tress sofly carressing each other stories over my head, creating another biosphere about giant eyes height. an extreme environment, worn down with permeating marine rain, leaves of lichensuggling up the feet of trees, crawling alongside creeping moss electric mini verdant afro. my favorite path in our long fibrous hike thru alaska.

The Tree & The Big Tree

By O'DonnellWeb

Note: Fred has encouraged me (and probably anybody else who visits his blog) to join him and a few others in a bi-weekly writing effort focusing on "Place." This weeks subject is Trees and Place. It immediately triggered a memory - so I'm in this week. No guarantees I'll be a regular...but we'll see.

My first memories of childhood come from Torrejon, Spain, a small town outside of Madrid. My father was in the USAF, a member of the Strategic Air Command helping protect the world from the evil commies in the USSR and East Germany. We lived off-base, in a community of Americans that did not qualify for on base housing. The central gathering point for the kids of the neighborhood was The Tree.

I can't even guess at what type of tree it was. It was large and it's defining characteristic, and the reason it was so popular with the kids, was a wealth of very low hanging, very thick and sturdy branches. This was a tree designed for climbing, and climb we did. This tree seemed to have a safe occupancy level of about a dozen kids. I'm not sure the fire marshall would have approved, but I can't remember anybody ever falling out and being seriously injured. I also don't remember us allowing girls in the tree. This was back in the early 70's and the whole equal rights thing had not reached us yet I guess :) I'm not a height guy today , and I wasn't back them either. Although I did climb the tree, I had to if I wanted to maintain my standing among the other 6-8 year boys, I think I stayed on the lower branches most of the time.

This particular tree had another feature too. It extended over the fence and into the swamp. The swamp was off limits. It was not part of the military facility, and we were warned time and time again by our parents to stay out of the swamp. It was land owned by a crazy Spanish farmer who shot at American kids on his property. It was a dangerous place, inhabited by snakes and gypsies and all sorts of dangerous things. Of course, crazy guys with guns and mysterious gypsies are just the sort of things bored 7 year old boys are looking for. If they had told us the swamp was infested with girls we probably would have stayed away. As it was, we spent a lot of time in the swamp. We got in by climbing The Tree and jumping down on the other side of the fence. I don't

remember seeing any snakes or gypsies. I do have a vague memory of a shotgun warning, although I really don't know if it actually happened, or it was the product of our over active imaginations. Probably the latter...

The big kids hung out at The Big Tree (Our naming conventions lacked pizzazz). The Big Tree was off base somewhere, not accessible by foot or pedal power. The big kids used their mopeds to get there. Again, I have no idea what kind of tree it was. The big kids had built a fort in the tree. As I remember it, it wasn't much of a fort. It was a few planks spread between branches and a floor made out of scrap plywood. Ever once in a while, the big kids would let us come out to the The Big Tree with them. They gave us rides on their mopeds. This being the early 70's helmets were for sissies. I remember the big tree being fairly remote. It wasn't a good climbing tree at all. You really couldn't do anything there except climb up to the fort, which of course was off limits to us little kids. We were just happy to be there. The big kids would climb up into the fort, have a smoke, and then we would go back home. It seemed so exciting at the time.

As I was writing this, the appeal of The Big Tree finally hit me. This was the early 70's - smoking was cool. The big kids could smoke cigarettes on base all they wanted. I bet those weren't Marlboros they were smoking at The Big Tree. Funny how that connection hit me almost 30 years later.

Permalink

Comments

Smoking a fat one in the brances of a big tree... a wonderful double entendre of 'getting high' eh? Great post, thanks for joining the topic at Ecotone, Chris!

Posted by: fredf at August 1, 2003 10:27 AM

Chris, what a good story and well-painted picture! Happy to have you along at the Ecotone - please keep posting!

Posted by: beth at August 2, 2003 10:53 AM

Chris: Did you live in Royal Oaks, by any chance? I grew up in Madrid and though my father was not in the military, wasn't even American, we spent some happy Girl Scout summers in R'Oaks and an occasional Thanksgiving dinner on the base... I'd love to know if that Big Tree was still there. It sounds like an encina, an oak--do you remember if it could have been that?

Posted by: Pica at August 2, 2003 11:30 AM

Source:http://web.archive.org/web/20060104150744/http://www.odonnellweb.com/mtarchives/000648.html

8.1.2003

By Fieldnotes

His obsession was the result of unwavering imagination. And so when I'd awake just past dawn and find myself alone in the dome, I'd know where to find him. Coffee cup in hand he stood with a hose or a hoe, ant spray or fertilizer, tending his trees. When I looked at them, I saw their upward form, their tall smooth trunks, graceful few fronds on top, and the coconuts that greened and fattened there, then dropped milky and full. But he saw something hidden, something I couldn't see. His battle was with the roots. The roots needed tending, for it was the roots that would save him. Whatever time of year, the rainy season haunted him. There was never enough time to prepare, to fortify against the torrents that would inevitably come and wash away his land. Roots were needed.

The two-and-a-half hectares sloped down towards the ocean, and when he first bought the land, he'd done two things: he'd planted it with coco palms to stave off erosion, and he'd built a sea wall to fight off waves and the tides. The sea wall could be worried over--was it holding? was it tall enough?--but it couldn't be worked like the trees could be.

Every day was a march against the weather. Mornings, he'd do the weeding, the turning of soil; late afternoons he'd set up a hose from the holding tank at the top of the property, and water the trees. He never stopped, and in the evenings he'd worry because he hadn't done enough--could never do enough.

And in this way it was established that I could never do enough. There was no room in his world for a person who wasn't working. The world was a harsh place, and in Mexico, harsher still than elsewhere. He judged the inhabitants of our villge, our friends, by their willingness to work hard. A person who worked from dawn til dusk and beyond was doing just what was required. And many of our american neighbors shared this work ethic, obsessively fighting the jungle, the decay, the weather, and the relaxed work habits of our hired hands.

He never loved what I loved about Mexico. I loved what he hated, and what he feared. I loved and still do, the almost indecipherable shrug, the turn of the mouth, the raised eyebrow, the words half-praise, half-surrender, "manana, this is Mexico". I love the crashing of the rainy season, pounding pouring rains that leave mud and rivers where there was parched earth yesterday, the sweet smell of fecund jungle--decay and growth indistinguishable, the slow afternoons when friends stop by unannounced and everything stops, meals prepared, games played, conversations go all night chased by laughter.

But in his way, he loved his trees. He'd nurtured and cared for them like nothing else on this earth. For years, he'd kept a year-round caretaker who tended the trees while he was in the states. Now, we lived here, and he bent to the work daily. He'd wrap a shirt around his head for coolness, but leave his brown back exposed to the heat.

After each meal, I'd dump a little bucket of rinds and leftovers into the dirt around one of the palms, then chop the food into small pieces with a long-handled shovel, burying the coffee grounds, the egg shells, the tortillas that had hardened beyond use. The palms near the kitchen

got the most compost, and they needed it more than the rest, because they were closer to the salt spray of the ocean. Gardening on the beach is challenging for that reason. On our land the challenges were greater yet, because the soil was loamy. That's why the dirt at the base of the trees needed constant turning. The ground was red with clay, and didn't absorb water well. When the rains came, streams ran down the property everywhere: the driveway, at the edges, and around the buildings. The soil just left with the rain, leaving a new upturning of Huichol Indian shards to be discovered, taking the topsoil and depositing it useless onto the sand.

Perhaps ground cover would have been a more useful obsession. But where I saw streams and topsoil runoff, he saw a bigger calamity. He saw that someday the land would be taken away from him, ripped away by the roots. He knew that no matter who his lawyer paid off, no matter how many trees he planted, no matter how many fences he built, that land wouldn't hold: it would slip through his hands. He was right, the hurricane last year decimated the kitchen and both of the other palapas, but that was just the beginning. After his long fight with the federal agency who originally held the land, it was finally taken away from him early this year. After almost 20 years holding the soil, those trees will come down now, if they aren't already down. In their place will be a hotel, and nobody in those rooms will ever know what toil came before, what held the land, what lost it.

I like to remember hot afternoon breaks. We'd lay a coconut on a stump, then holding a machete high overhead, chip away at one end until a thin membrame was exposed. Then with the point of the blade, we'd pop a hole, and pass the coconut around and drink its sweet thin milk. Afterwards, we'd chop the hollowed ball and chew the fruit until we tired of it, and went back to work.

**

This post is part of a collective of posts--all in one way or another about Trees and Place--over at Ecotone: Writing About Place Please come and join us for discussion, or add a post. We'd love to have you!

posted by Lisa Thompson on 7:09 AM link | comments [postCount(105974697767876706);]

Source: http://www.field-notes.net/2003_07_27_archives.html#105974697767876706

A cleanly drawn wild

by One Pot Meal

My father's family is full of schemers brimming with schemes: my great-grandfather who built the Maryland house I grew up in and founded his own hellfire religion because the others weren't enough for him. His son, my great-uncle, who bought the house and planted acres of would-be Christmas trees, his fortune waiting for harvest, but instead he grew restless, sold the house to my grandparents who sold it to my parents, and the only trees harvested were cut down by us for our own holidays, choosing a trunk each year to gnaw with soft, plastic saws until we got cold and my father chewed it down with the teeth of a chainsaw.

The pines covered the hill at one end of the property, a long, dark horizon filling our view from the bay windows at the back of the house, stretching from the collapsed garden shed and small vineyard on one side to the thick maple and birch woods that bordered the highway on the other. We were smaller then, my brothers and I, and the lowest branches of the pine trees drooped over our low heads as the canopies of tents and the black ceilings of caves and dark night of African jungles carpeted with rust. Air and light couldn't even break in through the tight weave of branches and boughs, and the sour smell of needles and soil settled in the backs of our throats as we hushed in awe of the quiet we'd found. We could slip under the canopy at the bottom of the hill and climb to the top invisible, emerging into the cluster of clearings strung together in rooms inhabited by my younger brother's invisible friends, a whole family worked out in detail, each member assigned a break in the trees, a history, a particular design of his friendship.

The rows were deliberate, the straight lines of hand-planting I've seen later in the Scottish Highlands where sheep and landlords cleared forests and geometricians work to reseed them, rivers of darker green pines curling between lighter fir banks up one hill after another. Our own forest was a small swathe of that planning, the map of my great-uncle's desires and dreams, and the schemes that were dreams set in motion, so why not a house laid out among them? Why not a family living in the negative space of our childhood, surrounded by the jungles and caverns and frontier forts on the edge of our cleanly mowed yard? For all the wild, open spaces we ran through and worked to make tame the banks of our pond stocked with catfish and snapping turtles that could, we assured ourselves, take off a dangled, pink finger; the baseball diamond/football field/soccer pitch/battleground my father scythed clear of the high grasses that fought yearly to claim it; the swaying yellow fields he'd given up to those same grasses where a leap in the wrong direction covered a body with bristles and thorns, the wide open fields whereI vanished when kidnappers from the news stole into my sleep we spent a lot of time under the pine trees. We packed peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and set out on expeditions into architected danger and chaos, a cleanly drawn wild where we felt safe in our terror. We knew the bounds of our darkness, our jungle, and in a world that was always getting wider and more dangerous we could always follow the flow of the hill to safety. When we crept into that particular darkness, we always knew what we were getting into.

I don't know when the pine trees stopped growing, or when I overtook them, but they're smaller now than they were before we sold the house a decade and a half ago. I visited once during college, snuck into a stranger's yard ringed by clusters of identical glass-and-brick houses, squat and heavy as bullfrogs, instead of by cornfields, their front yards sprouting hedges instead of loose cows and old tractor parts. I could hardly crouch to slip under the canopy, and was shocked by bright beams of light that slipped untroubled through the withered fingers of boughs that scratched my back as I crawled. Giving up, I backed out and saw that tall grasses have encroached on the ballfield, on the pond banks and house, so the whole place feels smaller; even the hill lies down flat. And I'm tall enough to watch traffic roll by on the highway without a glance toward a few scraggly pine trees in a clump on a hill.

Written for Ecotone: Writing About Place

01 Aug 03 | Comments (1) | TrackBack (0)

Comments: My grandfather also had a Christmas tree "ranch", as we called it, up on a hill in New York State. I didn't even think of it as a potential topic until I read your evocative story. That place has changed a lot too due to years of inattention, but it used to be dense and magical.

Thanks for this excellent post and for reminding me of a part of my own childhood. Posted by beth at August 2, 2003 11:03 AM

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20040307104426/www.onepotmeal.com/2003/08/index.html

August 1, 2003

By Bowen Island Journal

My contribution to this week's Ecotone collective blogging project on trees and place*:*

Have you ever seen an orange forest?

There is a moment every fall in Ontario when the maple trees turn orange and red and the sky becomes deep blue, the deepest blue you have ever seen, and the air sharpens up a little. I lived for that moment every year for about the first 26 years of my life. For me, living in Ontario was epitomized in many ways by the experience of that moment. When I ask the question to folks out here on the coast and describe the experience, I am met with genuine awe.

The year I moved to British Columbia, I was surprised by how overwhelmed I felt by missing this scene. Here the fall progresses through deeper and darker shades of grey, and the forests become greener and wetter and more pungent. Mushrooms sprout everywhere and the trees seem to sigh and draw a breath to gird themselves against the winter wind storms to come. I was sorely disappointed when my mid fall moment never materialized. I remember feeling totally dislocated.

It took me a couple of years to anchor myself to the moods of the trees on the coast, and it happened in 1995 on Cortes Island, about 150 kilometers north of here. One hot day in July I was sitting on the porch of the cabin we frequent, reading and writing a little when I suddenly noticed that everything had stopped. There was no bird song, no wind, and strangest of all, the tress had stopped moving. Not so much as a Douglas-fir needle stirred. I became acutely aware of a feeling that the season was turning; that everything that had grown and sprouted to this point in time had reached its peak and was now turning towards decay. It was a profound moment, as narrow and fine as a knife edge, and just as palpable.

I have a new relationship with trees, and they certainly define my place here. In the fall there are days when the term "rainforest" seems so appropriate. The rain falls and when it stops, the trees keep it going. They drip and spray water on the forest floor for hours afterwards.

And in the winter, when the Pineapple Express winds blow at speeds exceeding 80 km/h, it's the threat of a Douglas-fir limb coming through the ceiling that puts the profundity into the moment.

So surrounded are we with the big trees of the coastal Pacific rainforest - the Douglas-firs, hemlocks and red cedars - that I almost take them for granted. I don't think of them much on their own, neither their overwhelming presence or huge size.

Once in a while though, like last week when my brother was here from Toronto, the sheer breathtaking girth of them is brought to my awareness again. Out on a walk in Crippen Park last week, my brother pointed to an old Douglas-fir that rose straight and cylindrical out of the forest floor up a couple of hundred feet and said, very quietly, "Look at that."

And it truly is an amazing thing. a tree so huge, five people can't join hands around it. So tall that it rakes the clouds for moisture. So green that the light beneath it takes on a permanently cool hue.

As amazing as an orange forest against an azure autumn sky.

posted by Chris at 10:43 AM

Source:
http://www.chriscorrigan.com/miscellany/bijournal/2003_08_01_archive.html#105975983672632842

July 26, 2003

Review: *The Trees in My Forest* by Bernd Heinrich

By Northwest Notes

I learned one of my favorite tree facts from this book: the explanation of how water rises to the topmost, thinnest twig of the tallest trees—and does so with no energy expenditure on the part of the tree. Adhesion and evaporation of water molecules provide the mechanism. A water molecule is absorbed into a root and pulls other water molecules behind it; meanwhile a water molecule evaporates out of a leaf in the top of the tree. The next water molecule is pulled up by adhesion, pulling all the water behind it in a chain reaching all the way back to the tree's root. Water moves hundreds of feet straight up, one molecular step at a time.

Bernd Heinrich is a biology professor who grew up loving the woods of New England and was eventually able to buy his own large piece of forested land in Maine. Over a period of decades, he's studied and managed his forest. He plants for healthy native diversity, thins areas of rampant growth of a single variety, plants seeds to see how they develop over years, and marks trees for further observation. He makes detailed and beautiful drawings of hundred of trees and their flowers, seeds, and leaves, some of which are included in *The Trees in My Forest*. He supplements his experimentation with readings of the research of others, speculates on the influence of natural selection on the trees in his forest, and presents the results of his passionate study in this book.

Heinrich's writing style is so relaxed that I felt as if I were walking with him through his woods, with him pointing out amazing details and explaining their significance. He has strong opinions about lumber companies' replanted "forests," which aren't really forests but homogeneous crops of identical, cloned trees of the same age, and little else. A forest is a mind-bogglingly complex

system, not a farm. But Heinrich doesn't raise the reader's blood pressure by stridently harping on the mistakes of the modern economy; instead he adds to our understanding and appreciation of forests. Most of his more activist-styled writing appears toward the end of the book and is as well-mannered as the rest of his writing.

Take a walk in the forest with this author.

(This review is also posted on Blogcritics.)

Posted by Fran at July 26, 2003 08:05 PM | TrackBack

Comments

Well you can imagine this book captured my attention. Thanks for the pointer and the captivating review as well.

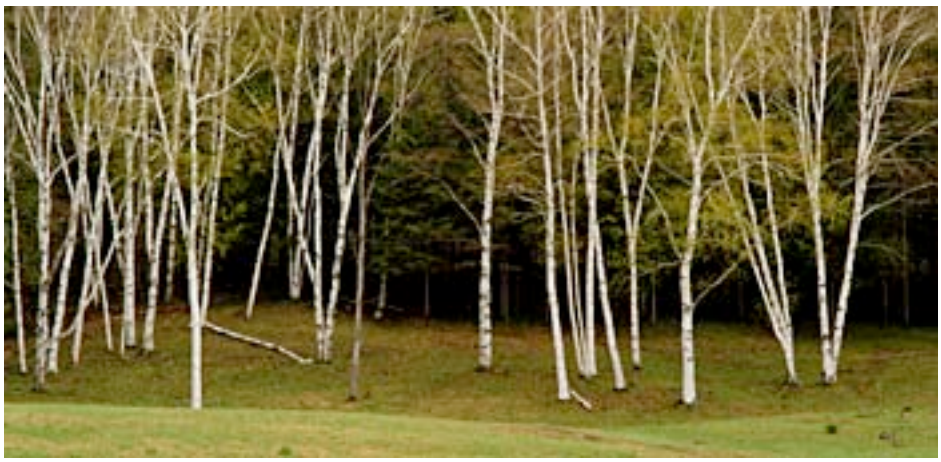
Posted by: fredf on July 27, 2003 02:55 PM

Sounds like a great book! I'll have to check it out. I've always loved trees and forests. I'm dying to see these illustrations you speak of too.

Posted by: Josh on July 28, 2003 07:22 AM Source: http://www.northwestnotes.net/archives/000256.html

TREES: Ecotone Topic for August 1

By cassandra pages



Birches. Photograph by J.

I live in a forest. Anyone who doubts that should fly over northern New England: you cant see the people for the trees. When visitors arrive from un-woody places, like England, or our new neighbors from virtually tree-less Iceland, they are overwhelmed by the omnipresence of trees,

and the way the forest dominates not only landscape but life. We heat with wood, build with wood, boil tree sap into syrup; smell wood being cooked into paper and sawn into boards, wait for lumber trucks and trees being skidded out of the forests, watch rivers of yellow tree pollen flow in the streets after rain, see trees breathing their oxygen back into the clouds. Our world here is green, and blue, and more green: Ver-mont was aptly named.

In a city we find ourselves one among many, and so the woman in the red dress, or the man who sings out from his newstand as you pass it each day becomes a focus. Here there are too many trees to comprehend, and so its the white pine standing taller than all the rest that captures your attention; or the grove of thorny locusts above the riverbank, knarled and conversant like old souls. I could write in a dozen directions about trees, but for todays topic Im just going to offer an essay I wrote several years ago about a tree that shared my place on earth for many years.

While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.
Wordsworth, Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey

The big willow is being cut. Im upset about it, know it has to be done, but its such a great and beautiful tree, worthy of being mourned. Ive looked up into its branches for twenty years now, especially on summer evenings, when the only light was from the moon, to see stars shining through the leaves so far above my head, and fireflies dancing among them. It always felt like its own world, up there, in the bowls formed by those great dark branches, populated by things of

the air and heights. A pair of orioles nested in the tree each spring, serenading me as I turned over the first soil in the garden; later their purse-like nest swayed above me. And it was home to many smaller birds: chickadees, nuthatches, warblers, feeding no doubt on a vast colony of insects. Kneeling next to the garden beds Id feel drips of water raining down on me all summer, even during dry weather, and wonder whether willows really wept, if that was how they got their name.
Branches fell continually, especially in spring storms, and I used the long supple tender ones to make woven fences and supports for herbs and other plants. It was a high-maintenance tree for us, and we didnt even own it, but I never minded. I drew it many times, painted a watercolor, wrote a poem --trying unsuccessfully to capture that mysterious, secret world suspended in the sky.

When this hill was a pasture, a stream flowed between our property and the neighbors, and along its banks a line of willows grew up. Ours was the first house cut out of the farm proper, near the turn of the century. Over the last twenty years, the hillside, divided and subdivided, became house lots. The willows -- streambank trees, never intended for shade -- were left in one back yard or another, sending their shallow roots into basement walls and dropping branches each spring. Homeowners, sympathetic at first, grew tired of taking care of the trees and worried when major damage occurred in thunderstorms. Its understandable. But as is always the case, it doesnt matter that the trees were here first, that we are, in fact, the ones who have encroached on them.

Last night, after dinner, the chain saws in the neighbors yard were finally silent. I went out on the back porch and looked over at the willow. The tree stood there still, its great wide crown shorn, one main trunk remaining with all its branches and leaves, the others amputated into huge logs that lay around the base. It was a horrible sight but heroic in a way; the tree, still alive, retaining something of its nobility and the strength emanating from that huge solid trunk, easily five feet in diameter at chest height. Yet it was doomed; this would be its final night, the last time those branches reached toward sunlight, leaves stretching a few new millimeters in length. I came back upstairs, drew a basin of water for the dishes, and started to cry, filled with sorrow for mankind, for being alive at a time and in a culture which values the safe, the cheap, the fast solution: whatever fits easily into our lives and causes the least inconvenience. I cried rueful tears for myself, made so sad by a tree -- how out of step I am, and how painful it is to stubbornly refuse the cries of a culture that would gladly give up Bach for the sitcom-of-the-moment; where artists, musicians and poets eek out a living and developers get rich.

Ill remember the willow best on those nights, years ago, when I was trying to figure out if God existed. After Id meditated for an hour, the incense burned down to ash, candle extinguished, Id come out into the night, and to my polished mind, open, newly innocent, every sensation appeared fresh, important, astonishing. The Milky Way had never seemed so vast, the air so exhilarating, the snow under my feet so white. And there the willow loomed: hugely alive, pulsating with being-ness and a quality of home that strangely did not feel closed to me. I stopped trying to paint it or write about it, but just stood there, night after night, as if it were part of the meditation ritual; looking up, not thinking, I let it tell me whatever it had to say.
7:43 PM |

Source:
http://cassandrapages.blogspot.com/2003_07_27_cassandrapages_archive.html#105978142617160590

The Elfin Forest

By Pax Nortona

I'm surrounded by a sparse forest of tall trees. Long leaf pines, eucalyptus, liquid ambers, mimosas, and purple plums sprouting from an emerald green lawn make this sun-charred place resemble an Eastern woodland or, in real estate dreams, Scotland which is over the horizon and alive with the sounds of sheep — as these hills once were a century ago. The landscaper's artifice is to equate home with the place where you escape from the freeways and the concrete of the workplace. There are several office complexes down the hill here and they are not landscaped much differently. There's concrete in both places and a lie being told by the trees.

Not a single one of the trees that I mentioned is native to this land. We have here a forest that most overlook because the trunks are short and the canopies beneath our waists and beneath our knees. The "Elfin Forest" is what Francis Fultz called the brush in a book written in the 1920s. It's the chaparral, the land that rips your clothing off if you run too fast through it, named for *chaparro*, the scrub oak. The land loves fire. Every few years a conflagration rolls through these parts, tearing away the round top bushes of the dwarf trees. For two or three years following, medusoid black stumps carry the memory.

Then seeds in the ground and deep rootstocks start to replace what was lost. A shrub which poets call "chamise" and fearful landowners call "greasewood" adapts itself with bellicosity to the circumstances here. Drop a match on a stand of greasewood and you have a fire that burns as insanely as a frying pan. It not only sacrifices itself but its self-immolation carries to the white sage, the manzanita, and the coyote brush which stand adjacent. The terrible holocausts that you see on television from your chairs near those Eastern forests — those are fueled by greasewood. When the storm has blacked the land, a secret manifest destiny has begun. Chamise resprouts from its own roots. Following the season of rain, stands crop up in places where underground pathfinder branches reached in previous seasons of abundance. The stuff spreads, conquers. Homeowners fret because greasewood lives only for itself and the fire which took everything seems to be prepared to give everything to this plant.

It behaves a little bit like the Bush Administration in Iraq, you see, destroying and giving itself favors in the reconstruction.

Other plants have learned to resist, either by paratrooping down as seeds, or, like coyote brush, being resistant to fire. Gardeners who want a natural feel about their canyon homes love coyote brush: it does not tempt or scourge.

Coyote brush, scrub oak, and greasewood live on dry slopes. What Easterners would call "real trees" live in the clefts between the slopes. The live oaks rise to heights of thirty to fifty feet. If I showed you the leaves, you wouldn't take them for an oak because they are toothed ellipses.

They have acorns: that's the giveaway. Near me, a long line of such oaks overarches Trabuco Canyon Road. It's like those arbors you see in old films about people who visit rich relatives in overwrought mansions. Except the color coming down through the leaves at midday is turquoise. Again our habitat declares its separate identity from the false forests of this hilltop.

Someday, when California fades like all the old cosmopolitan civilizations did and tourists come to visit the ruins of the Crystal Cathedral and gawk at the faux Matterhorn, these trees will unite with the bunch grasses to reassert their claim to us. I've been to Greece, I've seen how great centers of trade can disappear in a wheatfield or under a rocky slope. The plants shove themselves forth and cover our artificial promontories. The real mountains here will spit forth endless tons of gravel and dirt, burying our lives. When we are the subject of archaeology, our motion pictures mere fragments of celluloid that researchers will squint through or imprisoned on unreadable DVDs and video tapes, the short forest will show that it knows the land better than the liquid ambers and the purple plums. The song of the chaparral shall flow off the hills, giving the grasses space so that eyes can see the duet.

Maybe there will be sheep again, bighorns come down from the adjacent stone summits.

Posted: August 1st, 2003 under Ecotone. Comments: 2 | Twitterings

Comments

Comment from fredf
Time: 8/2/2003, 2:43 am

Our eastern forest, too is somewhat artificial, at least compared to that of several hundred years ago when the original Americans used fire in their game management practices, opening up the way for shade-intolerant species.

The topic of plant success and succession… esp as one sees when 'lost civilizations' are reclaimed by the native vegetation… is always a humbling reality we often forget. Thanks for the reminder. Ashes to ashes, landscaped office parks to dust…

Comment from beth
Time: 8/2/2003, 11:47 am

A nice piece, Joel, with excellent and humbling points about nature's eventual supremacy. And thanks, now I understand what "chaparral" really is - I've seen it, but I didn't get it.

Source: http://paxnortona.notfrisco2.com/?p=1482

Little Apple

By Feathers of Hope (Pica)

This entry is another Ecotone collaborative blog on place, which this time looks at trees.

Some trees are meant to be touched.

I think it's the manzanita's bark. Warm copper-red and smooth, smoother by far than eucalyptus whose bark has shredded off in shaggy, untidy strips. The manzanita's shredding is subtle and delicate, waxy rolls curling like planed metal or even plastic. But there is none of the coldness of metal or lifelessness of plastic. This is a warm tree with a warm heart.

I first saw manzanitas in Napa Valley, in the hills above Calistoga. I couldn't stop stroking their trunks. Madrones have a similar bark--both these trees are in the *Ericaceae*, same family as blueberries--but with their larger, more imposing bulk and leaves, seem less inviting to touch. Many manzanitas rarely grow taller than eight feet, qualifying more as shrubs than trees--perhaps it's the scale, as well as the irresistible bark, that draws me. The same is true of Brancusi's sculpture of a seal in the Pompidou Museum in Paris--the combination of scale and smoothness--that makes touching it irrestistible (a headache for museum staff).

Ursula K. LeGuinn set her utopian anthropological novel *Always Coming Home* in a Napa Valley with a different future than the one it seems to be embarking on... the characters share a strong kinship with the land they inhabit, share a lot with the Native Americans who lived there over 200 years ago. They greet all the living things they encounter with a "heya" as if they were meeting a friend on the road.

Heya madrone, heya coyote, heya jackrabbit. Heya foothills. Heya northern chaparral.

Heya, manzanita, I still say, even if sometimes not out loud. This one is never a stretch for me. It is a tree with a warm heart. Touch me, it says.

Posted by Pica at August 1, 2003 09:10 PM | TrackBack

Comments

In our woods, ironwood or musclewood has the same tactile imperative. However, being a tree hugger, it takes little provocation to touch a tree; yet some are more huggable than others.

Posted by: fredf at August 2, 2003 08:24 AM

I can't stop touching trees, either. For me a favorite is yellow birch, although we don't have so many here as where I grew up. There was one I used to visit everyday, and I rubbed places on its trunk into burnished gold.

Posted by: beth at August 2, 2003 12:00 PM

Source:http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2003/08/01/little_apple.html

To All the Trees that I Have Loved

By Laughing~Knees

Tree watching over a dolmen, Funen Island, Denmark, 1988 (I'm not sure what kind of tree this is. I think it's a beech, but if anyone knows, I'd be grateful if you'd inform me)

This is the fourth installment in the ongoing online essays series at Ecotone, this time on the theme "Trees and Place" Please drop by and have a look at what other people are writing, or possibly contribute your own essay if you like.

Love knows no bounds, so the saying goes. At times I wonder about the cogs that spin around upstairs in my attic, because most of the emotions that have twirled and waltzed me around to that indescribable music seemed sourced to some transmitter on another planet, completely disconnected to any wires in my own little control panel. I've had my share of relationships with women and each time some tugging force manifested itself without my say so. Each of the women were different in so many ways, and each went their own way with vestiges of wonder, joy, and sadness. Without having known each of these women, the steps that I have taken so far through my life would have left me that much further behind in my unsteady progress across the stepping stones in the river. Men have, of course, played significant roles in the drama, but none with the intimacy and intensity of what I have known with women, to whom I have both completely opened the gates, while at other times letting out the monster. Love has turned me inside out, lifted me to where no man had gone before, and dragged me kicking into the open.

So it has been with trees, too. Perhaps it is their seeming immoveability, their tendency to be there when you get back. When you look up, there they are. They can usually be counted on to take you as you are, without comment, and to listen without prejudice. And unlike so many friends, perhaps, their stationary nature provides a pillow against time, somehow creating the illusion that nothing changes and that you can rest easy in their infallible devotion to one place. They are the friends that preserve the substance of memories when you return home.

The first tree that arises in my own memories was a venerable old Weeping Willow that stood in the back yard of the Parkway Village housing complex in New York, back in the 1960's. It was a craggy old stick with crooked branches and a wide gash in its abdomen where mud dauber wasps found refuge. The long strings of its leaves cascaded from the scant branches that clawed at the sky and swayed in the wind. A grey squirrel resided in a crook in its cranium, dashing out along the limbs to chatter at me as I sat playing among the roots, or tightroping out to the ends of the branches when I clambored among the boughs. For four summers that tree and I grew together, and when my family moved to a new apartment that looked right out at the backyard, I would greet the Willow every morning from my bedroom window.

Then, in the winter of 1968, a great blizzard hit, turning the night blue and the wind screaming across the window panes. In the middle of the night a great crack woke me and when I ran to the window I witnessed, through the indistinct blurr of snow and darkness, the great form of the Willow lying prone in the yard. I cried that night and still grieve for the loss of a great friend.

My family moved to Japan the following year. New trees that I had never seen before stood watching as I took my first tentative steps in the new country. Among them I discovered new creatures and fresh adventures and as I grew the visions that they evoked seeped into my making. One particular tree, a Camphor Tree, five stories tall and just as wide, with a trunk as wide as a Volkswagen, stood behind my junior high school building. It was a place few students ventured and where I loved to retreat to when I wanted to be alone. One afternoon I was reading a book at the Camphor's base, when three boys, Peter from Australia, Marcel from South Africa, and David from America, found me there. There was little talk. They were big and strong and thorough. Afterwards I lay sobbing between two huge roots, blood from my nose spilling across the wrinkled bark. I lay there until night fell, clutching the great roundness of the tree.

After high school I moved alone to Oregon, on the west coast of the United States. In all the ten years that I lived there, no single tree stands out. Rather it was like walking into some grand banquet hall of giants, 30 meter tall Titans, the Douglas Fir, standing at attention at every corner

and every open space. The mountains were covered by them. The university campus ran like a green carpet under their legs. When I looked up at their faces their eyes were far away, as if contemplating the sea to the west. They never looked down. And so for ten years I scuttled among these mighty sentinels, getting smaller with each day. When I left Oregon I was no more than a mouse, but my eyes had learned to consider the horizons, and the distant clouds, and the wind.

Boston was my next stop. After Oregon it seemed as if walls had closed in. The company of trees dwindled to what the verges allowed, but I was grateful for the Plane Trees around Harvard. And one sunny spring day I stared amazed during my first encounter with a weeping tree, a Sugar Maple leaking sap with the first warm spell of the year, a delirious joy at the retreat of the cold of the northern winter.

I had found a woman I loved in Boston, but could not love Boston itself and I felt I had to leave. So I forsook what I had started there and returned to Japan. The distance was great. The telephone bills ate half my paychecks. The one who was waiting for me couldn't bear the strain and left. In my sorrow I took to the mountains around the small town at the foot of Mt. Fuji, every weekend walking farther and harder, till my feet ached and I would sing Beatles' songs at the top of my lungs as I descended in the evenings. On one small and almost unnoticed mountain that pitched itself right at the knees of Mt. Fuji and commanded a wide perspective of the entire waistline of the great volcano, stood four aging Japanese Cedars. They reminded me of my beloved Douglas Firs in Oregon, standing in the same regal straightness and also looking away over my head. Many afternoons I fell asleep at their feet, bees buzzing in the grass and crows cawing in the distance. One time I decided to camp there and I sat all night listening to Racoon-Dogs, Red Foxes, and Sika Deer shuffling amidst the underbrush. The following morning I stood naked beside one Cedar trunk, watching mist rising from the valley, as Mt. Fuji rose like a golden queen in the rising sun.

And so the circle made a full turn. Tokyo is my home again. The trees that I have loved still stand behind me along the long road, and I wonder if they will be there if I were to return to give them my regards. Tokyo is cutting down much of its tree kin. It is a lucky gift if you can open your window and hear the leaves sighing. And in that perhaps I am lucky. For, outside my window, for the past three years, I am able to rest my eyes upon a big chested Magnolia Tree. In spring she bursts her corset and waves at the sky with a thousand white gloves. The first bird of the dawn, the Brown-eared Bulbul, heralds the light with his piccolo screech, from atop the highest branches. And in strong winds, such as the big blow earlier today, all the fat leaves turn up in prayer, asking only for another day. Just another day. I watch and smile and nod in agreement.

Posted by butuki at 02:04 AM in Japan, Community, and Daily Life | Permalink | Comments (3)

Comments

Thank you for this wonderful memoir. No wonder you shared my grief atthe loss of that willow. I especially appreciated your writing about the majestic Douglas firs with their faraway gaze, and the Japanese cedars. Many of us see to be commenting on the “protective” quality of trees for us, in addition to our need to care for them, and if that’s so, it makes sense that we feel dislocation, grief, and even anger when we lose them.

Posted by beth at August 3, 2003 04:56 AM

My earliest memory about trees was that of seeing an orange grove near our home bulldozed, piled, and burned. The ashes fluttered out of the sky as we came out of a bakery and my mother told me to cover them so that I wouldn't catch one between the lids.

That's behind all the landscape here in Southern California for me now. That and dairies that are no more.

Posted by Joel at August 3, 2003 07:15 AM

The rootedness and permanence of trees providing landmarks to come back to, versus their being plowed into heaps and burned, or our grief when they fall victim to storms… this is a tension that recurs in Ecotone posts where we look at the things that contribute to our grounding in place, and your essay is a wonderful contribution to this subject. Thanks.

Posted by fredf at August 3, 2003 08:01 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20041206233057/www.butuki.com/archives/2003_08.html#000054

The Aging Of Neighborhoods

By Feathers of Hope (Numenius)

This is a post on trees for the biweekly discussions of the Ecotone wiki.

If one looks at satellite imagery of Davis, two neighborhoods show up as being heavily wooded, the College Park area north of campus, and a tract north of Montgomery Street in South Davis. Both are quite desirable and expensive places to live, owing in part to the large trees there. Though there are a few valley oaks amongst the trees, most of these trees are not native to the site, and were planted when the tracts were laid out.

The time it takes trees to mature exceeds the planning horizons of most developers and city workers by a good bit. When I travel through new developments like Mace Ranch shown above, a place with a very low tree canopy to rooftop area ratio, a place where the garages dominate the houses which dominate their lots, I wonder if it will ever appear as forested as College Park. Somehow I doubt it.

Posted by Numenius at August 2, 2003 11:16 PM | TrackBack

Comments

Why, it looks as if those homeowners have a veritable forest...THREE trees...of a species not expected to gain much girth, apparently, planted so close to the house.

Can you point me to a site that allows public use of satellite imagery (I know about terraServer) and would work with a dialup connection?

Posted by: fredf at August 3, 2003 03:27 AM

my son says that those new areas in davis have no personality. no trees, all houses look the same.... i agree! :-)

Posted by: Fernanda at August 3, 2003 09:04 AM

Source:http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2003/08/02/the_aging_of_nei.html

I Think that I Shall Never See…

By Travelertrish's Journal

I'm astonished at how fast the grass has grown in a week. Apparently, it has rained like the dickens all summer while I was traveling and certainly this week has been no exception. The folks out West would pay dearly if they could have about half of what we've had. There are fires still burning out there, and I'll never forget the smell of the forest fire, the sinister yellow look of the sky and the sight of all those burned, whitening carcasses of trees along the Oregon highway. It's hard to imagine what it's like to live every summer as a Fire Season. As I drove along the burn-blackened highway, I wept for the trees.

I was telling my British friends about my American acquaintance who is lobbying hard in our little town for a tree ordinance that would require a permit if someone wanted to cut down a venerable old tree or even a young stand of trees. The Windles looked at me amazed. The very idea that just anyone could cut just any tree down without so much as a by-your-leave was unheard of. If you let people do THAT, you won't GET the mature trees, they said.

Maybe I have developed this sensitivity to trees recently, a consequence of my young friendship with the Brits. But now that I think about it, I was a tree climber, a tomboy who once aroused the fervent concern of our neighbors because I'd climbed so far in the tree the trunk was as big around as my fist, and I was singing the Star-Spangled Banner from the very top, swaying in time to the music. My mother thought I was a strange child, and had not a clue what to do with me, so she just let me climb trees and make fantasies up in their branches.

And the sound, this winter, unmitigated by any whirring electrical appliances (since the power was out for days), of tree branches cracking and crashing in the park behind my house, one after another, all day and all night, was one of the saddest sounds I've ever heard. We had two ice storms last winter: the first deposited two inches of ice on the trees, the second an inch. The trees suffered. Truly hurt. I knew it, to my bones, and wept for them then.

A guy from the Scottish mystical commune Findhorn gave a lecture I attended in which he gave the formula for talking to trees. Imagine yourself a tree, he said. What would your life be like? Rooted in the same spot, immobile except for the smaller branches. Receiving weather, not running or sheltering from it. Drinking what rain arrives. Knowing wind, in all its moods. Visited by birds and squirrels. Lived in. Touch a tree, he said. Put your arms around it, as far as they can go.

Then he got into more mystical pursuits, like feeling the tree's energy, listening to the sounds of the leaves as if they were whispers of what the tree might be saying to you. Talk back, then, he said. Tell the tree the kinds of things such a creature might understand.

My travels this season have taken me to the feet of some extraordinary trees, the Sequoias of the

Sierra Nevada mountains and the towering Douglas Firs of the Olympic Peninsula rain forest of Washington State. One man at the Olympia National Forest called the grand old fir "Old Doug." And there was the General Sherman Sequoia, 2700 years old and the largest living thing on earth in sheer volume. I admit to having hugged a couple of trees, too. They grow so big out there, so old, so silently.

As I drove back into the East, I was struck by our long, winding tunnels of trees overhanging the roads, all the green in such profusion that I knew how miraculous our landscapes would seem to those westerners whose trees are few and far between, stuck on mountains while the valleys below are dessicated and sparse or watered with the life of lakes and streams that can, some of them, ill-afford to share.

This year, the Windles taught me to appreciate the individual tree, to admire its shape against the fields, to notice how different-shaped trees work in a wide vista in a garden. Our forests here in the East are a jumble of well-watered trees, little dogwood flowering white in the understory in spring, maples blazing red and orange in fall, but usually just tunnels of dark green, masses of them making our mountains furry and soft. To see the individuals, to begin know their lives or to hear their voices, I had to go West, where they are burning or scarce.

Source: http://travelertrish.livejournal.com/61722.html

Desiring Daphne

By The Coffee Sutras

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Apollo and Daphne by Antonio del Pollaiuolo

I became interested in the myth of Apollo and Daphne after reading the first, somewhat terrifying pages of Samuel R. Delany's *Dhalgren*. The story goes basically like this: Apollo, having angered Eros with an insult, is struck by one of Eros's golden arrows, causing him to fall obsessively in love with the nymph, Daphne. Daphne, for her part, has been struck with another arrow causing her to be repulsed by all thoughts of love. Apollo pursues her relentlessly. Desperate to be saved, Daphne begs her father, a river god, to change her form. Immediately she is changed into a laurel tree, thus providing Apollo with one of his key symbols. You can read the story in detail here.

It's interesting to me that in this myth we see joined art (Apollo was god of the arts), desire (eros), and nature. I've often loved particular trees, and have felt moved to remember them in verse. A glance back through poems I've written over the years show trees to be a recurring image. Here's one I wrote more than twenty years ago:

By Drakes Creek

Between this neighbor farmer's pasture
and Drakes Creek
there is a strip of woods
free of undergrowth
where cows stand in shade
during the heat of the day
The edge drops off to the water
about fifteen or twenty feet
Along it grow beech trees
tall and very old

One fell recently
and lies across the creek
its leaves and tufts of grass
on the mound of dirt it carried with it
still green
The soil here is eroding
These trees shall fall
The root system of one has been exposed
and reaches out above the damp earth
dark and interwoven

Along this cliff there is also a wall
built of stones
running straight for some distance
an earlier farmer's attempt
to mark his boundary
It no longer fits this scene
with dirt working its way slowly
toward the wide creek--
the perpetual movement of earth to water

The wall is a mere gesture
inescapably part of the process
covered with moss and small plants
and changed in other ways I cannot know
But the struggle of these beeches is my own
The grasping roots of this tree, clinging to falling soil
remind me of veins
standing out bold on my arms
when I lift a heavy object
or bulging along the length of my calves
when I run a long distance

For more on trees and place, visit the Ecotone wiki.

Posted by K. at August 3, 2003 05:24 PM

Source:http://web.archive.org/web/20051024025444/sainteros.com/weblog/archives/000346.html#000346

The Universe Tree

by bird on the moon

My little home is marked on all sides lush stands of old trees. Pine, oak, apple, cherry; even our names for these upward yearning beauties are gentle... the words roll off the tongue like a twilight breeze that stirs the branches. I am thankful for them, and the cicadas they presently harbor, for both give the day and night a kind of rhythm, of rustling and murmuring. Their presence comforts, the offery density and continuous summertime happenings; wrens chastising inquisitive cats, mourning doves in courtship, a lone mockingbird in jazzy solo.

I watched in wonder today as rainwater beaded on the leaf of a red bud tree. The leaf held it as the sun made a jewel of it, bright enough to star my eyes. Then it slipped away, on to nourish soil and roots. Leaves really do something for me; touching them, feeling them as I pass by, shaking hands of a consciousness I cannot grasp. Once recent evening, as a mild encounter with wine loosened the stones of my synapses, I bent down to kiss a leaf. I don't remember the exact tree, but I do remember the response. It was my breath on the intake, a reminding that this leaf is a fountain of oxygen. Breathe deeply, and for a brief but ever replenishable second your lungs become the repository of untold verdant giving.

As for a particular tree that has grown roots in memory, it would have to be that maple in the schoolyard in sixth grade. I remember a distinct awareness that this being, sheltering the back of the socially awkward and befuddled me, was alive. Downright alive, coursing with an intelligence that questioned not and did as it did. Each branch that tickled that child-giggled sky was an adaptation, each bird that alighted there some far off sage. That tree stood for, in sixth grade cosmology, that this place, nestled under it's canopy, was safe. Whole worlds can pivot off of such graces. I sat at that tree everyday... many times it was refuge from bullies, but more often it was an unraveler of imagination. It gave me dreams, drifting peace where all the hubbub and turmoil of middle school melted into other worlds as I held onto the trunk of something sure. It's ecosystem, rooted there in that worn sneaker-trod earth, taught gently and without admonishment. Sometimes, it was my only friend. In a way that it's taken me a long time to consider, it was my own personal Yggdrasil, the Universe tree. From there, in those shaded recess reflections, seeds grew that made me who I am today.

Perhaps I'll never know quite how that tree worked it's magic. Perhaps I have more to learn. Just think of the teaching impact trees have: Buddha and his Bodhi tree, Newton and his gravitationally impaired apple, Washington and his fabled cherry, and those are just the history book names. We are a world teeming with vast ripe minds, and there's enough shade to cover them all and enough upward yearning to pry them from their worries. No wonder the Kabbalists place such value on the Tree of Life.

Not far from my first home in New Castle, Delaware, there is a tulip tree that surpasses generations of our industry and technology in age. At it's base is a semi-circular bench that was placed there an eternity ago. The builder of that bench had the right idea; sit here, lean back, maybe even close your eyes and release your cares in a sigh... the tree will take your exhalation and from it make a future's inhale. Like the strong embrace of a friend, it will hold you up, as your wonderstruck eyes attempt to fathom the sky that the branches so easily uphold.

This post was inspired by a discussion over at EcoTone Wiki. Go and see.

jaybird gave you this @ 23:08 in *"Journaling the Infinite"* | Birdfeathers (1) | Moonbeams (0) | Permalink

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20041227192852/birdonthemoon.com/archive/week_2003_08_03.html#000390

In the Company of Trees

By Notes from an Eclectic Mind

Note: This is my late addition to the Ecotone Trees And Place topic. After weeks of not hearing from any clients a ton of work was dropped into my lap last week cutting into my writing time and my play time with my new iPod, a marvelous little device with which I fell completely in love in the first half hour. Add to that experiments in video compression to watch movies on my Clie and coloring mandalas with J. acquired from this wonderful site and its been a full few days. We have, by the way, finished our first mandalas, which I will try to scan later in the day and share. Many thanks to Julie for the original link to the site.

Memories of my father naturally mix with images of trees. Spreading pecans encircled the house back in the Little Town, trees which received yearly pruning, faithful webworm eradications, and regular fertilizing. On the adjoining lot, acquired when I was in grade school, Papa planted more pecans and a few fruit trees although they didn't flourish in the harsh climate with its brutal summers and unpredictable rains. Papa babied his trees and gloried in their thickening trunks and spreading limbs.

In the early evening after supper he often walked among them, setting hoses to soak thirsty roots or simply laying a hand lovingly against rough bark. When I reached tree house age he forbade me and my motley boards and nails access to the branches of those precious pecans. Papa consigned me instead to a non-bearing mulberry that was practically in the alley. Secretly he hoped I'd kill the nuisance mulberry so he could plant another pecan tree in its place. Alas he subscribed to an elitist take on trees with pecans at the top of the evolutionary ladder.

There was something infectious about Papas love for his trees. I often walked along with him as he inspected low hanging branches and speculated about the fall yield of nuts. Off and on for several years we employed a wetback, an illegal alien, who worked around the house and yard.

Ben was the first really poor person I ever knew but he seemed rich to me in his love of family and of growing things. From my father Ben caught the pecan bug and optimistically lugged sacks of them back to Mexico where he nurtured the nuts into seedlings. When we took a vacation south of the border and paid a call on Ben and his family, he immediately dragged Papa out to see the transplanted trees-to-be. Papa spoke lousy Spanish and Ben's English was atrocious but those two could talk an animated pidgin pecan polyglot.

Perhaps the arid West Texas environment and the landscape dominated by low-growing mesquite, scrub oak and cactus explained the widespread local veneration of trees. Where trees grew in abundance people gathered, in the shady river bottoms for fish fries and barbecues, on the courthouse lawn for concerts and flea markets, and in the city park for the county fair and class reunions. Trees beckoned and welcomed and people heard and congregated.

The first court of law convened in the county in frontier days used a board wedged in a forked pecan trunk for the presiding judge's bench. And I'm certain some thick branch in a pecan grove along that same stretch of river felt the weight of the hangman's rope. The trees have stood watch there many years now and harbor their vast store of secrets, of blood feuds settled by gunfire and of kisses stolen by moonlight. Trees don't give their secrets away but hold them close down among the rings that record their own stories, keeping their knowledge with concentric fidelity.

Papa taught me to fish amid the exposed roots of an ancient pecan on the bank of a quiet backwater pond, a little bit of magic tucked back from the mainstream where the perch grew fat and smart from one too many dangled hooks. I can see us sitting there in the shade, his hands wrapped around my tiny ones on a cane pole. In my mind I often go to sit among those roots and fish by that river, safe and quiet with the trees and the water.

This weekend on All Things Considered I heard an interview with a Memphis man whose neighborhood suffered severe damage in the recent high winds and storms that swept the city. A lifelong Memphis resident, he spoke of the huge old trees that once lined his street and sounded a little lost and confused now that they are gone, those sentinel landmarks familiar to generations but so vulnerable to natures violent temper.

And Saturday morning on the street where I used to live five teenagers speeding down an all too inviting hill lost control of their car, which slammed into a massive tree and split in two killing four. The weight and velocity of technology crumpled on impact with a tree whose roots have reached deep into the earth for half a century and more establishing quiet power and presence.

I bristle when I hear the term tree hugger used derisively, for in my life I have watched men nurture a deep and personal love for trees that have, for a brief span of their own lives, fallen into the care of a mortal. I have known and experienced dreams born amid their branches and seen death occur at that solid place where they rise from the earth. Unlike Tolkiens Treebeard they do not walk among us but instead stand witness to our lives, coming before us and remaining long after we have gone.

On the Vicksburg battlefield in a row of graves down by the river the small stone of some nameless Confederate soldier has been taken into the trunk of its neighboring tree, half the marble face now encased inside the wood. I remember leaning against the trunk and looking down at that tiny marker, thinking of the man resting down amid the roots. I am only sorry that

no tree shades Papas grave and no roots hold him in his rest. As I walk among them now I believe that his trees miss him and that in their depths they carry a memory of the man in the white shirt and workpants who brought them water and laid his hands on their trunks.

Comments:

Julie says:
August 4th, 2003 at 11:39 am

You are very welcome, Rana! I am having fun as well. Coloring is good therapy!

Dorothea Salo says:
August 4th, 2003 at 1:37 pm

There is a LeGuin story called, I believe, "Relativity" that I think you would absolutely love.

It is not a pretty story, any more than the ones with which you closed your post… but you will still love it.

It's been anthologized, but I'm not sure where off the top of my head.

beth says:
August 4th, 2003 at 2:46 pm

This is a moving and beautiful post, Rana, thanks for writing it.

Denny says:
May 23rd, 2004 at 11:47 am

Trees are being removed from the skin of the planet at an alarming rate. I hope I'm dead before they're all gone. Trees mean a lot to me, maybe because I grew up in a forest. At one time in my life I had to travel to El Paso, Texas with some frequency. That place always gave me the heebie-jeebies and after two days the angst was driving me nuts and I had to get the hell out of that place.

Source: http://www.ranablog.com/?p=365

Trees

By Creek Running North

The late garden writer Henry Mitchell used to try to talk people out of planting trees in their gardens. A spruce that looks perfect in a five-gallon pot will rapidly outgrow its place in the garden, shade out the irises and muscle the azaleas aside, overwhelm the house. Mitchell recommended planting *anything* other than trees. If nothing else would do, he said, one should

restrict one's self to dwarf or slow-growing trees, miniature Alberta spruces or flowering cherries grafted onto dwarf rootstock, which would know their place in the garden and stay there.

The longer I garden, the more I sneer at the notion of "slow-growing" trees. I plant them, turn my back, and turn again to find they've tripled in size. I'm not talking about the silver maples I planted in our yard in New York, which now overtop the house, if the owners haven't yet cut them down. Silver maples are "trash trees" - they can grow six feet a year. I'm talking about Catalina ironwoods, Xanthorrhoeas, cutleaf Japanese maples: the kind that pout out a few leaves each spring, an inch of new trunk, and that nonetheless seem to grow at an amazing rate, nourished with a thick mulch of calendar pages.

This isn't just a problem with trees, of course, as the image of my grandfather staring out from my bathroom mirror will attest. But still: last year I went out to scrape clean every squirrel-planted live oak and black walnut, and this year they're back twice, three times as tall.

Tree, squirrel or person, we all grow in the same direction. This week, I built raised garden beds from 350 feet of redwood two by six. Not even close to old-growth, the trees from which my lumber was made were probably younger than I. The boards were green. They didn't yet realize the trees had been cut. Driving the decking screws to join the planks I watched tears of sap well up to the surface of each hole, tremble at the lip of the countersink, then weep onto the thirsty soil.

This is a belated entry in a collective writing project on Trees and Place at the Ecotone Wiki.

Posted by Chris Clarke at August 4, 2003 04:44 PM TrackBack URL for this entry:

Comments

The wonderful little-used word 'fecundity' comes to mind.

Posted by: fredf at August 4, 2003 06:45 PM

I'd happily wait a number of days for that last paragraph.

Posted by: beth at August 5, 2003 08:05 AM

Source: http://www.faultline.org/place/pinolecreek/archives/000367.html

Fly, leaf

It may tell you something about where I live that on the day the city cut several aging, spotty oaks in Horseshoe Lake Park near my house, several women were roaming the grass with tears in their eyes. One of them told a reporter she had touched a tree's spirit and that it was sad, but not angry.

The oaks dated to the 1920s or before, when the city and the park were the epitome of dignified, expensive grace. After World War I, slim white oaks were planted along the north and east sides of the park, with copper plaques at their feet bearing the names of soldiers lost to fighting or

disease. The trees grew to shield the streets from the sun -- straight, tall, handsome memorials that remain long after the men themselves have been forgotten. Now, even the purpose of the little round plaques needs explaining, though the city loyally replants those trees when they die and someone plants little flags at their roots.

It may tell you something about the changes taking place here that a few of the plaques have been pried from their mounts and that over-muscled youths have pulled a couple of the concrete mounts themselves half out of the ground. The power company has had its way with some trees, and as of this summer, a couple more are due for a decent removal. The city stopped spraying its elms in the '90s, for fear of what the spray was doing, and those trees are going fast, too. Older oaks and other species, too, succumb to age, disease, bugs, accidents and zealous utility workers.

Still, "mature trees" was near the top of my list when I moved here. Most likely the real estate dealer looked at the price range and went no further, but the result was the same -- it's ironic that urban trees often grow up with the houses at their feet, but the higher the tree, the lower the price. It's immaterial that I wouldn't want to live in a former pasture surrounded by toothpicks -- I couldn't afford to.

The gregarious family I bought my house from had a treehouse out back. The tree, a beauty, still has galls that confirm the story, but a friend I found after moving in added, "I got my first grope in that treehouse!"

Even if it were legal -- safety-minded parents and control-minded city officials saw to it that it isn't -- I wouldn't consider re-housing that tree, for fear of hurting it. I would not consider myself a tree-hugger, but I reflexively rush to the defense of my underbrush when the power company comes through, and when the city's tree nazis took half the gum tree out front, I was outraged, but too late.

I think it's because they're mute, and attractive, and helpless in the face of chain saws that we rush to protect trees. Considering what we get back, I guess that's OK.

P.

Source:http://web.archive.org/web/20051231071733/my.core.com/~pzicari/text/Trees.html

Trees and Place

By Mulubinba Moments

Trees can play as significant a role in our memories of place as familiar land features and buildings. The following piece has been written as part of a topic post on "Trees and Place" on the Ecotone Wiki. This essay uses as reference an article entitled “Our land is their land” written by Mike Scanlon, Newcastle Herald, 14th August 2003. It serves to remind us that the history of place and people are closely interwoven with the natural features (landscape, flora and fauna) of that place.

In the 19th century, sailing ships used to discharge ballast from their cargo holds after entering the port of Newcastle. Much of this ballast was dumped around the edges of Newcastle harbour. The ballast consisted of foreign soil and rock from as far away as Britain, the Mediterranean, Singapore, China and the Americas. Rumour has it that “quake rubble" was brought out following the 1906 San Francisco earthquake.The north Stockton foreshore rapidly grew as fleets of ships came to load coal and discharge their ballast to form training walls.

Soon, Stockton’s roughly topsoiled ballast walls began to sprout strange fruits including a bitou bush from South Africa. Also growing was what has become a much loved Stockton landmark - a “Crown of Thorns Tree” (acacia karoo) which normally grows in the savannah of Africa. This “gnarly orphan tree” had been growing next to the Hunter river for over 100 years - grown in soil from ship ballast.

Over the years, children used to play and hide in it. The men of Stockton. in the 1930’s, were said to have met every Sunday inside the tree’s canopy. It apparently could hold up to 20 men who would play two-up and drink a keg of beer within the privacy of its 40 foot cover.

Two weeks ago, Agriculture NSW officials removed the “Crown of Thorns” citing it as a “dangerous, toxic pest”. The Hunter Committee of the National Trust tried to save it but authorities moved too swiftly and the old tree is now only a memory. A few days later someone planted a cross on the site to mark its passing.

August 14, 2003 in Jenny's posts, Newcastle, Place | Permalink

Comments

It was impressive how many folks, in their Ecotone "tree" posts, lamented the loss of a well known and remembered tree as if were the passing of a friend or family member. Sorry to hear about the loss of your community's old friend, the African acacia.

Posted by: fredf | August 15, 2003 at 08:19 PM

Source: http://mulubinba.typepad.com/mulubinba_moments/2003/08/trees_and_place.html

[Lifescapes]

The mesquites that grow abundantly here in the Texas hill country are usually small trees, but large in spirit, large in generosity--not well loved by the local ranchers, though, who hate mesquite with about the same passion intensity that they direct to prickly pear cactus. Mesquite are deep-rooted and compete with grass for the limited water. And, back in the days when cows were rounded up by real cowboys on horses, you could lose half your herd in a thorny mesquite thicket. In fact, mesquite is on the Texas hit list of invasive plants. But there are fewer ranchers than there used to be in Burnet County these days, and it's getting harder to object to mesquite. The tree is perfect for xeroscaping your yard (as long as you don't let the kids go barefoot where they can step on the thorns). The wood is a natural for barbecue, and mesquite jelly is delicious, sort of like apple jelly. Settlers hereabouts processed the dried beans into flour, which was in turn made into bread and, cunningly fermented, into booze. And artists are discovering the exotic beauty of its wood. On Lifescapes for 8/26/03: a photo of a mesquite vase that my Bill turned on his lathe. Lovely to have the mesquite outside my window and inside, on my desk.--Susan

Discussion

I don't have my thoughts together enough to speak them out clearly, but wanted to say I thought this biweekly collection of essays was particularly interesting, and appreciate the several first-time posters! This is great, and I hope we'll continue to find new voices contributing here. I'm going to finally get around to posting some images over on the pages Joel has created, and would like to begin to SEE what some of you familiar folks see when you look out your windows, or hike near home. -- Fred

Weblog as Place

Bi-weekly Topic for Aug. 15, 2003

Is your weblog a place in itself? How do you locate it in the scheme of things? What kind of map is it on? What's your relationship with your weblog? And with those who visit it?

Weblog and Place

By London and the North

Weblog and Place: participating in Ecotone Biweekly Topic

Strange that it was I who volunteered this topic for Ecotone. My weblog is one year old this week! I am very proud of it and feel it is one of the best background things for me of the last year. So this entry well all those for this week feel like some great responsibility: to do justice to the whole caboodle. Im cool. But is it a place in itself? To be honest, I never even realised I was writing about place until Pica invited me to join Ecotone as a place blogger. Ive been wondering if, since that moment, my writing, my focus has changed. Perhaps it has. I think I expect I should make more sense. To help readers / viewers locate themselves. I guess thats not really necessary. Is it?

Joining Ecotone has been a big thing in some ways. I have met or come across people who care about where they live, are moved by what goes on near and far. They may live in isolated spots but they live in a relational world in which there is room for the close up and the wider picture. This is about the most important thing in my life. The leaf on the path at my feet, the latest goose to appear, the changes in the river and the world as it is lived, not just as it is reported. My weblog is one spot where many things can come together. Rage at injustices, reflections on time journeying up and down the tracks between London and the North, art is it art?, musings about the geese on the canal and political games. (BTW, we are back to five geese. I don't know why.....)

::: posted by Coup de Vent at 8/15/2003 08:00:16 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20051215134932/airenet.co.uk/alife/2003_08_01_archives.html#106089370612567091

Where-blogs and Place

By Fragments from Floyd

*** Is your weblog a place in itself? How do you locate it in the scheme of things? What kind of map is it on? What's your relationship with your weblog? And with those who visit it?**

A weblog is typically considered a means of "self-publication". I often think of mine more as a *broadcast from a place*. Hitting the "SEND" button to post a daily entry to my weblog brings to mind my early 'radio days'. I would tune in my shortwave to just the right frequency and pick up transmissions of real people-- merchant marines, missionaries or wanderers -- in remote places on the globe. Their listeners could tune receivers just so, pulling the exact radio signals from among thousands of wavelengths, and so maintain a connectedness with their communities on the other side of the world. Now decades later we take for granted that communications-- not only of voices but of images and all manner of digital information-- can move instantaneously to any point on the globe. From any computer desktop in the world, words can be transmitted instantaneously with no more than the modern equivalent of the Smith-Corona electric I used in 1980.

Millions of us are pouring our opinions and reflections, hopes and fears through our fingers and into keyboards and hitting the "Send" button. The transmission is remarkably easy. But *tuning in* to any one of those countless blog 'broadcasts' is far less likely than my finding the one of a thousand frequencies on my shortwave whose words from world travelers I could understand and that had some particular meaning for me. My weblog now is one of millions of such 'broadcasts', and finding receptive readers who would care to listen still relies for the most part on random chance of Google, or friend of a friend of a friend referrals.

But my weblog emanates from a real and permanent "address"... a term used metaphorically to locate any webpage. Fragments from Floyd comes every day from a literal address-- the same desk in the same green valley of Southwest Virginia. Many blogs' political or technological

opinions and fact-streams have no bearing to their location of origin-- which may even change from day to day now that road-posting and hand-held blogging is possible. Other webblogs, fewer in number, could be thought of as "where-blogs". For these bloggers, place is central; and for some, the person and personality behind the keyboard is also integral to the information being transmitted.

Fragments for me is a way to transmit the small wonders of my daily life beyond my own perceptions, past these walls and well beyond the small world I inhabit here; it is a way of self-validation that says "I am still here and here is what makes me smile, reflect, wonder". Readers who come here over a longer period might feel that they know what I see and feel, and even what I smell, see, hear-- from Goose Creek in Floyd County-- and know, in some sense, who I am. I transmit on a weak frequency, as blogging statistics go, and not many folks 'tune in' to my frequency here on the margins of the blogosphere's map. And yet for those who come regularly and intentionally, their 'visits' seem in a way like neighbors-- recognized but mostly not well known-- dropping in for a quick hello. I know about their places too, know who they are when I see their visit records, and I can imagine their desks in their own quiet houses in towns and neighborhoods from which they broadcast. There are elements of community in the links formed by this world of self-publishers, but with great potential yet to be realized as the medium matures. Much is needed yet to facilitate the bringing together of geographic and special-interest clusters of bloggers, creating better ways to find others 'in place' in the increasingly complex and broad world of weblogs.

Meanwhile, somewhere in this burgeoning babel of voices, Fragments tiny beacon is from time to time picked up by a listener dialing across the million frequencies and they stop, tune in, and leave some indication they might come back again someday. And in this, there is the sense that my weblog has become a point on someone else's map of the world of weblogs. The reception of my words and pictures by others in other places has been a means of connecting to a sort of 'real' if largely faceless community. I have set about writing, mostly, to hear the sound of my own words, to make memories, to tell my story to me and my family -- to know what I think by seeing what it is that I will say or images I will show each day. That there are a few interested readers who want to look over my shoulder while I spin these tales and daydreams and foolishness makes the effort seem a bit less self-indulgent and certainly worth the effort.

* Biweekly topic for August 15, 2003 at the Ecotone.

Posted by fred1st at 04:55 AM | Comments (7)

Comments

Well put! I find myself at your site with increasing frequency and have even sent maps of your location to friends and family. I feel you are representative of the burgeoning throng of writers who are transforming our ideas of literary communication.

As with most paradigm shifts, by the time it is noticeable and people have started to analyze it and quantify it, it will have kicked off many derivative activities which will generate new businesses. I hope that those of you in the vanguard won't be looking around in bewilderment at all of the money being made by those coming after. Best of luck on your book.

David

Posted by David St Lawrence at August 15, 2003 05:52 AM

I'm reading a book called Two Roads to Dodge City, written by a father and son, Englishmen. The father, Nigel Nicholson, knew Virginia Woolf. His mother, Vita Sackville-West, was one of VW's best friends. Both father and son are regularly open-mouthed at our American ability to reduce just about everything to a question of money.

I think Mr. St Lawrence is probably right. Those of us in the vanguard will be blinking slowly as we watch the medium turn into a cash cow. Not that we don't know this about our culture, just that it never ceases to amaze us.

Posted by trish at August 15, 2003 08:27 AM

I had thought of the analogy to ham radio myself. Another comparison that comes to mind is the CB craze, back in the 70's, which like blogging was more accessible to the average guy than ham radio, which requires a license and some specialized equipment and skills.

Posted by bill at August 15, 2003 09:16 AM

I enjoyed your entry. Made me think about a song by Van Morrison about the early days of radio and what would and wouldn't have come in without "those - radio - knobs". It is too early to comment on the longer term effect of blogging but it's not too early for bloggers themselves to talk about what it is like for them to blog. If another person says to me "Oh you mean it's keeping a diary online", I'll I-don't-know-what. I think your idea of fragments works well as a description and creates a set of permissions. Once in the public domain, a blog can be a stopping off point for anyone with access. And it is nice to have some filtering in the "babel/babble of voices" - ie those who choose to linger a while. Thanks for the co-founding role you've had in Ecotone, Fred.

Posted by Coup de Vent at August 15, 2003 12:13 PM

I love the radio analogy. You are after my heart with that one, being that I'm an old radio guy myself.

Posted by Chris at August 15, 2003 06:18 PM

I guess all of us Hams saw the connection between blogging and hamming. In fact, I extended the connection to consider cell phoning. I grappled for completion to the simile, blogging is to cell phoning as hamming is to...(CBing?)... or as reading is to TV viewing? We humans seem to have a need to communicate (whether we have anything worth saying or no). Fortunately for us readers of Fragments, there's always something worth reading on Fred's site.

Posted by Cop Car at August 16, 2003 04:05 AM

Fred, I enjoyed reading your entry on weblog as radio signals with various frequencies that bring news from other "desks" anchored in physical rooms scattered across vast georgraphical areas.

And I wanted to thank you for directing me to the Ecotone Wiki.

Posted by maria at August 17, 2003 02:28 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20031002130400/http://www.fragmentsfromfloyd.com/archives/2003_08.html

weblog as place

By The Chatterbox

Depois de quase três anos escrevendo diáriamente neste weblog, posso dizer com certeza que ele é um lugar. Não só metafórico ou virtual, mas um espaço fisico. É como se ele fosse um quarto extra na minha casa - um com um papel de parede cor-de-rosa exdrúxulo - onde eu entro toda manhã, ou às vezes à tarde ou à noite, e escrevo os meus pensamentos. Este weblog tornou-se uma parte da minha vida. Nele eu coloco coisinhas do meu dia a dia, o que eu vejo, escuto, penso e vivo. Ele é uma caixinha de tesouros em tamanho ampliado e uma extensão de quem eu sou. E escrever nele faz parte da minha rotina, como tomar banho, escovar os dentes, beber água, dormir, comer. Meu blog é um lugar, localizado em downtown Davis, Califórnia, EUA. Meus visitantes vêem de muitos lugares diferentes e estão acostumados à várias línguas e culturas. Param para uma visita de minutos e se entretem com o que encontram aqui. Podem conversar comigo durante a visita ou só entrarem e sairem calados - mas com um sorriso nos lábios, pois isso eu garanto, quase sempre!

.....

After been writing daily on this weblog for almost three years, I could say that it has become a place. Not only a metaphorical or virtual place, but a real physical space. I feel like this weblog is an extra room in my house - the one with the funky pink wallpaper - where I go every morning, or sometimes in the afternoon or night, and jot down my thoughts. This weblog became a part of my life. Here I set little tidy bits of my days, what I see, hear, think and experience. It's like a giant treasure box and an extension of who I am. Writing here is part of my routine, like taking a shower, brushing my teeth, drinking, eating, and sleeping. This weblog is located in downtown Davis, California, USA. My visitors come from different places and are familiar with different languages and cultures. They stop by for a couple of minutes and get entertained by what they find here. They can talk to me while visiting or only pass through in silence - with a smile on their faces, though - for that I guarantee!

.....

Este texto vai fazer parte do Ecotone:writing about place, no tema de hoje - Weblog as Place

Comments

Meu blog tem paredes acolchoadas e camisas de força há quase um ano e meio... hehehe!

;-D Beijocas.

Fabiana - September 1, 2003 11:24 AM

I'm so glad to read your comments this week through Ecotone. I liked what you said and also like the pink wallpaper. Please keep writing a little in English from time to time.

beth - August 17, 2003 06:03 AM

Eu também fiquei conhecendo blogs por aqui. Foi o primeiro que li, atendendo sua solicitacao na lista de Cine-Tv (leia o meu pensamento). Dai a visitar os da sua lista foi rapidinho e a virar blogueiro tambem. E, igual a voce, virou parte da vida, todo dia, abro, leios os comentarios, respondo, posto e depois saio visitando os amigos, que ja sao tantos que nao da pra fazer num dia so! Beijos e obrigado por me trazer a este mundo!

alvaro - August 16, 2003 09:55 PM

Fer: Thanks for doing this. It's great you extended our conversation and got the courage to post in English, which I hope you'll do more of! (with Portuguese too, of course...)

Pica - August 16, 2003 02:22 PM

Eu sento aqui nessa cadeira e todos os dias dou umas viajadas pilotando meu lentium. Vou espiando um monte de quartos por aí. Vou resolvendo...comecemos pela Rosana, agora vamos ver a Fezoca, a blowg, a speed...e isso já tem uns três anos. Não tinha hábito de me pronunciar, mas depois que você pediu para dar as caras parece que tou acostumando.
Não tenho blog, só me aproveito do esforço alheio e não passa um dia que eu não visite pelo menos alguns.
Beijos
Cléu

Cleunice Rocha - August 16, 2003 05:41 AM

Eu passo de vez em quando e leio de montão, não é só entretenimento, sem saber, eu vou vendo umas coisinhas que eu não via em meu jardim, um cheirinho no ar, um babilaquezinho ali no supermercado. Vou gostando mais e mais do meu pedaço. Fico querendo contar para você tambem como são as coisas por aqui. Do tempo que eu fiquei sem provedora por causa da mudança que eu e a Nami fizemos no fim do mes passado... Bem, vou contando aos poucos.
Beijo

gilberto - August 16, 2003 05:34 AM

Eu tb bato ponto aqui, mesmo as vezes nao comentando. Sabia que o seu blog foi o primeiro que eu li ?

Lia - August 16, 2003 04:16 AM

E já faz parte da minha rotina também, pois todos os dias, assim que termino de postar no meu blog, venho aqui fazer uma visitinha...beijinho no coração,

Kel - August 15, 2003 07:28 PM

Happy to have you add your thoughts to the Ecotone topic this week!

fredf - August 15, 2003 04:53 PM

presente!

Enio - August 15, 2003 03:14 PM

Source: http://www.fezocasblurbs.com/archives/2003_08.html

August 15, 0023

By Bowen Island Journal

The Ecotone community is blogging about weblogs as place today.

Look very closely at these words. If you lean into your monitor you will see that they flicker a little. Peer even closer and you see that each letter is made up of little squares. Take a magnifying glass to the screen and you notice that there is space between the pixels.

This weblog is about a place, but it lives everywhere. At the moment it lives right in front of you, little more than light shining in your eyes. Reading it may invoke a feeling of being here on Bowen Island, but it is not Bowen Island itself. It lives only on your monitor. Once I publish the words, they reside as tiny 1s and 0s on a server in Vancouver. When you reach them via a URL they fly at the speed of light to where you live and they embed themselves in your context.

Edward Hall and Marshal McLuhan and others talked about how technology extends our bodies from one place to another. The phone moves our voice boxes thousands of miles, past ears that are travelling in the other direction. Weblogs do the same with our thoughts. Those that I get down onto the keyboard become thoughts that you can read, thoughts you can interact with.

In as much as I believe that landscape lives in the mind, it is possible that what you are staring at is actually one kind of Bowen Island landscape. I recognize this, which is why I have mapped this inner landscape onto the maps of stories at the Bowen Island GeoLibrary.

But are weblogs places in themselves? I don't believe so. Come to Bowen, swim with me in the phosphoresence on a late summer evening with crickets and nighthawks chirping away and you will know what it is like to be consumed by place. The next click you make will take you away from this weblog, but it's not that easy in real life. When we are in place, we are rooted. We cannot leave without some part of us remaining behind, stretched out behind us, eventually catching up to where we now find ourselves. But with this weblog, perhaps with any weblog, we skim the surface, reside in the moment perhaps even try to peer into the depths.

And all we see when we do that is light.

posted by Chris at 2:55 PM

Source:
http://www.chriscorrigan.com/miscellany/bijournal/2003_08_01_archive.html#106098453724315930

On Weblog as Place

By Mulubinba Moments

This essay is a contribution to the fortnightly discussion running at the "Ecotone Wiki".

I am a newcomer to "blogging". Our weblog is less than two weeks old and I am realising how much there is to learn about computing - just to post an entry onto the Ecotone Wiki site has been a challenge. Up until now, this computer has been a work horse - it was a means by which reports were written and accounts balanced - a source of frustration as it distracted children from doing homework. I never dreamed that it could become an important means of communication with people from different parts of the world or that it would be a place of continual learning for me.

I started reading weblogs three months ago after an old school friend invited me to read theirs. From that moment I became a "blogaholic" - a daily read of my favourite weblogs and of the posts on the Ecotone Wiki was a must. Over these weeks I feel I have come to know many of the writers - I have celebrated a wedding with Pica and Numenius from Feathers of Hope, I have grieved with Fred at Fragments from Floyd over the loss of his beloved Buster. I have travelled to India, to the U.K. and to many parts of the U.S. I have delighted in the photography and I have been inspired by the fluency of the writing. This is a social interaction without the, (pardon the expression), "garbage". Looks, body language, dress, social standing simply don't come into it. The weblog is a means by which like minded people can interact on a simple, uncomplicated level.

I predict our weblog will be a place of learning, communication and intellectual stimulation. As a mother of three I often get "lost" in the whirlwind of activities that go with the job. Like many bloggers at the "Ecotone", I lived in many different places as a child. I have felt many times an innate restlessness, an urge to move on from the place I currently live in - Newcastle. Being busy with "child" activities and with work I now realise had narrowed my perception of the place we live in - I had lost the ability to appreciate it and my reaction was to dream of moving on to another place. Starting a weblog has enabled me to look at Newcastle with a fresh approach - to realise that it has many hidden facades that need to be explored and written about.

This weblog will portray my journey of rediscovering the place I live in. It will be a joint effort with my husband Geoff who will occasionally add a post when he has time. For him the weblog will be a good source of relaxation and distraction from his work. We hope that other bloggers of place will enjoy sharing some "Moments" at "Mulubinba" with us.

August 16, 2003 | Permalink

Comments

So very happy to have you and Geoff along for the journey to whatever our weblogs and this medium will become for us and through us in the coming months and years! Enjoying learning about your inner and outer places there and thanks for this post to Ecotone!

Posted by: fredf | August 16, 2003 at 11:03 AM

Good to have a marker in another Newcastle - whereabouts in Oz are you? I too enjoy the space to reflect on my environment - it does make you see and feel where you are in a more grounded way I think. Looking forward to further visits!

Posted by: Coup de Vent | August 16, 2003 at 04:44 PM

Jenny, you've summed up perfectly my secret reason for starting my blog as well. What a wonderful thing: another reason to pay attention to where one is.

Posted by: Chris Clarke | August 17, 2003 at 06:03 AM

I'm so glad to be able to add my "welcome" to the Ecotone and to thank you for this entry! I'm going through a restless period here myself after 25 years in one place, and writing about it definitely helps me to continue to see the details and remember that serenity is really a product of one's inner, rather than outer, environment. I'm looking forward tohearing more from you and your husband on your site!

Posted by: beth | August 18, 2003 at 12:14 AM

Source: http://mulubinba.typepad.com/mulubinba_moments/2003/08/on_weblog_as_pl.html

Blogs & Place

By O'DonnellWeb

This weeks Ecotone subject is blogs and place. Physically, ODonnellWeb exists on a Linux server in Lompac, CA. Of course, several hundred times a day it exists temporarily in the memory of whatever computer is accessing the site. That would be at least 3 continents and probably 20 odd states daily.

Oh, wait a minute. That is probably not what they meant by "blogs & place." :)

Place, in reference to ODonnellWeb is not really a physical concept. It's mental. It's the same difference you find between Where are you? and Where are you at, man? (Say the second one in a droopy stoner voice for full effect). ODonnellWeb started as a way to share my stupid humor, political opinions, and the occasional family story with a few friends. Somewhere along the way, I picked up a bunch of new friends. Yes, friends. I don't consider them readers. Ultimately, I produce this site for my own enjoyment. I'm not a journalist or columnist with some responsibility to my readers. I'm a guy with a blog, writing about whatever interests me at the moment. If that interests you too and you come along for the ride, great. If not, I'm not going to worry about it.

In the end, the site is just an extension of me. The current tagline, *This is my Brain on the Internet*, is not that far from the truth. I've never used a pseudonym, never tried to hide the real me. I'm not making some sort of statement, or saying anything against those that do hide their true identity. I'm just too lazy to bother. Honesty is the shortest and easiest path from point A to point B, so I took it. If I'm mad, frustrated, cranky, tired, whatever, you'll see it in the writing.

A couple of years ago, a researcher at The University of Texas asked me to participate in a study. They were studying to what extent personal web sites reflected the true personality of the creator. They decided that ODonnellWeb was an almost perfectly true reflection of me, or at least the me that I think I am.

I took that as a very good thing.

Permalink | Comments (1)

Comments

Yes, I had imagined a high correlation between the 'seeming' Chris and the real one. Weblogs are all over the map, though, when it comes to 'authentic' blogger personae, and sometimes it is hard to know what is affect and what is genuine blogger or bloggette. I tend to gravitate toward the WYSIWYG blogger myself.

Posted by: fredf at August 15, 2003 09:07 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20051101072439/www.odonnellweb.com/mtarchives/000664.php

Blogging in Place

By Punctilious

The following is my humble first effort to contribute to Ecotone. The topic is Weblog as Place.

I am new to blogging and I am struggling to find my voice. While I expect my voice to change as it reflects my life experiences, I also expect to find a cadence that is singularly me. Therefore, in thinking about a blog as a place, I view it as a place for the exploration of me. I have a mental map that defines the realities of who I am, where I come from, what I am doing, and generally where I am going. It charts my antecedents, my physical locations, my accomplishments and my relationships. In blogging, I am drawing a new map that reveals how I fit into a larger world. In that world, I, and it are unknown. None of the visual cues of age, culture, or gender predispose the conversation. There are no vocal cues of accent or idiom to define the boundaries. It is a place where I exist in a set of coordinates beyond my physical existence and I must make my mark based upon the ideas I hold and my ability to express them. In many ways it is that place marked on the map that says, "here be dragons". Unexplored. Unknown. Intimidating. Exciting. Traveling too far in the wrong direction might expose me more than I am prepared to risk. Stopping short of a destination means I might lose the point. Taking a wrong turn allows me to explore something I would otherwise miss.

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20040216213436/198.30.156.67/blog0803.htm#article70

Maps and territories

By Creek Running North

Metaphors are always riskily deceptive, and yet we cannot think without them. Put your teeth just so far apart and expel air roughly through them, make a smooth sound from your vocal cords, and then drop your jaw suddenly. Is the sound you've just uttered - "chair" - capable of bearing your weight?

Ignore for a moment the hideous mixture of metaphor in the cliché "surfing the web" — the *Argiope* out back might inform you that she loves it when others attempt to surf her web, and that the experience, if the web works as designed, is fatal to the surfer, and let's hope Clear Channel doesn't hire my spiders as consultants — and consider what actual motions one performs when so "surfing," which is to say not many. The word "chair" is relevant here as well. A flick of wrist on mouse, ten fingers (or two) entering email addresses and credit card numbers, maybe an occasional arching of sore back and cracking of knuckles constitute the entire range of online motion for most people, at least for websites not requiring AdultCheck.

The first home computer I used was a brand spanking new TRS-80. The first computer of *any* kind I used was an IBM/360. True, I mainly used it to play Coffee, but I was all of four years old at the time. A Luddite I am not. In the early nineties, I spent a significant amount of time reading and writing posts to a "conference" - an equivalent of a Usenet newsgroup, only on a proprietary network run by a lefty ISP. The conference, utne.cafe, was styled by its eponymous founders as an "online community." We preferred the café metaphor, and any number of flirtations and torrid political arguments took place around its nonexistent pool table. Relationships spilled over into the offline world, lifelong friendships established, a few hearts broken.

It's easy to see that the "café" description was a playful metaphor. With that in mind, why am I having a harder time deciding whether that's also true of the word "community?" The old café had many features that would seem to qualify it for the title, and there's precedent for the existence of non-local communities — the "community of scholars" being one that gave direct rise to Usenet. If all of us "in" the café had gotten "together" each night by way of a telephone conference call, we may well have called ourselves a community after a while, but we probably would not have defined that community by the medium we used to converse. Millions of people have friends they never talk to without using a telephone, but such people are not generally called "on-phone friends." We take pains to distinguish our online lives from meatspace: the medium seemingly demands a starring role in the interactions for which we use it. Is it an "online community," or just a community that takes advantage of a particular medium for communication?

And what is "place" but "community" defined more broadly? So I'm a bit bemused at the current Ecotone topic, "weblogs as place." There is a sly temptation, flitting out there at the edge of my id, to post a one-word answer: "no."

Put it this way: There's about a ten-inch section of one of my shelves that's filled with nature writing from Nebraska and Kansas: *Swallow Summer, The Last Prairie, PrairyErth.* But my shelf is not a prairie. Last night I watched a rerun of the documentary *Cadillac Desert,* Marc

Reisner wryly grinning into the camera to narrate the Owens Valley War. But the television contains neither Reisner nor the Valley: both are dead, more or less.

I write in this weblog about place, when I'm not writing about me and my relationship with myself as I see it. But Pinole Creek does not at any point along its length flow through this Pinole Creek weblog: you are less likely to hear treefrogs in this blog than you are to taste salt by touching tongue to blue ink on a map of the bay.

Posted by Chris Clarke at August 16, 2003 12:12 AM

Comments

Interesting entry. I wrote about maps and place twice in error for 1st August - lost the plot. Sounds like you blended maps and weblogs as place and why not? It's all connected. Maybe we could have an ecotone topic on webwriting. I love your spider entries. That must surely be the ultimate weblog.

Posted by: Coup de Vent **at** August 24, 2003 08:02 AM

Source: http://www.faultline.org/place/pinolecreek/archives/000523.html

Weblog as Place

By under the fire star

This is for the fortnightly topic at Ecotone: Writing About Place. Other pieces are linked from here. If the subject interests you, you're welcome to add your link to the Ecotone page.

I think of my weblog as a window; the kind you see in very old paintings, where there is a room with a person in it (me), and then a view of wonderful things, seen only partially, outside. It's the outside - Chennai - India - South Asia - that's important, not the room that holds the window, or the person in the room. Except that the person in the room has manufactured the glass through which you see the view...

I see others' weblogs as windows into their rooms, with their partial and marvellous views beyond. Their doorways ajar, opening onto hidden courtyards. I want to enter those courtyards, see what is just beyond the window's frame. The weblogs that I like most allow me to imagine that I can.

Saint Jerome in his study (Thanks, Maria.)

(Alembic recently wrote about weblogs and place. And look at The World as a Blog and see the lights in so many windows.)

by Nancy at 16.8.03 0 comments

Source:
http://underthefirestar.blogspot.com/2003_08_01_underthefirestar_archive.html#106102410398424400

weblog as place

By prairie point

When I think of my weblog as a "place" I think of this little rectangle into which I type my words. It seems like I look at this side of it much, much more than I look at the "public" side where the results are displayed. I've never really understood why this box that I type in must be so narrow. It takes up such a small part of the real estate of my screen. At least it's bigger than the comments box.

I've been blogging for about six months and I still haven't quite determined what my relationship is with the blog. I've kept journals off and on for years and I expected it to be somewhat like that but it isn't. At least not for me. At times it seems like producing a column for a newspaper. Although I've never done that so how would I know? Even though I try not to be, I frequently feel pressured to write something. And I am much more particular about what I write than I ever was in a journal. At other times however I feel that I am writing to certain people who I know read my weblog as I read theirs.

To explain how I got into this I would have to go back about two years. One day at work I went into the snack bar to get a soft drink and found a book on HTML that had been abandoned there. I got interested in it and took it home for the weekend. Our ISP provided us with a small amount of space for a "home page." Like most people I had never even thought of using it, but over the next week I started building a site. Tricia had recently given me a digital camera and I needed a forum to display my pictures. It didn't have a lot of words at first. Later, when Tricia and I remodeled our kitchen, I started to document that project. Unfortunately only about a dozen of our closest friends and relatives ever visited any of those pages, and of course nothing linked to them.

I didn't know anything about weblogs then. That came much later after I started to follow links in online news magazines. When I first started blogging myself, I modeled my writing after those political news blogs, but that didn't seem right for me. What I did feel comfortable about was writing about my garden. For years I had been intending to start a garden journal, so I decided to

make my garden the main focus. That limits it's appeal. I may never have a lot of readers, but I am having a lot of fun with it.

Part of the Ecotone series on "Blogs and Place."

Posted by Bill Hopkins on August 15, 2003 08:54 PM

Comments

I started my blog with the intention of eventually making it a website, and the website was aimed at helping people garden in a cold climate. I also feel like I'm writing a newspaper column, and feel the pressure to keep posting and not disappoint the audience that I hope is there but don't often hear from. In my case, I would say this is self-imposed as part of the goal of the website.

Before I discovered blogging I was writing occasional essays and sending them off as emails to all my garden buddies. For me the blog was an expansion of something I was already doing. I love writing and I love gardening, and I would much rather read a garden blog where I follow one person's experience rather than go to GardenWeb where all the responses are rather short and aimed at answering questions. So keep writing!

Posted by: Kathy at August 16, 2003 06:37 PM

Liked what you had to say here, Bill, and I'm glad you've decided to expand form your original garden theme. I'm a longtime journal-keeper too, and it's funny to compare these two experiences. I always told myself "you're really writing for an eventual reader" even in my journal, but it was really quite different from this.

Posted by: beth at August 17, 2003 09:29 AM

Source: http://www.prairiepoint.net/journal/archives/000135.html

A Place In Cyberspace

By Feathers of Hope (Numenius)

This is a post on weblogs as place *for the* Ecotone Wiki.

Writing this weblog has really been my first endeavor in online community. I have been on the Internet ever since 1990, but would only post very occasionally to places like various mailing lists or Usenet, and never hung out for very long in IRC-land. Nor have I been inclined to participate in web communities such as Kuro5hin or Slashdot, though I lurk omnivorously. There I sense my identity would get lost in the tumult of voices, whereas this weblog is more my own home, a place where my own sensibilities can emerge.

Is there something special about weblogs that make them possess more of a sense of place than other online fora? Place has always been an important metaphor for the Web -- witness the use of "home page" and "web site" -- and perhaps the combination of the graphic design elements of the Web and the prominence weblogs give to the individual writer's voice enables a strong sense of place. And a weblog is happiest when other people stop by -- it is always reaching towards community.

To turn the metaphor about, a weblog feels like a home on a street with neighbor bloggers who frequently visit, or at least check if your cat is outside. From outside your neighborhood, people occasionally drive through and comment on your choice of house paint. Outside your town, the world of bloggers is vast, growing unfathomably, but all share a desire to create their own little nook in cyberspace.

Posted by Numenius at August 15, 2003 11:02 PM

Comments

Glad you mentioned the 'home page'. A you've been online since 1990, don't you think some of the greatest attractions to the web which kept us up till the early hours Back Then was the Home Page. You could connect with amazing aspects of the real people. In recent years, the search engines don't service home pages. It's all Kellogs and Cars and Crap inc. Blogs are the transcontinental way of waving hello again to people with whom you fel some connection. Or some such thing!

Posted by: Coup de Vent at August 16, 2003 03:55 AM

I notice you coyly neglect to mention that you and I met on one of these "various mailing lists" (Scribes) back in 1995 when I posted a request for the best quill knife...

Posted by: Pica at August 16, 2003 07:03 AM

Seems like somebody with extra time on her hands who can't be running around right now chasing birds or collecting quills ought to post an old scroll she wrote in the 90's about Hermes.

Posted by: BuoysInMyBinos at August 16, 2003 10:25 AM

I noticed he coyly neglected to mention that, too!

Posted by: Doc Rock at August 16, 2003 12:56 PM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2003/08/15/a_place_in_cyber.html

Saturday, August 16, 2003

By TheCassandraPages

Nirvana series by Jacqueline Heer, via Conscientious

ECOTONE TOPIC for AUGUST 15: WEBLOG AS PLACE

We've talked a lot in these pages about the places we move in and out of: the big natural places; the created cities; the homes of our childhoods, made by others; the found places and secret hideaways; the less-easily-defined realms of the spirit. None of these places belong to us; they are bigger than we are and we move through them, marvelling at the ones that seem permanent – the night sky, the desert, the mountains – and mourning the loss of those that change or disappear. Walking past a snowberry bush today in another town, I instinctively reached out and squeezed a waxy white fruit, instantly remembering my childhood hiding place beneath my grandmother's big snowberry bush. I wonder if it's still there.

The blogosphere feels to me like an even bigger place than the aggregation of physical places we call "earth"; it is dimensionless, nearly unlimited both in extent and imaginative possibility, and while we may be able to trace its beginning no one can predict its future. Unlike natural physical places, it's a virtual representation of the minds of human beings, extending with them backwards in time as well as representing, very nearly, the immediate present, and portending the likely trends of the future. That makes it, perhaps, the most human – and therefore most compelling, surprising, seductive - of all "places" ever created.

I've been making personal places all my life. Once, during a parent's visiting day at school, my father gasped when he caught a glimpse of the inside of my desk. Yet what looked like chaos to him was precious and personal to me, and invested with meaning. The spaces I've made, from

childhood corners through dorm rooms to my first apartments and eventually a rambling house and garden, have all retained some of that early "meaningful" chaos, through art, artifacts from the natural world, and the continual presence of books, paper, and words.

I wasn't the one who discovered weblogs; J. did that and told me, long before I started one, "You ought to look at this. I think you're a natural blogger." When I did start *The Cassandra Pages* I really had no idea what I was trying to do, other than continuing the journal-style writing I'd always done, in a public way. The eventual importance of the visual content shouldn't have surprised me as much as it did; both my weblog and physical home have a lot in common – except that *TheCassandraPages* are neater! Ideally, I guess I wanted my weblog to reflect me as accurately as possible, but also to be as hospitable to others as any physical place I could create. Trying to consciously do that – without voice, touch, warmth, eye contact - has been a fascinating challenge.

Blogging seems to prove a spiritual truth I've been writing and thinking about for a long time: people want and need to have a way of saying, "this is me, this is who I am" that goes much deeper than putting "Honk if you love golden retrievers" or "I love square dancing" signs on their bumpers. We crave self-expression both for its own sake, and because we crave communion. I think the virtual places we tend to return to are the ones that feed us, not unlike the physical places we visit, remember, and long to return to. We're all looking for that elusive sense of home, where we'll be welcomed just as we are.

Please read more responses to the current topic at the Ecotone Wiki

5:55 PM

Source:
http://cassandrapages.blogspot.com/2003_08_10_cassandrapages_archive.html#106107091223388586

The Transformation of the Logbook

By Feathers of Hope (Pica)

Another post on Weblogs As Place for the Ecotone Wiki...

In June 1997 Numenius and I moved into a 1930s cabin in the hills above Santa Barbara. Neither of us had ever lived anywhere like it and we decided to keep a journal, a logbook, of the house, not unlike a ship's log (this is when we both started reading Patrick O'Brian which might have had something to do with it). We were left with copious instructions about watering the 40 fruit trees (an inventive mixture of graywater from the outdoor and indoor showers and bucketing plus drip irrigation), so this made some practical as well as romantic sense. It was also the dawn of the biggest El Niño for 100 years, and looking back on the logbook we kept for that time (the year stretched into two), the drawings we made of the passiflora and the Channel Islands we could see from bed, the accounts of the arrival of the hooded orioles to nest in the banana tree, not to mention the account of the landslide that closed Highway 154 for weeks, it was the

chronicle of an incredible time. Yet it also made us aware that all time is incredible, even when it's spent in somewhere less inherently interesting than the Trout Club.

This logbook was emphatically not our journal--which we each still kept, individually, not for public or even each other's consumption--and while there are some cryptic references (the hooded orioles we named Horace and Sally, for instance, might need some explaining to outside readers), it was a sort of halfway house between journal and weblog. We made entries on alternate days, logging rainfall (plenty in that year of floods) and the activities of the copious local rodents.

We continued with our logbook after we moved to Davis, and we continue it still--it's hard to shake the habit. The logbook is always a black bound unlined sketchbook (we're now on our fourth), still recounts the activities, birds, and other notable events of the day as they pertain to the HOUSE.

The weblog has extended this place somewhat, but I feel they are related. While anyone is able and welcome to read our logbooks, nobody ever does, because they are physically bound, literally and figuratively, in our living room. Feathers of Hope extends the space that this shared activity has created and also the scope of our joint writing. The weblog is a place where I can write something--this, for instance--and know that at least fifteen, and probably many more, people than that will read it. One of them lives in Davis; another in Sweden; another few in England; another in Australia. Many are in North America.

I write this with a cast on my left leg, on a laptop (which is conveniently on my lap), looking out the back window to oleander bushes which despite the increasing heat are still miraculously blooming. The space makes it seem as though these fifteen (or more) people are in the room with me. The weblog seems to be an extension of my living room. It is always in need of some tidying, but hey, everyone's welcome anytime. The kettle's on the stove. I'd get it for you if I could get up...

Posted by Pica at August 16, 2003 03:05 PM

Comments

Glad to be one of the crew over for tea; enjoy your sedentary condition while it lasts! Soon you'll have to start getting your motion and strength back in that calf. Mend in good health.

Posted by: fredf at August 16, 2003 05:58 PM

Looking forward to sharing more good times in your extended living room. I echo Fred's comments - enjoy the rest - think of the exercises ahead!

Posted by: Jenny at August 16, 2003 10:16 PM

I would love to have a cuppa with you..... and I love being a part of your extended living room. I too say have a good rest now before all the hard work starts with excercises and back to tidying the living room.....!

Posted by: Jennifer at August 17, 2003 03:09 AM

Oh, Pica, I wish I could MAKE the tea for you and sit and chat this afternoon. Finally a cool day here with some time to catch up on letters and writing, and maybe even some weeding. J. and I hope you're recovering quickly and with good humor. OK to call you one of these days?

Posted by: beth at August 17, 2003 07:34 AM

Mine's a decaf with milk please!

Posted by: Coup de Vent at August 19, 2003 12:00 PM

Now that i have been at your place, I can picture you and Numenius writing on your laptop and even the landscape you see from your your door and windows!

Next time I'm over there, I'll want to see that journal..... ;-)

hugs,

Posted by: Fernanda at August 20, 2003 09:24 AM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2003/08/16/the_transformati.html

the agora in agoraphobia

By alembic

UPDATE: After reading the comments left here by Nancy, fredf, and beth, I decided to add this post to the list of writings on Weblogs As Place for the Ecotone Wiki.

warning: more pontifications about the nature of weblogs

Some years ago, when I was writing a thesis on urban sociology, one of my favorite inspirational books happened to be Gaston Bachelards The Poetics Of Space. In the many moves we made since I handed in the manuscript of that meandering oeuvre written in almost unintelligible academese, I lost my copy of this book. Every once in a while, one of the more erudite bloggers gets excited about this book, and I remember fondly my own delight over discovering that space -- apart from place -- like institutions or people, was a major player in the drama of ones life.

I was reminded of Bachelard, once again, when I happened on David Trotters review of Paul Carters Repressed Spaces: The Poetics of Agoraphobia in the London Review of Books (24 July 2002). From what I gather from reading the review, Carters book may well be the Escherian inversion of Bachelards poetics of space. To put it in plainer English: Carter, in his analysis, seems to be defining the poetics of non-place, or space emptied of place. And not just any place, mind you. He is talking about a place in which the topography is all about relations.

There is repression in agoraphobia Carter claims, but the feelings repressed are the product of an environmental unconscious: an other other scene, at once collective and historical, beyond what has customarily been the subject of psychoanalytic enquiry. This other other scene is the agora as it once was in history and myth, and as it might yet become: a place of assembly, encounter and

utterance; a place where people are driven together, and apart; and also a time, a (to be) remembered convergence of ideal paths. The Fall came in Paris in the 1860s, when Baron Haussmann drove his boulevards through this convergence. Since then, across the world, modernity has imposed its abstraction on the other other scene: its orbital roads, its monuments and vistas, its computerised flow of vehicles (traffic signals are said to date from 1905).

Although I havent read Carters book (*looks like Ill have to put it on my Amazon wish list*), I am already trying to inhabit its purported central thesis so that I might renovate its spaces and transform them into places for hosting some of my ideas about the blogosphere.

So, here are a few preliminary notes:

Distributed in a space that seems robbed of all attributes of a specific place -- from the physical to the poetic -- we populate the Web with various accounts and images of actual places in which we live. We fill our posts with utterances about how we relate to the spaces in which our lives unfold. These spaces are places that are distant to others who read our blogs, but they are visceral to us.

With each account and exchange, with each image we upload, we give dimensions and character to the spaceless and placeless idea that is blogosphere. With our stories, we breathe life into our virtual commons, and we bring back to life the other other scene of the agora -- that convergence of ideal paths.

I know that I am not the only one in the world of bloggers to have been afflicted with agoraphobia. I dont know about the others, but for me, whenever I turn on my computer, knowing that soon Ill be in the very center of that convergence of paths that is the virtual agora of the blogosphere, puts me smack dab in the center of a world populated by people whose relations to their worlds shape both place and space.

The blogosphere is not an escape form the world. Far from it. As any good and lively mythical agora worth its utterances in meaning, the blogosphere, too, depends on a constant exchange of stories -- on movement. We come to the market to trade stories. We leave enriched by knowing that the vast space beyond the shapes of the place in which we feel safe enough to move about, has features and is populated by others who speak our language.

Before my trip to Pittsburgh, PA, and London, England, of this year, I havent been on a plane since 1996. Nor have I taken a vacation, except to drive, with my family, to Jackson, Wyoming. It wasnt a fear of flying that stopped me so much as a combination of both claustrophobia on the planes, and agoraphobia when it came to visiting new cities.

As I started to read more blogs, I found myself drawn into the worlds of other people. Day in and day out I followed them, as some followed me, I suppose. It wasnt long before the worlds they described in their blogs became almost as familiar to me as my own. Is it any wonder then that when it came to going to Pittsburgh or London, I didnt feel as if I were leaving the familiar outlines of my home? Quite the opposite; I could hardly wait to see the landscape -- the shapes and colors of the place -- that was not so much backdrop, as an other character in their daily narratives. A certain pub or restaurant or art gallery was not something faceless, or without secret personality. No, I already would know something about it, something only a local would know, so visiting the restaurant, the pub, or the gallery, became a matter of re-seeing that place and making it a part of my own maps.

As an aside, but somewhat related topic: could the plethora of reality shows that are plaguing network TV have something to do with this carving for the agora, now that more and more people prefer to read blogs and create their own entertainment through blogs instead of watching TV?

If all dedicated bloggers were agoraphobic or anti-social, there would be no comments on blogs, no friend-of-friend feed discussions, no webrings ... in fact, there would be no weblogs. For what would their point be?

As an afterthought to these notes, let me just say this:

What Baron Hasumann rendered asunder when he cut up the agora with his boulevards, Tim Berners-Lee put together when he set about the weave a web of texts.

Posted by maria at August 13, 2003 01:21 PM

Comments

Another great post! I blogged about it today.

Posted by: Tom Shugart on August 13, 2003 04:49 PM

Ecotone is writing about Weblog as Place right now -- you ought to add this link to their page:

http://www.magpienest.org/scgi-bin/wiki.pl?WeblogAsPlace

Posted by: Nancy on August 16, 2003 01:47 AM

I appreciated your comments and experience in the weblog's role in diminishing our discomfort with those places that are unfamiliar to us. I have found that, even though I write my daily posts from a very tiny place, it is increasingly populated with 'friends' who can enjoy the peace and beauty I find in our remote and 'foreign' place in the Blue Ridge. I concur with Nancy that your post is apropos to our Ecotone topic, and will add a reference link to it in the discussion if it doesn't become part of the collection of biweekly posts (which are still trickling in).

Posted by: fredf on August 16, 2003 04:13 AM

Well, Maria, you made me get out my copy of Bachelard, and it's clearly due to be re-read. This was a terrific post, and I hope very much that you'll keep going along these lines. I was surprised by some of the responses to the Ecotone topic this time, because for me, as for you, weblogs are so definitely --even ultimately - "place" - but many didn't seem to agree. I hope some of us will keep talking about this. The agora comparison - cut up into streets, woven together through human discussion - is brilliant.

Posted by: beth on August 17, 2003 10:52 AM

I think it is important in any case to reframe agoraphobia. It's so pathologising and does not allow for reflction on how the person feels about the world in which they are living, whether difference and understanding are things to be cared about and worked on. And I have meant to read Bachelard's the poetics of space for ever..... Weblogs really are a way of connecting with others who live on the same planet as you try to.

Then it's worth going out (of one's way).

Posted by: Coup de Vent on August 19, 2003 12:35 PM

I have a copy of the book by Bachelard - I bought it by following up the "if you like this..." links on Amazon. I found it totally incomprehensible. Maybe I should have another try.

Posted by: Ian on August 28, 2003 11:35 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20031001122845/http://www.ashladle.org/archives/000200.html

Weblog As Place

By Notes from an Eclectic Mind

Note: *This is my belated contribution to the Ecotone topic Weblog as Place.*

For a number of years now a former professor obstinately corrects me each time I refer to the Internet as a place. Just having completed a major overhaul of Eclectic Mind and its companion blog, PhotoEclectic, the Ecotone topic Weblog as Place strikes a particular chord with me. No cartographer has ever or may ever draw a map of the shifting online landscape yet many of us daily trot down paths weve worn into its surface.

The act of registering a domain name is not unlike staking out a homestead. Although Ive had a website in some form or another since 1995 I didnt become a dot com owner until May 5, 2001. Seven months later, after listening to Leo Laporte talking about his blog, Leoville, on the Screensavers, I signed up for a Blogger account. It would be almost a year, however, before I got serious about Notes from an Eclectic Mind.

Unlike many online journals, Eclectic Mind gives me the living space I dont have in real life. What began as a drawing board for the book Ive been talking about writing for years quickly evolved into an alternate dimension, a private public space vital to my days. I now feel that I live my private life in a bedroom, two closets, a bath, and a blog.

For me midlife crisis took the form of a complete role redefinition on May 8, 2002 when I became the sole caregiver for my best friend and second mother in the aftermath of her stroke. Never married and childless, I suddenly found myself running a household. When R.s therapists said her road back would be long and slow, I didnt grasp the full import of their words. And when they said life would never be quite the same again, I didnt believe them because I didnt want to.

My favorite old sci fi series, Dark Shadows, posits a theory of parallel time, a place where all the same people exist but lead different lives for having made different choices. On our weblogs I believe we live in selective time, sharing choice bits and pieces of our lives and viewpoints, altering our portrayal of reality and our efforts to cope with it by what we say and dont say.

The role Eclectic Mind plays in my days is not unlike that of the Round Table where Papa and his cronies used to hang out. Here, theres always a chair for me, and some reasonably like-minded and friendly folk drop by throughout the day just like I wander by their places and we

talk a little. If my incomparable BlogMoxie designer Julie could figure out how to plug in a coffee pot so we could share a cup, no one would object.

I may have initially approached the daily cultivation of Eclectic Mind from a point of depression, but I didnt stay that way. Originally I came here feeling that Id lost all sense of self-expression. I no longer taught computer seminars and my home-based website business was in serious decline. Because our tastes differ so radically I only brought with me to my new home with R. those things that would fit in my room. Everything else went into storage. Cooking and cleaning on this alien level felt like a prison sentence. (Just for the record, Cinderellas wicked step-mother should have been boiled in oil for what she put that girl through and I dont want to hear any more cracks about June Cleaver.) It was all pretty damned depressing. But within weeks of writing daily on Eclectic Mind, my friend J. was telling me, I think the blog has been good for you. I began to litter my sentences in real life conversations with references to what other bloggers were writing about on their sites. Like taking out a room in crazy apartment building, I started to get to know the neighbors.

My weblog can be many places to me, a rowdy table at the local diner where stories are swapped or the quiet bank of a river where thoughts are mulled through. People who are only now coming online strike me as trepidatious pioneers, curious about whats out there but apt to flee homeward if the natives seem hostile. My little cabin made it through the first winter and now Ive added on a room or two, put on a fresh coat of paint, and gotten better furniture. I carved out this place, made it mine, and draw sustenance from it. Im here to stay.

Posted by Rana at August 18, 2003 10:06 AM

Comments

So happy to have you 'drop by' Ecotone with this addition to the conversation. I had thought you might side with those of us who have found hospitable terraine and feel a 'placeness' to our weblogs. Not all concur with this point of view. I also have another bit of info I'll send via email re 'small towns' and writing opportunities pertaining thereto. How's the heat down your way these days? Can we send you some of our surplus rain?

Posted by: fredf at August 18, 2003 01:01 PM

:-) Wonderful words... Thank you!

Posted by: Andrea at August 18, 2003 07:59 PM

I for one am glad you're here, Rana. You're an inspiration.

Posted by: Dorothea Salo at August 19, 2003 11:03 AM

Aw, shucks. (blush)

Posted by: Rana at August 19, 2003 11:11 AM

This is such a beautiful piece of writing, and so true. My own blog is my private cafe, studio, office, and lounge, or none of those, but definitely a PLACE.

Thank you for writing this.

Posted by: Melissa at August 19, 2003 05:26 PM

Hi Rana, I was so surprised that more people didn't concur with the view you express so beautifully here! I don't know what I'd do without my blog to live in part of the time. And I was glad to hear you say you find yourself talking in conversation about what your blog friends are writing - I thought maybe I was the only one who did that, and watched the eyebrows go up.

Posted by: beth at August 19, 2003 07:33 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20031206055854/http://www.ranablog.com/archives/000399.php

Weblogs as Place

By Other Wind

Ecotone Topic for August 15—Weblogs as Place (I'm a little behind on this one.)

These are the questions:

Is your weblog a place in itself? How do you locate it in the scheme of things? What kind of map is it on? What's your relationship with your weblog? And with those who visit it?

I see my weblog as a place if I use the word place loosely and define it as a certain location or experience that is sought out, that evolves, that is built or becoming. It is a distinct locale. But roads don't go everywhere yet, and I doubt they ever will. In some ways, my weblog is more like a vehicle or even a map. I use it to get somewhere in my mind, to express something, or to have fun. Sometimes, others visit it and use it too. The way I create it and use it reflects my mind, my life, and my physical place, but the reflection is only partial.

I like writing this weblog, but I haven't completely figured out what I'm doing yet. So, I don't know much about how to answer these questions. Other Wind is on a map, in the sense that it is linked to from other locations. Links on Movable Type and Weblogs.com, on search engine results, or on other bloggers' sites tell people how to find it. And it links to, or tells people how to find, other sites.

My husband, David, points out that a weblog, or any site on the web, is different from a physical site because you can visit it directly, and usually quickly, from any location.

Weblogs are controlled locations, though, and their environs are not left to chance. Comments from the outside can add a dimension of otherness and perhaps chaos, but they too are under control. They can be turned off or deleted. Weblog content is chosen and portrayed by a single person or group. So, weblogs are places we can visit, but they are not as organic and eclectic as physical sites likes towns and buildings populated by unpredictable people or like wild sites populated by plants and animals.

Comments

And yet the place of my weblog invites others to visit me in real space, and several have done so. More of this to come, as our community becomes face-to-face acquaintance.

Posted by: fredf on August 21, 2003 08:46 AM

Source: http://otherwind.fademark.net/archives/000396.html#000396

[Lifescapes]

I imagine my weblog as a kind of window on our 31 acres of Texas hill country. It's my view of this place (a view colored & shaped by the views of many different places I've lived and traveled and read about), and of the way I feel about it, and of the way it seems to shape me. The window looks out on weather, on plant and animal wildlife, on the dogs and geese and sheep and gardens, and on me, working outdoors around the place, or at my computer, or in the kitchen or in my favorite chair. I try to make it as inclusive and as authentic as I can. But I'm always aware that the window is also a view IN, for the people who read the log and who are curious about this place and the way we live here. It's a selected view not the whole. A window never looks out on all the landscape. And when people try to look in, they sometimes can't see through the curtains, or into the dark corners....

Blogs as Place

By Panchromatica

There is a fascinating discussion going on at Ecotone about the idea of blogs as place rather than being about place.

I'm currently trying to read a hefty book called "The Production of Space" by Henri Lefebvre. According to the blurb this is about:

a reconciliation between mental space (the space of the philosophers) and real space (the physical and social spheres in which we all live).

Now my reading of this so far is still patchy and incomplete but what is interesting in the present context however is actually a comment by the translator to the effect that:

English speaking experts tend perhaps not to use the word 'space' with quite the same facility as their French speaking counterparts use the word espace, but they do have a corresponding fondness for such spatial terms as 'sector' and 'sphere'. (footnote p8)

Now what I think that means is that the idea of non-physical space is more than just a metaphor - and I think I agree. Lefebvre is probably not the first to make that point. His book dates from 1974while about 10 years before that another writer, Melvin Webber, wrote an article called "The urban place and the non-place urban realm". His argument was that communities of interest no longer depended on propinquity. I haven't been able to find a URL for the article but this is from a paper on a similar theme

In 1964 Melvin Webber challenged the notions of community and centrality used in urban studies by demonstrating that 'community without propinquity' was emerging within certain social networks. He argued that individuals were enmeshed in an overlapping range of groups,

and that increasingly these social networks were not limited by physical or geographical location.

This is long before the web and even before much of the writing of Ted Nelson so Webber was pretty much ahead of the game. (Interestingly however Nelson coined the term 'hypertext' in 1965!)

What this all means I think is that a weblog, especially one with a wide user base offering commetns and discussion, is a place, incorporating many of the characteristics of a physical locality but adding new features of its own. After all how often do we see terms like 'drop by' etc in relation to someones blog?

Could sites like RedPaper be viewed similarly?

August 27, 2003 in Web | Permalink

Comments

Ian, thanks for joining the discussion at Ecotone and for your astute comments. My blog feels so much like a "place" that I sometimes feel if I looked around the corner, the commentators would be gathered for dinner! I think the reason we are all a little perplexed by this is simply that this way of interacting - using our minds but not our physical presence - is so new.

Posted by: beth | August 28, 2003 at 12:32 AM

Back in 1982, I wrote my thesis on urbanism as a series of social relations and the role of communication patterns in the organization of these relations -- highly theoretical stuff, but the essential points were that place is a relation to space, or a way to integrate space.

In plainer language: I agree with your conclusion about the kind of "place" a weblog is -- one that is challenging some of our notions about place.

Posted by: maria | August 28, 2003 at 07:07 PM

Source: http://ibanda.blogs.com/panchromatica/2003/08/blogs_as_place.html

Discussion

Can anyone find a thread that unites those of us who associate elements of physicality to our weblogs and writing, and those of us who do not? I wonder if we all knew each other well enough, could we find a concrete-abstract divide in points of view? Is it that some of us are willing to allow our metaphors to help us think about ourselves in relation to place, while others are more objective, and take themselves out of their words to a greater degree? I haven't the foggiest idea what I'm talking about here, really, but would like to see us interacting on these topics a bit more. I'm really tickled with the turnout for the biweeklies so far. Hope we will continue to find a few more souls around the periphery of the blogosphere who share our interest. I wonder too about writing as we are now to a biweekly topic, but have that be some snippet of literature about place, a quotation, that sort of thing. Many of you are quite conversant with the A-team writers in this genre. Something to think about. -- Fred

Seems to me that if there's a "divide" (and I'd rather not see it that way) it is over how we define "place" to begin with. Some are involved here because they write and think about physical places where they live; they are more in the realm of nature writers, or urban sociologists/anthropologists. "Place" is the desert, or the ocean, or the city. Others are coming at "place" from a more metaphorical perspective, and their comfort area tends to be more literary or spiritual, and less, perhaps, biological. But I think those lines are blurry. Isn't it great that we have so many perspectives, and that new people, not necessarily tightly-defined "ecological" or "nature" folks, are considering these topics? I'm also finding reading the comment threads on the various posts very interesting, and it doesn't bother me that there isn't as much discussion going on here. --Beth

Substitute "difference" or "dichotomy" for "divide" if this word seems devisive (and isn't that too many "D" words in one sentence to be legal in some states?) I agree the 'lines' are blurry and I am much more a lumper than a splitter (sorry, biological reference from 'the old days') and am enjoying the different perspectives. I'd be happy to hear some of these points of view elaborated in discussion here, but who am I kidding? If there was a really interesting conversation going on here at Ecotone in recent days, I would be hard pressed to participate; I am thinking of renaming Fragments to "Kibbles and Bits"... know what I mean? -- Fred

There's generally a pretty good view of the landscape from atop a divide. -- Chris C.

I think there's plenty of room in the meaning of "place" to fit an intellectual activity like a blog, and there's ample precedent: You might even say the blogosphere is a sub-universe of cyberspace.

As one who only visits, I can't speak to the psychological status of a blog, but it seems as if most of you (we?) who write about places invest them with meaning beyond their root-and-pebble reality. So it's no surprise that some people also give the blog itself that extra dimension.

Want another challenge? How about coining an arresting, evocative term one could substitute for "blogosphere" -- which suggests "Brigit Jones' Diary" rather more strongly than "Walden." I mean, is a blogosphere more like a billiard ball or an amoeba; do I, as a visitor, orbit it or invade? - P.

This is a discussion I would love to be able to contribute to in more detail – work pressures prevent me from mulling over the points and developing a long argument in support of what I am about to say, but here it is:

Maps and Place

Bi-weekly Topic for Sept. 1, 2003

Losing One's Place

By London and the North (Coup de Vent)

Funny how easy it is to get lost. One minute you feel secure, on track - Knowing where you're coming from and trusting that you will find wherever you are meant to be going. The path just seems to keep coming.

And then suddenly you're adrift.

Can this be an aesthetic experience in itself? To be lost? A man stopped me. He was looking for a lost dog. I hadn't seen it.

I remember once having a profound experience. I'm not sure it is that easy to recapture and in any case may sound trite but it went something like this: - There is only this moment now - here - wherever I am

Am I then still lost or just relocated by meaning?

.....

I have loved maps so deeply, so widely. I have lived with maps on my walls: A Historical Map of The London Underground Roman Britain Wensleydale on tattered brown cloth A pink, green, yellow and mauve Map of the World I have been to exhibitions about maps. It would be misleading to think I could have a new journey writing about an old love. Writing, for me, is this spot here which passes with each keyboard tap. I could almost imagine this view could explain my increasing longsightedness or the forgetting of appointments for the temporal dimension is not that easy to map and diaries become the dictator.

::: posted by Coup de Vent at 8/3/2003 01:27:27 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040101082009/www.airenet.co.uk/alife/2003_08_01_archives.html#105991467960797964

on Mapping Place

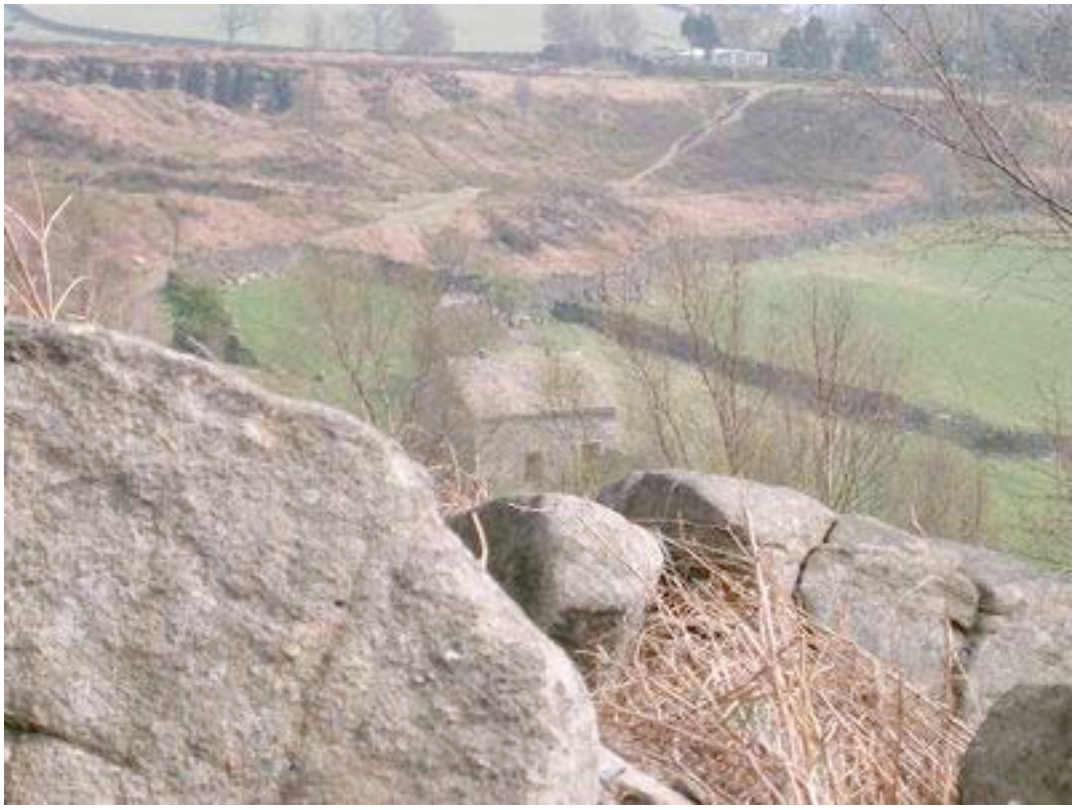
By London and the North (Triks)

(Responding to the bi-weekly topics in Ecotone - Maps and Place).

"The map is not the territory"? Well actually, it is. They whom I live with are inclined towards postmodernism. I'm more of a modernist myself. In my world the map ***is*** the territory. There's a lot of it - some of which I tread often and parts which I will visit some day I expect.

When I speak of terrain I am also speaking of it in a temporal sense. And of its texture. The lower path floods in rain and still my spirit soars as it did when I was a puppy and saw the path come running towards me alive. I love getting wet. Sometimes on walks I take them to my favourite spot. Here they throw me a few stones. Usually about six. Then I dig for them as the water starts to cloud.

If we go through and over the rough rather than up the deer path to the bogs, we might sit and watch with nose and ears. I never understand why we sit here for a while but we do. Once I saw some beasts in the distance and was frightened so I barked. They didn't dare come near after that. I like to watch the other dogs from high up and see who is where. In the dry season, when we linger more, the berries are there and I help myself. I don't think I should have to be hand fed them when they are more my mouth height than hers in any case.



I own this path that I am on now. Until I have left it. But it is interesting to smell who else has owned it at other times. I ignore them when they appear and pass.

Sometimes the world is taller - it just changes and I work harder to find my ball in the dark underworld. I am not allowed to chase things here but at BA I do. I run the bank faster than the river and move the rabbit world till it has disappeared to the underground village. I can hear and smell but cannot see much down there. This is one of my favourite places. I have a lot of them.

In my territory on the other side of the door I sleep and play. In this one, where I am a granddog I lie anywhere until they ask me to move.

On holiday my bed comes with me and my spot is there. And that's where I am.

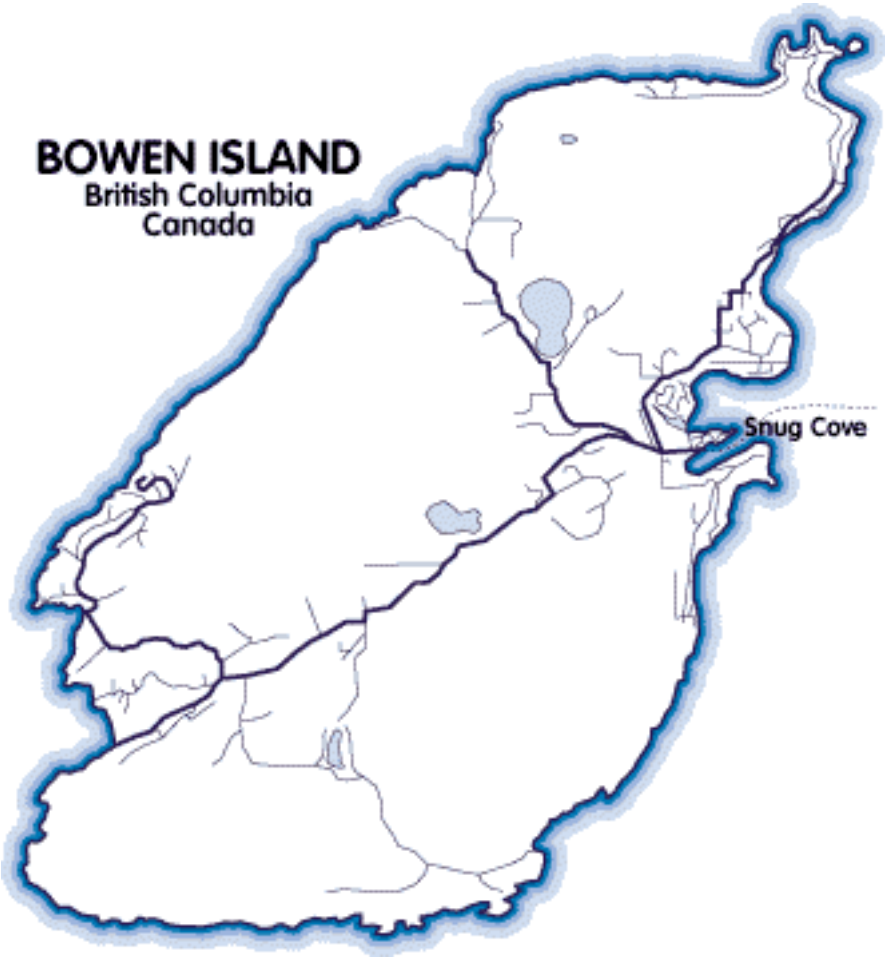
And I am always aware of where they are. That's how I know where I am. It's the space and sounds between them and me. The feeling of having been somewhere is like a lovely meal and makes me sigh, allowing me to be, just here, now.

Posted by Triks at 06:38 AM

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20031023192232/www.airenet.co.uk/alife/2003_09.html

September 01, 2003

By Bowen Island Journal



September 01, 2003

A map of Bowen Island *This week's Ecotone Wiki topic is* Maps and Place As a kid two of the most prized possessions were my stamp collection and my atlas. I learned more from those two things about geography than anything I learned in school. I learned about the shapes of countries, why some were coloured red (the Commonwealth, of course) More importantly, I learned from those things how we see the world, and it wasn't until I was in university and I had read Hugh Brody's Maps and Dreams that I began to see all of these representations as maps of place. The map itself, the topographic representation of a place was merely the beginning. What a country chose to put on its stamps was also a map. Certain countries other than the USA for example,

honoured US presidents, a fact completely inexplicable to me in my childhood, but absolutely clear in the geo-political consciousness raising of my late teens (although why Poland issued a stamp in 1975 with George Washington on it is still a mystery to me). At any rate, suffice to say that my twin interests in philately and maps led me to thinking deeply about representations of place.

* * *

Maps are tools that help us make sense of place. We create maps of any number of scales in many different media all to tell stories about what we know. The very best maps contain exactly enough information for a specific purpose, be it wayfinding, hunting and gathering or planning. The maps that are most real are those that accurately reproduce our experience of a place, in three dimensions with sound and texture. We normally think of maps as flat reproductions of the elements of a landscape. They are pictures, with physical geography represented by lines and colours. Peering at these maps can help us understand the forces that shaped the land, or the best place to build a house. Maps are animated by a keen eye, and eye which understands both what is being represented, and what it really looks like. But maps are just pretty pictures without a sense of place. Only when you have visited Bowen Island does the above map mean anything substantial to you. It is only after you have walked through the old-growth of Cape Roger Curtis that the 600 acres in the lower left corner of the map resonate so strongly for the wild jewel that it is. Only after standing on my deck overlooking Mannion Bay - the large "bite" on the right side of the map - can you know what it is to look out over log booms and ferry traffic to the rocky shore of Whytecliffe on the mainland.

* * *

Stories are a little like maps of place. They help us to understand place and to navigate a little in someone else's boots. Over the 2+ years I have kept this blog, several people have told me how much they appreciated getting to know one islander's perspective and how it helped to inform their life on Bowen. That is why I have provided links to the Bowen Island noosphere, a group mind that exists on the internet, fed a steady stream of content by the likes of Markus and Marian, Michael and Penny, John and Mark and Richard and the contributors to Bowen Online. And then there is the Bowen Island GeoLibrary which in many ways is the sum total of everything our municipal government knows about this place. It contains maps of water sources, land use, geological composition, rainfall, roads, structures, plans, beaches and dreams. It also contains a way of understanding some of the stories contained in this blog and in other story gathering projects, as the Local Stories module charts our semantic relationship with the landscape. In a very real way we are connecting stories of place to maps here on Bowen Island. What use it will have is unknown. In a generation perhaps people will look back at the stories and the ways we were and recognize them as earlier steps on a path, deepening their understanding of place and how they arrived where they are. In the end perhaps that is the value of mapping place: it establishes our mark in time, like a "Kilroy Was Here" etched in the landscape for others to know that we tried to understand this place and live fully within it.

posted by Chris at 12:20 AM

Source:
http://www.chriscorrigan.com/miscellany/bijournal/2003_09_01_archive.html#106240082116289721

Maps and Place - Geoff on Ecotone Wiki

By Mulubinba Moments (Geoff)

Many years ago, while still a full-time student and despite meagre financial means I decided to buy the Lord Of The Rings trilogy. Not for me the sensibly priced paperback edition, I had to have the hardback edition - for the maps. The paperback edition lacked the elegant fold-out maps boldly printed in red and black on crisp pure-white paper. For me these maps were not just an indispensable aid to finding my way around Middle Earth as I read the books, but beautiful artefacts themselves. Maps and writing are inextricably linked. But just as language existed before writing was invented, so did the oral and mental equivalent of maps. Aboriginal Australians did not have writing or maps. Yet they were able to do many of the things we use maps for. In the more arid regions of Australia they lived a nomadic existence covering vast distances on foot. They survived and were able to find food and water because they had knowledge of the land. This knowledge was not just location knowledge, but ecological knowledge - for example the knowledge that near a certain type of tree you only have to dig a little to get water. There was in fact a kind of kinship with the land that is described as "Sense of Place". It might be tempting to think that maps were invented elsewhere as a consequence of people abandoning the nomadic lifestyle and living in more permanent settlements. After all, the earliest known map in existence is a depiction of a neolithic village in what is now Iraq (Catal Hyük). It has been suggested that the earliest ancient Egyptian maps were developed in response to the need to define land ownership because the annual flooding of the Nile removed landmarks. However in many areas Aboriginals lived in villages (which they often abandoned according to the season, but were able to return to the next year). Throughout Australia the Aboriginals knew and respected tribal boundaries. The Aboriginals had villages, boundaries, travel and trade, and their spirituality was linked with "Place". They did all this without maps of any sort. The knowledge that allowed all this was of course passed from generation to generation by oral tradition. But in our culture the use of writing can enhance the use of language, and maps can enrich our experience of place, whether the place is real or fictional.

September 01, 2003 in Geoff's posts | Permalink

Comments

Hi Y'all! Interesting post. I feel so moved by people's relationship with place in other cultures. It's so humbling and exciting - touches something in me. I guess we are very street sign bound in the westernised world. We don't know where we are unless we're told!

I also like maps in books - espcially those relating to railways and tube maps in London.

Posted by: Coup de Vent | September 02, 2003 at 06:46 AM

Thanks for this piece reminding me that non-written, mental maps are maps all the same; our arrogance in forgetting this is like dismissing oral tradition story-telling as if it must be fiction, simply because our minds aren't trained to remember and transmit knowledge that way.

Posted by: beth | September 02, 2003 at 11:07 AM

Hey CdeV...do you remember a board game from the late seventies that was based on a map of the tube system? I've never forgotten the likes of Cockfosters or Marylebone as a result.

Posted by: Chris | September 04, 2003 at 12:13 AM

This is very interesting to read.

Posted by: Christina recollet | February 25, 2004 at 12:59 AM

Source: http://mulubinba.typepad.com/mulubinba_moments/2003/09/maps_and_place_.html

Maps as Place

By Panchromatica

The excellent Ecotone wiki has moved on to Maps as Place for its bimonthly topic.

Maps I think are a language, not a place. They translate what you see as you walk around into another medium, a story if you like, a story that you can take away and reread. Like any language some of us are more fluent than others and can read them in the original - we can look at a map and visualise what it represents. I find that easier with rural mapping than with urban. I can read the topography and get some idea of the landform, although crucially the vegetation will be missing except in the most rudinentary form.

With urban mapping however there is no building equivalent of the contour and so the key issue of enclosure is missing. That square we see could be surrounded by a series of single storey sheds or by the most elegant of Georgian terraces. While there are often clues in things like road layout, usually the place has to be experienced in the 'original language' for the urban map to mean something. Pushing the metaphor too far perhaps, urban mapping needs some sort of Rosetta Stone - photographs, written descriptions, personal experience for a full ranslation to be possible.

September 01, 2003 in Environment, Writing | Permalink

Comments

When I walk around central London I often just look at the rooftops / skyline and think that makes a wonderful socio-historical urban map.

Posted by: Coup de Vent | September 01, 2003 at 09:51 PM

Source: http://ibanda.blogs.com/panchromatica/2003/09/maps_as_place.html

Maps and Place: To Boldly Go

This week's Ecotone Biweekly topic is Maps and Place.

By Fragments From Floyd

The other day I picked up a National Geographic map from a back room shelf and sat in a quiet place and traveled to Indonesia. It is a place I have never been, and yet, I am there, in a sense, knowing from the map about the vegetation types and terrain, following the courses of meandering rivers within watersheds, tracing contour lines that hint of the texture of the place, of its geology and age. I walk along trails and roads past orchards and quarries and swamps and skirt around the perimeter of villages and cities. To possess an accurate and detailed map and see the world through its symbolic language of place is perhaps the next best thing to being physically in the place depicted. And yet, at least today, there still remains a vast gulf between map and territory. This may not always be so, and the best maps and the places they symbolize may someday be difficult to distinguish from one another.

The computer "games" that grow in synergy with government-sponsored technologies like war are already closing the distance between map and territory. The average civilian like you and me sees glimpses of this in computer-enhanced reenactments of actual bombing runs from our recent spate of "regime changes" around the world. The camera, in a CNN glorification of the war du jour zooms down from orbital to suborbital to upper atmospheric, pulling into range over a middle eastern desert, flying lower, down between dunes, showing wadi and oasis zooming past, with realistic shadows, texture, signs of life. Then we follow 'ordinance' as it annihilates the target: a baby formula factory or palace, perhaps. I could have been in the cockpit with the pilot, so realistic were the images racing past as the computer recreated the map in three-dimensional reality. It seems so sad to me that our most advanced maps are not for exploring places but for incinerating them with our gamers-thumbs or our bunkerbusters. And yet, the day will come when we can travel virtually anywhere, perceptually if not physically, by state-of-the-art "maps".

Arising from this same game and war technology and augmented by others we've yet to imagine, the day will come when I (or more likely, my children or theirs) can don a map-helmet and view-visor and walk the trail up old familiar places I have loved-- I can hike up Henley Hollow once again, or climb to the top of Massey Gap or peer out from a floating island in the Okeefenokee by merely saying the name of the place. In those pseudo-real places there will seem to exist 'real' trees and rocks, and perhaps simulated wind and water noises and one may see from time to time the common creatures of those coordinates (or the ones that *used* to live there decades earlier, when the ecosystem was healthy and whole). These computer generated maps of the future will be as much like being there as one can get without literally being in the place. Still, the map will not unite us with the place, even though viewing it may evoke some of the feeling of having visited places I used to go easily and often.

There are so many alluring features that I see on my topo maps or out my windows as I drive the back roads of rural Virginia. And yet more and more of these places that I can see I will never visit as my physical strength and vigor diminish over the years. I have already had to say goodbye to distant wilderness valleys and mountaintops-- in the Smokies, or up in Cranberry Glades in West Virginia-- that I once experienced but will not likely have the opportunity or physical resources to visit again. And yet I would love to be there, in that place I remember or see in my mind's eye out my car window, just beyond the farthest ridge in the distance through the blue haze.

If there is indeed a God responsible for creating all of this that our senses and instruments have revealed to us about the Universe (as I believe) then He is not likely to think us content for eternity to ride on clouds and play harps in our pajamas. So while mortally bound to a failing

chassis I daydream of heaven. I imagine that I inhabit a new body and am not bound by either time nor space-- and am in some sense *omnipresent*, a trait 'inherited' from God himself. In this eternal incarnation, the newly-corporeal thing that I call self can actually be present in those cherished earthly places I have remembered or in the tropical rain forest or tundra or steppes and places I never experienced in this body. I could fly away in the 'twinkling of an eye' to any place within the boundaries of the Universe, exploring galaxies and perhaps even Time itself. Then there would be no need for maps because the physical-temporal place itself would need no reduction to symbol or representation or picture-thinking. Eternity would not be a terror or a bore as some imagine. I would never tire of exploring without limit, without fatigue; and I'd never have to stop and ask directions again! And rather than the perpetual tedium of cloud-riding and harp-playing forever, over the eons I would only find ever greater wonder and awe in the things and places I would be and know within this largest place we call the Universe.

Posted by fred1st at 07:07 AM | Comments (5) | TrackBack

Comments

I read recently that Porsche (or maybe it was BMW) was in the development stage for a helmet for mechanics that would project content of repair manuals directly onto the retina. Mechanics could compare diagrams to reality and read instructions while actually working in the engine compartment. Augmenting relaity instead of replacing it.

Posted by bill at September 1, 2003 01:50 PM

It is amazing what maps can fire in the imagination. I wonder if that isn't an experience that may diminish as younger generations have different expectations - of a landscape that can be simulated and "travelled" through, virtually. Will they realise that it is only virtual? I have also enjoyed pouring over maps (where does that expression come from?) and puzzling over the meaning of those damn colonising colours assigned to countries. An arm outstretched and pointing.....

Posted by Coup de Vent at September 1, 2003 04:58 PM

About 50 years ago I read a book where nearly each human had his/her brain disconnected from the body and installed into a bell-jar, awash in nutrient. The brain was connected to electronic nodes that allowed etermal life, lived in dreaming and pleasurable sensationing (is that a word??). The only "real" humans were those who tended the bell jars. We are closing in on this nightmare.

Posted by Cop Car at September 1, 2003 06:45 PM

I love the idea of the eternal incarnation where we can revisit cherished places from our past and we are not limited by time or physical boundaries - thanks Fred!

Posted by Jenny at September 2, 2003 12:59 AM

The ability to fly -- to lift my arms and soar into the air, Superman-like, and go wherever I wish, at whatever speed and altitude -- has been a recurring, persistent daydream of mine for many years. Longing for the eternal state, I suppose...

Posted by Curt at September 3, 2003 12:46 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20031002132444/http://www.fragmentsfromfloyd.com/archives/2003_09.html

A Map Means I'm Lost

By Notes from an Eclectic Mind

The following is my contribution to Ecotone's new bi-weekly topic, Maps and Place.

My family always seemed to travel to known destinations. That simple statement says more about us than volumes could. It perhaps explains why today I dont like to go to places that require me to use a map. For all my forty years Ive lived between the Red River and the Rio Grande and known how to get everywhere I needed to in between. More than once Ive headed down some narrow country road only to have a passenger ask nervously, Do you know where youre going? And always Ive answered; Sure, as I traced the lines on my mental map of a life lived in small places.

For the most part, maps touched my formative years only in imaginary ways. I remember trying to recreate the map from Treasure Island, wadding up a piece of notebook paper over and over until it took on the creased softness of age. With magic markers I traced the lines of an island and put an X at the spot where the treasure lay hidden.

One summer, one of the last before the chasm that exists between us now opened up, my sister took me to Six Flags. We came home with a cartoon like map of the theme park that became a major player in the games of make-believe with which I entertained myself and occasionally shared with M., the neighbor boy down the street.

Oh, the glove compartment in the family car did hold a map of Texas, picked up at some filling station long ago. The creases had worn feathery and thin with age and open diamonds appeared in the spots where four lines intersected. Occasionally Papa retrieved the map before some outing and opened it on the kitchen table under the good reading lamp. I dont think he needed the map, only liked looking at it; the pilot in him knowing you should look at your charts before you take off.

I can see him there still, in the circle of light thrown by the lamp, leaning his head on his hand. He would stare at the paper and trace lines with his index finger, occasionally tapping some spot twice for emphasis. Always twice. Tap, tap, and that was it. Wed go on the trip and I never saw the map again although I often heard the words, Goddamnit honey, we are *not* lost.

When I read The Island of Lost Maps: A True Story of Cartographic Crime by Miles Harvey, I realized my favorite maps are old and inaccurate, reflections more of a fanciful weaving of conflated explorers accounts than accurate surveying. They are the maps that say, with honest warning, Beyond this point there be monsters, the ones that suggest you can only sail so far before you go off the edge. I dont want to go to uncharted territory, only to be warned about where it begins.

Many years ago I found myself lost, at night, in Yellowstone National Park. Construction workers closed the road wed used to come in and the late hour and unfamiliarity with the land

forced me to pull over, spread a map across my lap, clench a flashlight in my teeth, and balance a compass in the palm of my right hand. No matter where I am in Texas I can always, instinctively, turn my face north. Once Im oriented with the poles, I can fake the rest. But when I cross over the border into the alien lands beyond, I travel with a compass.

That night, in Yellowstone, the simple act of finding north calmed my nerves. I turned the car around, over the protests of my companions who demanded to know why the only cars we saw were heading the other way. Finally, in irritation, I exclaimed, Goddamnit we are *not* lost anymore. I have a map and a compass and I know how to use them both. After a heartbeat of silence a voice asked cautiously, Then why are you so grumpy? I let my own heart beat a time or two before I answered ruefully, Because the only time I have to use them is when Im lost and I dont like to be lost.

Posted by Rana at September 1, 2003 10:56 AM | TrackBack Comments

So it's not just guys that do it? :-}

Posted by: fredf at September 1, 2003 01:45 PM

Nope. You nailed me. I will almost never stop and ask directions. Drives R. crazy. I think it's what comes of being my Daddy's only son. Kind of a male thing grafted on to an already obstinate female.

Posted by: Rana at September 1, 2003 01:52 PM

Thanks for that post. I enjoyed reading of your relationship with maps and place. There's something about tales of old maps, old local maps that is, that does get me excited! What i really love is comparing old and new maps of my local area in Yorkshire and checking out paths, courses of streams and place names. So much can get lost of you don't call it something anymore or don't walk it.

Posted by: Coup de Vent at September 1, 2003 04:06 PM

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20051225144948/www.ranablog.com/archives/000433.php

A Map Book

By Feathers of Hope (Pica)]

The Ecotone Wiki is running a collective post today on Maps and Place. Please stop by and check out all the entries and please feel free to participate either by linking to your own post about maps and place or by joining the discussion!

Below is the text of an artist's book I made a while ago as a present for my father, who loved maps and the understanding they conveyed. He could study a map of a place he had never been (Spanish military maps were superb, almost as good as the British Ordnance Survey Maps) and decide that THIS place would be a good spot to camp in (we wildcamped throughout the 1970s and 1980s in rural Spain). He was always right, down to the abundance of firewood he predicted just by looking at an unfolded sheet of paper.

We had our moments, my father and I, but talking about maps always makes me realize how much I miss him...

Map Book

I never told anyone THE SECRET that Jennifer & I looked for years in the Casa de Campo on horseback & amid the ruins of countless Castilian castles for an iron RING we were certain would lead us to buried TREASURE but we had NO MAP

It took years to discover that the Treasure lies in the very art of being able to read a map at all. (Thanks Dad.)

Posted by Pica at September 1, 2003 10:18 AM

Comments

That's really nice and inspiring. I wondered what some of the images in your book were of. I have sometimes made monoprints or etchings of my locality - "my" locality, with personal punctuations of the landscape. I have an idea that making a book takes more courage than

working on a single sheet of paper. I think I might try working on a large sheet and folding it up map like.

Posted by: Coup de Vent at September 1, 2003 02:19 PM

I love reading about your life in Spain. It brings back floods of memories for me. I wish I could relive them. My Dad loved maps and compasses also - my sister and I have inherited the desire to search out the ruined abbeys and stone circles marked on the Ordinance Survey maps - we could spend days doing this whenever I visit her in England.

Posted by: Jenny at September 1, 2003 03:38 PM

The book looks great, and I just wish I could see it and hold it in my hands. Did he like it?

Posted by: beth at September 2, 2003 12:49 PM

Beautiful piece. On an aside, I think the Ordnance Survey maps are fantastic - such detail and accuracy. I am sure they would even show the cows in the meadows if the animals kept still long enough.

Posted by: Geoff at September 4, 2003 04:35 PM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2003/09/01/a_map_book....

ECOTONE TOPIC: Maps and Place

By The Cassandra Pages

In my memory, there are always maps. There's the wall of topographic maps in my father's office, the antique maps of New York State hanging on the walls, the intricately-detailed bird's-eye views of central New York towns in the late 1800s, the blue school globe in my childhood bedroom – I can still remember the area in the Pacific that had rubbed off - the elaborate fold-out maps from National Geographic, the pull-down maps of the United States and the world hanging in every classroom, accompanied by long wooden pointers that made a hard rapping sound on the blackboard. Later there were specific topo maps for camping and hiking trips, and a boyfriend who sometimes seemed more in love with maps than with me, losing himself in the delicate green lines spread on his dorm room floor: a meditation and escape from the pressures of getting into grad school. Maps have accompanied all the best road trips of my life, even when the point was to leave the mapped and predictable behind; maps were part of the anticipation, the planning, the excitement of imagining "I will be *here* – and afterwards, maps became part of memory: "I was *there*." Maps settled arguments and solidified dreams; they taught me things I couldn't see and made me want to see others. And, of course, they were beautiful. Because I'm a designer, I've used maps in publications destined for other people, designed atlases, and even made a few maps myself. Nothing teaches you the real geography of a place better than drawing its map yourself, and nothing makes you more appreciative of the skill and judgment of people who do nothing else but map creation. Maps represent a lot, but neither are they a place, nor a person; maps are merely tracks on a beach, an enigmatic, tantalizing trail. I wondered today what a map of my present life might look like. There would be an X for my house, with a garden indicated behind it, and some trees, and the street outside, and the field near the river and the

grove of thorny locusts. There'd be the bridge across the river, and some roads, big ones and small, not too many, leading to the places where I buy food or go to sing, or buy books, or visit friends. Another X, maybe, for my father-in-law's house, and my sister-in-law's, and the church, and the homes of a few friends. Then there would be a road west – that one goes to some mountains and beyond them to the place I was born. And a road north, toward Canada. And a road south, to the big city. And one east, not taken very much, toward the ocean. What would they tell you, these trails across the horizontal plane of my earth? Do I really exist in these two dimensions, these X and Y coordinates? No, but there's no map for the rest of me: I can't draw where I go through this machine, for instance, except to make an undecipherable cross-hatching of more two-dimensional lines, point-to-point. I can't map for you my past or my future, the flights of my imagination, my dreams, the fragments of poems and paintings or where they came from, and where they go, like the morning fog. It might be better to make a map that shows this room: where I'm sitting with this computer by a southern window that looks out on the street, the place where I eat, the piano, the Druze chest by the door, the window out onto the garden…the location of the blue jay nest under the wild grapevine, the woodchuck hole, the wrenhouse, the yellow jacket nest under the tomatoes. I think it might tell you more. But, then, my map seems to be becoming words. 1:33 PM

Source:
http://cassandrapages.blogspot.com/2003_08_31_cassandrapages_archive.html#106243760247972965

Treasure/map

by P.

It probably still stands in the corner of the "Scout House" in my hometown, 40 years dustier and that much more marked up by identifying fingers and the odd, illegal, pencil -- a tall, framed board displaying nine 1919 series topographic maps of the Susquehanna valley and its neighborhood, neatly trimmed and glued in place. When I first saw it and realized what it was, it gave me a thrill like no other map has done since.

I was 11.

Now you're shaking your head and thinking, "what a geek! Thrilled by a map?"

But I was a kid with a great deal of imagination -- still am, I suppose -- and I was just spreading my wings in my little town. I had permission to roam a little farther every year, and I was learning to find my way around town alone, to explore the creek and drop stones on waterbugs under the river bridge, to heave my bike to the highest street and speed down to the first stop sign, and I was already beginning to wonder, "what else is there?"

Kids don't get that much freedom anymore, I don't think. Will I trust my first-grader to hike to school alone in a couple of years? In third grade, I walked clear across town, such as it was -- my parents felt safer and no one pestered them with warnings all the time.

I knew about topographic maps, and maps in general, from family trips. I'm sure I met road maps early -- I can't remember the first -- but I grasped the trick of squiggly contour lines from

studying a map of my grandfather's that showed the Canadian lake where his cottage was. I loved that place, and I admired the map's pale green contour lines and light-blue water. For some reason, I don't remember the shape of the lake, but I do remember clearly the texture of the linen the map was printed on, and the pencil lines my grandfather drew to mark the compass bearings for boating from the "lower lake" to his cottage.

The map in the Scout House was a dark khaki, the color of the oldest Boy Scout uniforms, and it fascinated me because it showed me not three but four dimensions of my hometown.

There were the dense clusters of lines, just blocks from home, where an undiscovered gorge followed the route of Newton Brook. There were miles of unexplored country beyond, where forgotten placenames like Kelly's Corners and Yaleville beckoned -- and, I realized, there was history.

I could see the road west from town wasn't the same as the one I biked on. Another highway, north and east, had radically changed, too. Some of my friends' houses weren't marked on this map. There were sawmills, soil mines, and big, irregular dark buildings along the railroad tracks. Even in a town where history stares you in the face on every stroll, here was revelation.

So, of course, I explored. West Main Street had moved uphill because the old route had fallen into Newton Brook ages ago. I found the collapsed bank and a lovely picnic spot hidden under a white pine tree below it. With friends, I probed the old factories -- not long before they were torn down. I hiked up to some of the old houses and found forgotten foundations, and in one dooryard, a lilac tree that still thrived, long after the door it graced was gone.

I am still a map fan. Most of the time they inspire fantasies rather than explorations, though.

(Not everybody is comfortable with maps, I realize. Some women I know give precise, accurate directions and follow them unfailingly, but want nothing to do with pictures. Deep in North Carolina this summer, I met a woman asking if "highway 25" would take her around Charlotte to I-95. Darned if I know, I said, but probably not. I walked about 50 feet to a posted map, checked and ran back to advise the woman -- a friendly person in her 60s -- to stick to the main road and avoid shortcuts. I hope she got where she was going. Maybe she likes asking directions, the way so many men don't.)

I am baffled myself by sky maps -- I can never get them oriented correctly upside down, but I love the fantasy they give me of standing outside listening to the racket of the crickets and frogs, feeling the cool summer air and scanning the dark horizon for Bootes or the Pleiades. Only recently I found out how a Polynesian sea chart worked, and I love the fantasy (the opposite of the sky-

map one) that the chart inspires -- of listening to the water slap on the side of my canoe and squinting toward the horizon to judge the prevailing wind and the pattern of the waves.

P.

Source: http://my.core.com/%7Epzicari/text/Maps.html

maps

By prairie point

"Advice on the Prairie" by William Tylee Ranney, 1853

A map is a wondrous thing. It enables you to see not only where you are now but where you are wanting to go and everything in between. But to make a map someone needs to be able to visualize where you are in relation to everything else. In this day, that's easy to do as long as you are only talking about the physical world.

But most of the places we would like to get to are not as easily pictured and there are not always superhighways leading to them. We have to fall back on the equivalent of hearsay and opinion, which when they are available at all may not be clear or reliable.

This week's Ecotone topic is "maps and place"

Posted by Bill Hopkins on September 1, 2003 04:44 PM

Comments

Thought the picture was interesting and emphasised the point you were making.

Posted by: Coup de Vent at September 2, 2003 01:38 AM

Source: http://www.prairiepoint.net/journal/archives/000154.html

drawing the line

By alembic

Maps have always fascinated me, in part because they played such an important part in my parents excursions into the dark canyons of memory. As a child, I didnt possess the vision that was required to see past the sunny ledge of the mesa of the here and now. For me there was no chasm, no broken ground that tore up the territory my parents once called home. When I looked at a map of our region in the Eastern European country of my birth, I saw a representation of the world in which I lived plain and simple. Everything that was here for me was also there in the map. For my parents, the same map, that grid of places; it was also a map of absences, charting interrupted lives.

I grew up in a place that was at times either the jewel or the bane of whatever haughty empire, shabby province, or hastily cobbled together country claimed its territory as its rightful property, or original homeland.

By the time I was born, the town I called home was known by at least three names in at least three tongues. Just before I left the country for good, the mapmakers in charge decided that resurrecting the towns ancient Roman name would somehow decontaminate it -- from its foundation all the way to its flaky layers of foreign-accented facades.

When history shifts the ground under your feet with wars and revolutions that fence you in or herd you off like sheep or cattle, you learn that there is no here, and yes, there is no there there, to appropriate a clich. You also learn a few secrets about mapmaking, the way the line between here and there takes shape. It doesnt take long before you, too, are scratching your mark in the sand, declaring that this here is my here. But the sand in which you are drawing the line is the sand of the hourglass. The deeper you dig to leave your mark, the less sand you have left or the less ground to call home.

My first mapmaking lessons came when, playing hooky, I would climb the fence into the Jewish section of the large cemetery not far from the school. All around the Jewish section of the cemetery, the other graves were tended to with bright flowers and polished headstones. The paths among the graves and small mausoleums were cleared by workers, inviting you to meander, as in a park. Widows, bereft parents, and odd widower you could always count on seeing a few of them sitting by a grave. This was not a desolate place.

Not so within the fenced-in confines of the Jewish cemetery. Here was a chaos of weeds and tumbled headstones -- and no path in site. The absence of new graves and the absence of people tending the old ones, what did that tell me about the territory I called home? Where were the newly dead Jewish residents of my town? Where were the children remembering their ancestors? Where did they all vanish? The living, that is?

The territory that was the home of my parents, I came to understand over the years, was remapped, not only to carve up the land and mark the chart with new names, but also to redraw the features of its inhabitants.

As a child in the early 1960s, I used to see people who had numbers tattooed on their arms. If I asked why they had numbers on their arms, I dont remember the answer I was given. But I remember this: whenever one of them walked into a restaurant or caf, the people around them fell silent for a moment, then stared with an expression that held both reverence and anger.

It seems to me that back then and in that place no one around me ever said anything about the people with the numbers on their arms, that mark and map of the dark continent of their experience. In fact, not once did I hear anyone say the he or she was Jewish, let alone speak of what that meant at that point in time and in that place.

It was as if with the new boundaries of the region and the towns new name, the Jewish population -- or what was left of it in the aftermath of WWII -- lost its features, even as its surviving members moved about, carefully steering their children away from getting too close to that sunny ledge, beyond which were the precipitous canyons of memory in which the river of their sorrow cut ever deeper into the unmappable dark ground.

Posted by maria at September 01, 2003 08:41 PM

Comments

I think one of the things about old maps and the mapping of territories as a child or consc(ient)ious adult is that one is aware of what is or was also present but is no longer spoken of (as opposed to does not exist). So things exist in parallel universes, or in a multiverse - harder for us to see.... Thanks for this post. It connects with my own Jewish background and things that could and couldn't be spoken of.

Posted by: Coup de Vent on September 1, 2003 11:33 PM

Maria, we're so fortunate to have your participation at the Ecotone wiki. Your sensitivity and fine writing about place and the memory of place add another dimension to these topics...thank you. I too remember seeing the tatooed arm of a dignified gentleman who ran a clothing store in the nearest city to us. My father, who had fought in WWII and helped liberate one of the camps - something he never talked about - asked him to show me his arm. I was very young but the scene is burned into my memory, probably because I sensed that these two adults were acting much more gravely than usual, and that it was important for me to pay attention.

Posted by: beth on September 2, 2003 04:45 AM

Superb.

Posted by: qB on September 2, 2003 12:21 PM

I've always had the impression that maps were a little mysterious--like looking at a foreign language. Have you seen the topical weblog The Map Room?

Posted by: sya on September 3, 2003 07:16 PM

Oops. Your comments don't accept html. Here's the link to The Map Room: http://www.mcwetboy.net/maproom/

Posted by: sya on September 3, 2003 07:17 PM

As a matter of fact, I do have that weblog bookmarked on one of my computers. I, too, love maps, especially the old ones!

Have you seen the book "The Atlas of Experience" by Louise Van Swaaij & Jean Klare? On the cover, above the title, it reads: "Scale: Unimaginable" The book jacket describes it as follows:

"This atlas follows the conventions of cartography, but leads the traveller through familiar-looking topography into hitherto uncharted realms of imagination, ideas, feelings and experience."

My scanner is not working, or else I would have posted a picture form it. The book is beautiful, wistful ... and entertaining. I bought my copy at the British Library....

Posted by: maria on September 3, 2003 08:31 PM

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20031008062823/http://www.ashladle.org/archives/000209.html

On Cartophilia

By Feathers of Hope (Numenius)

This is an entry for the Ecotone wiki topic on maps and place.

Maps etch my life. The tale goes that I learned to read from maps, associating familiar placenames with words on the mapsheet. When growing up I prized my map collection. I would become lost in the world of maps: one game I would play would be to take a street map, start at some intersection, and trace sequences of turns -- left-right-left-right -- and see where I ended up on the map. Exploring that way was a lot less work than trying the experiment on foot. Another time I went to the long-gone Berkeley store Lucas Books, which had an excellent natural history section, to buy my first USGS topographic maps: I wanted to seek the source of Wildcat Creek in nearby Tilden Park, an expedition I would think about but never undertake.

Much later on I would become a geographer, and dabble in making my own maps. My thesis was on how to make maps of the distribution of animal species. There I glimpsed a bit of the mystical nature of maps, for who can ever be certain where a species isn't? All territories look vast when you start to make your own maps.

Maps are talismans. Even a map of the most familiar of spaces reveals new things: a forgotten street name, an unvisited urban park. A map collection, small or large, is a blessed thing, for it promises a feast for the imagination. Adventures to unknown places beckon, whether they are in

the same town, county, or in the antipodes. And every once in a while we take the map in hand and follow the paths to that beckoning place.

Posted by Numenius at September 2, 2003 09:00 PM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2003/09/02/on_cartophilia.html

Maps

B y travelertrish

Maps are the traveler's bibles. We live by them, swear by them, sing their praises. We gaze lovingly at them, letting our imaginations soar over their landscapes.

I don't learn geography from maps, though. I learn geography with my feet. If I've been to a place, the geography is imprinted. If I haven't been there, I can stare at all the maps in the world. They mean nothing. Before I went to the Baltic States, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, I knew there were three little countries up "that way." I'd actually known an Estonian woman, a science teacher, but that didn't help me visualize where she came from. I never remember which South American countries our Spanish professors come from. I've been to Costa Rica and Peru. Everything else is a blur.

Travelers don't mistake the maps for territory because we know what territory feels like. We've been to territory and it smells different.

"Man has invented three suberb means of communication - language, music and maps, maps being the oldest of the three," said the introduction to the atlas in the glove compartment in our little red rented Mazda on an unspoiled island in the Baltic Sea off Estonia. The oldest? I wondered. People without language drawing maps in the dirt with their fingers.

Maps can save us. Maps, clutched, smoothed lovingly out, diligently consulted, can useless, or worse, they can be misleading. As a traveler, a map is my constant companion, more constant than my husband.

In Holland, after the ferry across the Ij River, JF and I got pleasurably lost, in a hilarious round of asking directions and never getting the same answer twice. One guy told us three completely different answers. We never did manage to get a proper biking map.

One German lady of a certain age (who looked in spirit exactly like my feisty 90-year-old Aunt Ruth) told us that many Germans come to Klaipeda, Lithuania because their grandparents or parents were born here. The "return to one's roots" phenomenon.

"Why," she asked, "are you here?"

"Because it was on the map," JF answered, to which she roared with laughter.

In Estonia, in the rain, I found the best map I've ever seen, tucked cheerfully into the glove compartment of the car. We were supposed to have rented motor scooters, but when we got up, it was raining.

At 9:30, it was a pouring rain, all-day, insistent, gray-sky-low-clouds rain. To my dismay, I could just see the day unfolding-reading in bed until noon, walk downtown to THE restaurant in town for lunch, back for more reading and listening to the rain. I couldn't stand the thought. Saaremaa was supposed to be a beautiful island, nature, a rustic way of life, windmills, seashore. And because of the rain...again...I wasn't going to see any of it. We would leave on the bus tomorrow and I'd have seen the inside of my blinking hotel room plus one or two eateries within walking distance.

We had a row about it. I wasn't gracious. I cursed the infernal weather and my husband's seeming inability to rise above it. He cursed my infernal need to be doing something, going somewhere, accomplishing instead of Being. I thought of just buying the damned raingear and renting a scooter anyway. He dismissed this as idiotic. I proposed checking the Yahoo Satellite map for a place in Europe without rain and then just getting on the next bus and the next one until we got there. He was perfectly willing to do that. He preferred his book.

"Okay," I offered, a last gasp, desperate proposition. "Let's rent a car."

"Spend 56 European Euros?" he retorted. "That's 56 American dollars. Are you crazy? Do you think we're made of money?"

Other people rent cars. We do not. But I didn't want to miss Saaremaa. My guidebook said that the island during the Soviet era was closed to foreigners and that Estonians needed special permits to come here because of an early warning radar system and rocket base. Consequently, according to the book, this is what Estonia would be like if the Russians hadn't invaded. Unspoiled.

"Damn the money," I told him.

The car, a little red Mazda was gorgeous. We zipped back to the hostel to pick up the picnic lunch we'd bought at the grocery store, I spread the map out over my knees and prepared to NAVIGATE!

I spent the first half hour just learning how to read all the information in this Estonian Atlas, but then it was just a dream. It had peat bogs, cliffs, open land, bus stops, GPS coordinates, manor houses, windmills, castles, boat landings, and even sacred stones! Along with red roads and oops, yellow roads, which are gravel.
About that time, we bumped onto gravel. We drove to the tip of the peninsula, stood in the wind off the sea and watched seven swan couples dipping their long necks beneath the waves, up and down. Wild swans. The wreakage from the fierce WWII fighting on this coast was everywhere, half bunkers, machine gun slits slanting into the water. Blue wild flowers waving, swallows swooping, gulls screaming.

The houses on this part of the island, each one with its own little black square on the map, were few and far between. Living out there must be like living in remote parts of Alaska, something silent and fierce, something that feeds on windsweep and salt air and no one for miles. The houses were wooden, painted green or dark red or-most often-baby poop yellow-brown. Wide bogs and rocky beaches and cliffs that had signs about how much history could be read in the layers. A lot. Another swan colony. A wrong turn down to a pier and four open fishing boats moored there. The road muddy and slippery in places, so that I got bursts of fear-images of getting stuck and nobody for miles. The little red car just kept chugging though, past wooden

windmills and stone fences. A fox crossed the road in front of us. Alaska was like this for miles and miles, this flat, this windswept, this lonely, this beautiful...

We got off the peninsula and started seeing villages again, little clusters of wood frame houses and stone fences and picket fences. Sheep in the compounds and fruit trees.
"This is the way my grandmother lived," a New Zealand traveler said about her trip into the countryside. My own grandmother lived in Alabama, where it never rained that much at once and if July ever saw temperatures that low, they'd have KNOWN the Lord was about to end the world. But I could see this peasant life for her, the one cow, the constant farm work, the town something far off and only occasional.
The wonderful map had bus stops marked in tiny red letters, so all day I kept track of where we were from bus stop to bus stop. Near the city, they looked alike, just open shelters, but out in the country, they were like little individual masterpieces, with doors that close and each one looking only like itself. I could imagine curtains on the windows of some, with a tiny little stove inside for those long winter waits for the country children.

Coming back to civilization, the big city of Kuressaare, we stopped at a road house with a red sign called Artek, completely unprepared for what we discovered. It was a bar, restaurant and dance hall on weekends, devoted to a tongue-in-cheek, ironic homage to Communism. Honest. There were Communist flags draped down the center of the room, newspapers from the Communist era and paper money decoupaged into tabletops and bathroom walls. There were several bookshelves with Russian tomes extolling Lenin, busts of Lenin. The disk jockey's stand was backed with Russian Army uniforms, a gas mask draped over one and a cap over another. The waitresses wore Red Army jackets. There was a samovar, flags from the sailing Olympics in Tallinn before independence, even an old phone from the era.

I talked to the owner, a pleasant woman in her mid-thirties, who told me that Artek was a Soviet summer camp in the Ukraine for the very top athletes and students, "only the very best." She was 25 when the Soviets moved out, old enough to know about Artek, though she never got to go. The walls of the restaurant had diplomas and certificates issued by the Soviets. And there was an enormous mural showing the struggling Communists in battle, pushing on to victory. Weird for us, this nostalgic-sarcastic approach to Communism, sort of like a night club with a McCarthy era black list theme. I had October Revolution meat dumplings and JF had Capitalist sausages and sauerkraut.

It never did stop raining until we got back to town. We did the wooden windmills photo op in the rain, 14th century gothic church in the rain, and quaint north island town in the rain. It rained particularly hard during our 7500 year-old-crater visit. The Kaali crater looks like a wimpy little lake with some man-made mounds to keep the water in, but it isn't. It is the site of a wild-ass meteorite landing, one so spectacular that it has been handed down in Estonian mythology as the Sun's Grave. This, the story goes, is why the Estonians are blessed by God, since He chose this very spot for the burial place of the sun. There were many conflicting theories about this hole in the ground until the early 20th century, when geological analysis of the fragments of meteorite confirmed the hypothesis that it was one massive chunk of metal that went boom. We are talking 1000 tons on entry into the earth's atmosphere and 80 tons when it finally hit. It was going about 10-20 km per SECOND when it landed.

After dinner, the sun briefly showed up. JF admitted that it had been a really good day, that we never would have discovered Artek without the car and that it was worth every Euro we put into

it. I admitted that I would have been miserable had we attempted a tour by motorscooter. The minute I realized the map's yellow roads were all gravel and mud, we'd have turned around, completely missing the swans, the fox and the feeling of the Far North.

"After tomorrow morning," I wrote in my journal, "we will be hard traveling, just moving and moving and moving down the map."

The territory may not be the map, but the metaphor of moving down the map means getting down the real road.

Comments

From: bluebellrock Date: September 3rd, 2003 08:04 am (UTC) (Permalink)
Just wanted to tell you I'm enjoying your writing, and have pondered similarly about maps and their natural limitations. I've been creating masses and masses of envelopes out of maps, and I get so much satisfaction from seeing which colours and places appear on the face of each.

Philippa

PS: I found your LJ randomly and am so glad I did.

From: travelertrish Date: September 3rd, 2003 08:25 am (UTC) (Permalink)
Ya'll come on back and visit just any time! Thanks for the kind words!

From: travelertrish Date: September 4th, 2003 04:39 am (UTC) (Permalink)
I love the idea of making envelopes out of maps. My daughter makes envelopes out of advertisements out of magazines. Where do you get the maps? I would hate to dismantle a map. It would be like dismantling a book.

From: bluebellrock Date: September 5th, 2003 10:20 am (UTC) (Permalink)
Gulp

Out-of-date school atlases I pick up cheap as chips at the local charity shop. I used to loathe destroyers of books but you'll just have to trust me that there's nothing (nothing!) charming about these 1980s-vintage books. They make much more beautiful mail art than dumped book, and I take great care to craft them well and oh, even I can tell I protest too much. I'll go and sit in the corner.

From: travelertrish Date: September 5th, 2003 12:34 pm (UTC) (Permalink)

I believe you
I was at a craft fair in Hatfield, Hertfordshire and saw great framed prints out of old books that had been damaged beyond repair. The books, not the prints. I'm casting NO aspersions. I promise. No sitting in corner!

Source: http://travelertrish.livejournal.com/69136.html

Maps and place

By OnePotMeal

Driving home from Maryland to Massachusetts last weekend, a detour sign in Delaware obscured the point where the New Jersey Turnpike bends east and interstate 95 bends west. We missed the split, and continued north up 95, skirting Philadelphia on the inside of the river. On our Philadelphia area map, so old that its faded, crinkled leafs, seams split between them after years of frustrated folding and refolding and misfolding--that nanosecond of decision when the mapreader realizes they've got a bend in the folding, that they could unfold it and start over or just force the paper into position, tearing a seam in the map--; so old it's priced at $1.95 while all the others in the glovebox read $4.95, the interstate disappears into a dotted line after connecting to 295 north of the city at the far corner of the page--our next move contained on some other panel beyond our possession. On the ground, 295 runs into 195, and following that brought us back to the turnpike, and up through New Jersey.

Had we followed our obsolete map religiously, never looking up from it to read signs or do what Mapquest calls 'a reality check', we'd be lost, circling hopelessly around Philadelphia and Trenton, waiting for dotted lines to become roads. The drawn lines of the map weren't the same lines we drove, and there's a leap of faith in straying from the page, but it's the only way to get home. It's easier to trust a map, or a Mapquest, since they already know where they're going, but what is time to a map, or a computer? If you ask Mapquest to guide you from Boston to Baltimore, you'll be directed down 95 all the way, through Manhattan, across the George Washington Bridge, when everyone with a car knows the Tappan Zee and Garden State Parkway are the only way to go. (Or do they? Is my map yours?)

Maps are just stories we tell about a place--what we imagine it is, or was; what we will and wish it to be. Maps are no more a place than a photograph is a moment, obsolete as soon they're printed. They're Arcadian visions: a unified Europe; a manifested North America; a conquered Iraq. Arcadian as Mapquest's world without people, a perfect, paved world of uncrowded, egalitarian roads.

Driving through Maryland we passed the signs on 95 that marked where my family would've turned to go home in my childhood, signs proclaiming Fallston and Bel Air and Churchville, signs I'd looked for long past the threshold of my five-year-old tolerance, longing for an end to the interstate wasteland between the giant Termite of Providence and the green signs of home. Once, for school, I asked my grandfather to help me draw a map of Fallston. He showed me where to put a blacksmith shop, just up the street from my house; he guided my hand and pencil in tracing the scope of the cornfields, devouring what I knew as a small, single-strip airport; together we flattened housing developments and high schools and a swimming club. Later I asked my father to help me, and he added friend's houses, a drive-in, maybe a cinema. But on the bus to school the next morning I passed none of those: I passed the high school, the airport, the houses; what kind of map had they drawn, a map that could only guide backwards? More, what kind of map would I draw this morning; what kind of obsolete, neverwas Fallston would my mind (re)construct? What kind of maps would I draw if we *hadn't* moved?

We map what we need, or want, to know of a place. Old seacharts look nonsensical to a landlubber's eye: there are no continents, no countries, just unbroken white spaces bordered by floating, ungrounded black lines squirming across corners and edges of the page. Land exists

only where it stands in the way of water, only in one dimension; no cities, no towns, no capitols or castles or construction. Only what a navigator needs to get across water. For another elementary school project, I invented and mapped my own country. Charleton, I called it, an island small enough to fit a sheet of graph paper but vast enough to contain both Mohawk and Apache Indians; mountains, rivers, and lakes; dark miles of forested wilderness; metropolitan meccas of shipping and soot (mine was a pre-electric paradise, an Arcadian map I haven't much strayed from). Everything an eight-year-old boy might imagine an ideal world to be, and I spent many hours wandering that island, shrinking and expanding it to suit that day's adventure--throwing my own map for the sake of surprise, you might say. And Charleton, in my life, became as real as the town of Fallston I lived in or the Scituate, Massachusetts I'd never yet heard of but would be a resident of within a couple of years, in a state whose capitol city prides itself on being unchartable, on tourists getting hopelessly lost with the most up-to-date maps.

Some of my favorite maps are the walking maps of Great Britain, drawn in a scale fine enough to include every pub, every ruin, every relic. An afternoon's stroll can take in three or four historical drinking spots, a graveyard, and a church--a week's worth of history in other places. But those maps never include a tinker's campsite or tenement slated for the wrecking ball: they're fixed things, because maps of the English countryside (and all maps) belong to the past rather than the present; there's only room in them for *one* vision, and it's one that needs to sit still enough to be drawn on a map. A map needs a slow moving story, a story that can be told once and for all, and who wants to live in a place that won't tell anymore stories? Who'd want to live on a map?

Written (better late than never) for Ecotone: Maps and Place from notes taken on a back porch.

September 5, 2003 10:53 AM

Comments

You were in my neck of the woods--I live a few miles from the 295 split in Delaware--I often take 295 home from work, in fact. I'd say that you should have stopped to say hello, but I was driving back from Ohio at the time.

Posted by: Natalie at September 5, 2003 01:34 PM

TZ and GS — no question.

Posted by: AKMA at September 6, 2003 08:16 AM

Great post. I also used to draw imaginary maps--they always included a truncated whale to denote "ocean" (not very much like a whale at all, but I knew what I meant...). Good to have you participating in the Ecotone Wiki!

Posted by: Pica at September 6, 2003 11:50 AM

TZ and GSP here too. Not to mention the Merritt Parkway through Connecticut rather than yucky old I-95. Much more scenic.

Posted by: ralph at September 9, 2003 08:28 PM

Merritt Parkway--I'll have to try that next time. Anything that's more scenic than 95 has to be worthwhile.

Posted by: steve at September 10, 2003 07:29 PM

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20030930021118/http://www.onepotmeal.com/blog/archives/002340.html

Discussion

[Citizens of Nowhere] is a timely read for this group (while not necessarily related precisely to maps, but then again it is) -- Fred

I have really been enjoying these posts. I just love maps and live with them though not always by them. In such a changing world, in such a describing world, I feel drawn to plot my self in that landscape around me - on a local scale and worldwide -and at the moment Ecotone functions as a kind of "random world" mapping project. Thanks so much for all those posts. Coup de Vent

In response to these posts, which I've really enjoyed too, Language Hat (a self-described "mapaholic") left this map-related link to [Incoming Signals] at my site today and I'd like to pass it along: --Beth

This is hilarious...what synchronicity! -- Chris

CdeV?...good point about Ecotone. I think this is what I was saying in my post, that the sense of place informs the pretty pictures. I have a very interesting perspective on very tiny pieces of the world as a result of this little blogging community, but somehow I sense that Floyd County might just be the valley over the mountain from here. Stuff like this acts as threads that draws the pieces of the world closer together. And with the second anniversary of 9/11 coming up, it feels like 'tis the season for connection. Bring on the atlas of the noosphere! -- Chris

DOH! I got as far as the editing box with this yesterday but must have forgotten to SAVE. Will just post this [link to the topic] I posted this morning on Fragments. What are thots about posting map links to where we each live? Would be interesting to compare topography. This might be a future biweekly... to post a topo map from Topo-Zone and write about the details of that place and the significance to/impact of landform on your life. Just a thot, which I expressed with greater clarity when I almost posted it yesterday! -- Fred Fred, I like the idea of posting a topo map with descriptions. It will makes us all neighbors and draw "the world closer" as Chris put it. Kind of like a blog block party.... -- Maria

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20051219055122/www.magpienest.org/scgi-bin/wiki.pl?DiscussMapsAndPlace

There is space, and then, there is place. A space is the same, whether or not we describe it or rhapsodize about it. A place is born in our description of our relations to that space. Place is the story of our relation to the spaces we inhabit.

That is my take on it. Hence my view that, yes, the blogosphere is a place. If place were so independent of our perception of and relation to it, those of us hailing from the same spatial coordinates would be writing much the same thing. My reports of, let's say New York, would be like that of everyone else who lives in that city.

Okay, this is simplistic, but I wanted to throw into the discussion the notion that place is a relation to space…. -maria

Thanks Maria. I needed clarification on these terms, and hope there will be more to come. Ian also, I think you can contribute to this discussion to educate those of us (at least me) who are less aware of the way these terms are used and how we should understand them in our discussions. -- Fred

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20051220140959/www.magpienest.org/scgi-bin/wiki.pl?DiscussWeblogAsPlace

Islands and Place

Bi-Weekly Topic for Sept. 15, 2003

Nobbys Island

By Mulubinba Moments

This is an essay for the ecotone Wiki on “Islands and Place”.

It is tempting to write on Australia, the island continent, but where do I begin? There are the coral islands in the Great Barrier Reef, there is Lord Howe Island and Norfolk Island (where the Bounty mutineers finally settled). I must also not omit Tasmania, the Apple Isle. I am however not going to write about any of these - rather I am going to continue with my series on “Places of the Spirit”. Our journey to spiritual places will take us to my current home - Newcastle.

My favourite walk takes me from Newcastle beach to Nobbys breakwater. To get to the breakwater we walk along an isthmus towards a flat cliff formation with a lighthouse on top of it. The breakwater extends from this head out to sea and guards the mouth of the Hunter River. Careful observation will ascertain that the isthmus we walk along is manmade; in fact it was made by convicts. It leads out to what once was Nobbys Island.

Nobbys island was first sighted by Captain James Cook in 1770 and described as “a small clump of an island lying close to shore”. Since then, Nobbys has played a vital role in the history of the port city. An early problem facing captains of sailing ships entering Newcastle was the loss of wind in the ship's sails as they passed the towering Nobbys outcrop at the port's entrance. To alleviate this, the top was taken off Nobbys, reducing it to half its original height, with the resulting rock used in the construction of the breakwater. A lighthouse was erected on Nobbys and was brought into service on the 1st of January, 1858. (Hunter Port Authority)

But what of the story of Nobbys head prior to British settlement? Nobbys island in fact has a legend that has been passed on for generations before the white settlers laid eyes on it. The Awabakal people, original owners of the land, believed that Nobbys was the home of an immense kangaroo “ú Why-bay Gamba”. When he shook himself, the island trembled and rocks fell which accounted for the stratification of the cliff face.

A giant kangaroo assailed a female wallaby. Such an act conflicted with the laws governing the kinship pattern of survival based on purity of blood lines thereby destroying the totemic structure so strongly emphasised in the Bora teaching. After the deed became known, flocks of wallabies gave chase to the perpetrator, who fled over the hills and through the bush. although he kept ahead by superior leaping, he knew that the capture and death were inevitable because the sea offered no escape. But as he neared the sea a mist intervened and he was lost to the sight of his pursuers. He took advantage of this respite by swimming to Nobbys Island which he entered and shut himself away from sight. The wallabies gave up the chase believing the sea had claimed the kangaroo. But, according to tradition, the kangaroo was never certain of his safety. Now and then

he would jump up and down in his island and cause the cliff to tremble and break away as a warning to any wallabies and other animals not to come too close to his island refuge. (from "Nobbys Coal River Historic Precinct Workshop Prelude to a Heritage Masterplan")
This story of the giant kangaroo is part of the Newcastle tribal story.

Nobbys is the place of the spirit of "ú Why-bay Gamba". Perhaps no longer an island as seen below in this painting from the 1830's, but still a place of the spirit.

September 14, 2003 in Newcastle

Comments:

Comments I have no islands to write about. Thanks for providing me one to imagine knowing... a former island, at least.

Posted by: fredf | September 16, 2003 at 08:59 PM

Are you sure there isn't a little island that you've been to that has moved you? The US must have hundreds of islands! Not having been to North America, I'm interested in anything you can describe for me - from Manhattan to tiny islands in the middle of lakes or streams. Everything is new for me - so tell me about the birds, the animals, the plants, the Native American legends..anything you can think of.

Posted by: Jenny

Source URL:http://mulubinba.typepad.com/mulubinba_moments/2003/09/nobbys_island.html

Islands of the Interior

By Notes from an Eclectic Mind

This entry is my contribution to the Sept. 15th Ecotone topic "Islands and Place."

On my third trip to England in the summer of 1990 my companions and I rented a car in northern Scotland and drove out to the Isle of Skye. Getting there on narrow roads where sheep had the right of way proved a challenge to our questionable driving skills. To save money our organizing member chose a vehicle with a standard transmission, not thinking that the reversed seating position meant we Americans would, technically, be shifting gears with the wrong hand. For my part, I hadn't counted on the ferry. I supposed there would be a bridge of some sort, but instead, with me at the helm, we tentatively navigated up a ramp and pulled into our place on the deck full of cars.

It was a short voyage and a thoroughly pleasant one in spite of my jittery nerves. My friends got out and walked around a bit on deck but I'm given to motion sickness and thought it best to stay put and not to press my luck. I distinctly remember thinking I was about to set foot on an island for the first time. A West Texas childhood affords few opportunities for island hopping unless you count gravel bars in the middle of the river.

Papa and I often fished at his friend B.H.'s place and sometimes Papa would drive the pickup across a shallow place in the river and out onto a gravel bar that afforded us easier casting into the deep water. I got into a bit of trouble on that gravel bar the first and last time I tried going out there alone. The pickup wheels ground down in the slippery rocks, spun, smoked, but gained no traction and this was long before everyone had a cell phone handy. I was stuck.

How well I remember standing there looking over at the bank and telling myself the water couldn't be more than tire high. I'd just driven though it two hours before. I walked over and stood by the truck, measuring myself against the wheels to reassure myself that the water would not even reach my waist. The moment when I finally stepped into the current may have been one of the hardest of my life. My mind shut down into a small, frightened space that processed nothing more than my next footstep. When I finally reached the other side my legs were trembling and my breath came in ragged, terrified gasps. Should anyone ever want to imprison me, they would not need anywhere near the amount of water that surrounds Alcatraz.

Later after B.H. took his tractor down to the river and pulled the pickup out and I made it home, wet and shaken, Papa asked why I hadn't just waited there for someone to come. I guess I must have looked at him dumbly because he continued. "We knew where you were," he said. "B.H. knew you were down there. We'd have come looking for you when it started getting dark. Why didn't you just sit there?" I couldn't answer him. It had never occurred to me not to try to get myself out of a fix that was no one's fault but my own. I never considered just sitting down and waiting even when I was most scared.

So until I found myself on the Isle of Skye that afternoon in 1990, the gravel bar was as close as I'd ever been to an island or to confronting the special demands such a land feature presents. That evening in Scotland, before supper, we took a walk on the hotel's grounds and down to the edge of the fog shrouded water. The air was cold and damp and the sounds of the waves lapping on the rocks seemed to echo against the mist. Small crabs scuttled around in tide pools, a few sheep ambled about, but other than that we were alone.

The oldest member of our group, a recent widow, walked as far out on the rocks as she could go. For long moments she stood staring into the fog and we did not bother her, did not presume to break her reverie. I learned later that of all her family members she was the one who always went down to the water in answer to its call. As I watched her that day I wondered how many women down through the years stood on those rocks and watched the sea perhaps waiting for a man who would not come home again. That image of L.B. standing on the shore comes back to me now as a reminder that not all islands are patches of land surrounded by water.

The day when I walked off the gravel bar I became, in my terrified resolve, an island unto myself. There was no more to the world than my next footstep, the tug of the current on my jeans, the cold water pouring into the tops of my boots and spreading up my trembling legs. Within that limited reality I accomplished something I could not otherwise have done and later, when asked why, I had no answer. I could not explain that in those moments my world seemed to narrow down to no other choice.

So although I have now, in my catalog of experiences, spent time on an actual island, this writing

topic set me thinking that for many of us land lubbers, an island is a place we carry within. It may be a small moment of bravery like wading into the water when you cant swim or a bubble of grief that settles around us as we stare out at the waves. It can be a private insight, an individual joy, or a mental retreat to which we flee when we need to put space between the mainland of our lives and our own hearts. An island lies set apart, alone but not always lonely, offering barriers desired, needed, resented, or unavoidable. We all know one fragment of John Donne. No man is an island entire of himself. But Mr. Donne failed to mention that our interior ocean lies dotted with islands of our own making.

Posted by Rana at September 15, 2003 09:42 AM

Comments:

Good story.

I couldn't help but notice that you didn't consider Great Britain itself to be an island.

Posted by: bill at September 15, 2003 06:23 PM

Yes, I know. It makes no sense. Intellectually I knew at the time I was there and the twice I've returned that Britain is an island nation, but it's big enough not to feel like an island to me.

Posted by: Rana at September 16, 2003 10:13 AM

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20060131125130/www.ranablog.com/archives/000466.php

tiny bubbles

By alembic

This post is my response to ecotone's biweekly topic: islands and place

In the topography of my world, islands are the fabulous realms of elsewhere. Some islands beckon with mild breezes, promising to stop time in its tracks and embalm all the trappings of your own private paradise. Others, the more northerly ones, disdaining the guile of their tropical sisters, threaten to lay your soul as bare as is the bleak watery horizon beyond their stony shores. The lure of islands, the way I see it, is a promise of containment, be it of your happiness or your misery.

You could reinvent yourself on island, or so goes the siren call from the waves, and I tried that once, many years ago on Oahu, in Hawaii. Freshly out of one university, I flew to Honolulu to join my cousin who had been staying at The Ilikai for some time, herself having tried many other islands from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic to the Pacific before she alit on Oahu in her quest for a suitable, and endurable, identity.

We were remittance girls back then -- my cousins well-off mother sending us a small monthly allowance to keep us away so that she could drink unhindered by our presence and soak her sorrows at my uncles passing. Looked at it from another perspective, that of the islanders, we

were rich beach bums, and we would have been easy marks for local schemers, were it not for our youth, which gave us a certain prideful beauty we wore like a halo of innocence. This was our currency -- and we used it, I realize now, as best as we could, without giving away any of the capital.

The local young men who were always lurking nearby -- at the beach, the Charter House bar, in the lobby of the hotel -- soon figured out that we were much like them, though we were after different things. Still, we joined forces, all of us. The young men, some of them, borrowed space in our fridge in our respectable lodging to stash those premium bottles of booze they stole from various nearby stores. They stashed their cartons of cigarettes, also stolen, in plain view on our coffee table. Others borrowed us as icebreakers at best and as pimps at worst -- on the beach, in bars or in restaurants to score with lonely tourists with means. My cousin got to play out yet another act in her long-running show of rebellion, and I got to act out my idea of an existentialism stripped of Sartres nausea in mild weather.

With a little money and a return ticket in my pocket, in my then-stylish mini dresses, my hair bleached and curled, my eyes adorned with liberal dabs of blue Chanel eye shadow, I somehow still managed to convince myself that I was in full possession of an experience as naked, as raw, as elemental, and as exposed to the searing light of the sun as the one Camus mapped under the sun in Oran.

Never mind that I watched the sun do its mild thing from the cool shelter of an umbrella; never mind that the smells in the air were always sweet and heavily perfumed by coconut oil, sliced papayas, or the cloying fruitiness of pool-sized drinks; never mind that the occasional nausea I had to fight off was induced by tequila and not dread at the failure of reason ... Oahu, for a few months at any rate, was my moment: the here and now, the alpha and omega of all meaning, which, of course, had no meaning beyond the line where sand an sea met -- right there on the well groomed strip of beach reserved for the guests of The Ilikai....

I would very much like to say that after five months or so, staring at that line where sand sea met made me stir crazy and ready to belt out something along the lines of is that all there is? I would very much like to conclude this piece by writing that one day, sitting on the beach it hit me: if this is the end of meaning, it is also the end of possibility. Without possibility, there is no life -- and there is no art ... and so, with the right rhetorical flourish, I would have concluded that the island that opened up my senses also closed my mind.

But this is not what happened. I realized nothing back then, except to register a vague sense of unease and a creeping boredom with it all. I was as tanned as I ever was going to be. My excursions into the shady side of island life were wearing thin, like my cash reserves. Still, I wasnt ready to pack it in for any big stretch of land, that realm of possibility. As far as I was concerned, possibility was a mirage -- and as cold as the distant northern lights. I was still a fan of the stupefying sun of Oahu.

Then, one day, my aunt, somewhat sobered up, decided to stop the remittances. Being Canadian citizens, my cousin and I could not work in Hawaii-- at least not legally. So I went home, which back then was rain-sodden Vancouver, a city on the coast, a place from which, as I used to marvel, one could walk all the way to the North Pole and, depending on the route, one would never meet another soul along the way.

Posted by maria at September 15, 2003 08:34 AM | TrackBack

Comments

Oooh. I think I got a whiff of Coppertone there for a sec. And sea gulls. And lapping waves. And the decadence of youth we somehow survive.

Posted by: fredf on September 16, 2003 04:16 AM

It's a funny and touching story. What's a remittance girl?

Posted by: Coup de Vent on September 16, 2003 03:43 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20031008071802/http://www.ashladle.org/archives/000214.html

Clusters As Islands

By Feathers of Hope (Pica)

This post is part of the Ecotone Wiki's *joint topic,* Islands And Place.

What does where we live say about who we are? A very great deal, according to Michael Weiss, author of *The Clustering of America* and *The Clustered World*. His point is that people generally tend to live near people like them. He calls these groupings clusters, and he has divided them into 62 discrete types. They function, for all practical purposes, like islands.

Weiss's research has been a boon to marketers, who are able to target, say, Kellog's Pop-Tarts and Domino's pizza to the cluster "Greenbelt Families," who are also most likely to drive Mercury Capris. Greenbelt Families are young, upper-middle-class town dwellers, predominantly white, whose ideology is moderate independent. They are found in high concentrations in places like Parkville, Missouri and Hyde Park, New York.

Unlike the members of the "Sunset City Blues," mostly retired, married white folks who live in places like Battle Creek, Michigan or Merrillville, Indiana, and who buy cigars, lottery tickets, and pain relievers in high quantities.

You can enter your zip code at the Claritas site to find out what clusters are found in high concentrations in your area. For non-US residents, there are similar efforts in the UK, Spain, and Canada.

For the record, Numenius and I fall under the "New Eco-topia" cluster, people described as most likely to have a computer on the kitchen table, eat organic foods, and support recycling. By the wisdom of the clusterers, we should be living in Westminster, Vermont. An island of people like us.

Posted by Pica at September 15, 2003 08:24 PM

Comments

Whereas I am surrounded by people who own bread machines and chainsaws, and watch the Travel Channel .

Posted by: DocRock at September 16, 2003 07:56 AM

Very entertaining and no doubt will make someone a packet. Theories have become really important and profitable - no matter how crappy they are. I suppose it is another way of breaking such a large island down into manageable bite sized portions!

Posted by: Coup de Vent at September 16, 2003 04:20 PM Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2003/09/15/clusters_as_isla.html

Islands and Place

By London and the North

I guess we all live on islands. Some of them are just called continents.

I live about twenty miles as the crow flies from Menwith Hill - the USA's listening station in northern Europe. British Telecom lines apparently pass through the site. Emails, phone calls and so on can all be intercepted here. A few miles away the US military is establishing the most high tech early warning station in Europe, Fylingdales.

Some people here wonder aloud if the UK isn't the 51st state of America.

Somehow, not randomly I'm sure, the island I live on has been formed and reformed into smaller nations under the dominance of one. These days "Great" Britain feels as if it should have a more humble name. The "United" Kingdom is a misnomer. It is, and some say, should be, disunited. It is hardly a kingdom and should, I feel, be rid of any royal connections. Can you suggest another name for the UK or GB? Please use the tag board on the right.

(Particpating in Ecotone: a wiki for writing about place)

Posted by Coup de Vent at 08:26 PM | Comments (3)

Comments

I have been pondering the language we speak, if not necessarily share ... considering all the bits and pieces and ideas it accommodates, the island deserves a "great" for having evolved something so diverse and useful.

Posted by P at September 17, 2003 02:12 AM

Like the UK many people here think we are the 51st state of America. Last time I visited the UK we drove across England in under four hours using the motorways - we couldn't believe how close everything is. The UK has more of an island "feel" about it then Oz!

Posted by Jenny at September 17, 2003 08:26 AM

I agree, the Greatness of Empire has worn thin. ng Arthur has long gone from that green and pleasant land. Etcetera. I used to live there and called the place the UK. That name worked for

me, like the chain of grocery stores (dont know if its still there) called "The Co-op". In both cases, I guess youre encouraged not to necessarily associate with the name the acronym stands for. Like IHOP - the acronym and new name for the international house of pancakes (not just pancakes)
Like the "country" called the UK, the Co-Op store had no collectivist connotation for me, as a kid, its stores were like other supermarkets; it had a jingle that was just as silly and self serving as any other commerical enterprise's = " It's all at the co-op...now!"

As I remember England Scotland & Wales are definitely not united, at least nothing like the "United" States, where there is a real rallying around the same flag. But if your name is changed, there's the risk of popuring old wine in a new bottles, as they say.
I've got it.. how about renaming your island "The Co-op?"

Posted by John at September 17, 2003 06:16 PM

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20031023192232/www.airenet.co.uk/alife/2003_09.html

Island/connections

By P

We are all islands, so it may be that we love them because we identify with them. (John Donne had it wrong, but he was trying to make a different point. Decide for yourself when you put yourself to sleep tonight.)

I loved a Canadian island my family visited on vacation for 16 years when was young. I can close my eyes and call up a recollection of everything from the sparse grass in my grandfather's yard to the awful chunk-chunk-chunk the primitive electric pump made in its cupboard in the bathroom (I purely hated to flush the toilet there when I was little). To the junior survivalist in me, one of the coolest things about the place was that everything, from the exotic cereals with labels in two languages to the sand on the tiny beach, had been hauled in by boat from the mainland almost a mile away. It felt really independent.

I loved looking at a tiny island about a hundred feet from my grandfather's dock, too. About the size of a suburban corner lot, it had sparse grass, a single cottage and a few pine trees. My adult judgment says that what it didn't have is storage space, but as a child, I had an answer for that -- I dreamt that the island was just the top of a deep-tunneled complex of laboratories and living spaces for -- for what I don't remember. I was reading too much of Tom Swift. It seemed like the ultimate in independence then.

We had probably the best view on our island, with the well-groomed little satellite on one side and the mainland way beyond. I was fascinated by the people who owned the other island -- just as it's human nature to be island-like, it's human nature to want to connect, but I never saw them that I can remember.

Being a 15-minute boat ride from shore made us and our neighbors a tight little community. I played with the neighbor girls every year, and I remember them as tall and exotic, coming from Quebec as they did and speaking *two* languages. I was was a bright, awkward gosling slowly

metamorphosing into a prize turkey by time I saw them last -- I guess that's why I remember the rocks and trees better; I was more comfortable with them at the end.

I am no expert on islands. I've seen a few more. Long Island has too much of connection and too little of isolation, and there's little to see from its shores. Islands I admired in Alaska had too much of isolation: Thick with spruce and dark in the rain and mist, they were forbidding. A tiny, untenanted island in the Adirondacks made a wonderful memory for me and my wife. Block Island made a sad one as the scene of our last trip with my mother, then on the edge of her slow tumble into Alzheimer's.

Maybe we love islands because they're not plentiful. I'm still looking for more. -- **P.**

Source: http://my.core.com/%7Epzicari/text/Islands.html

The Isle Of Fabled Beasts

By Feathers of Hope (Numenius)

This is for the set of posts on Islands and Place for the Ecotone wiki.

Almost every day during my eight-year sojourn in Santa Barbara, I would glance seaward at Santa Cruz Island, about twenty miles off the coast. From our perch at about 1200' elevation in the Santa Ynez mountains behind the town, the view reminded me of looking west across San Francisco Bay to the ridges of Marin and the Peninsula, especially when the fog was in. The island is mountainous with a 2600' high ridge, similar to the ridges on the western side of the Bay where I grew up.

Despite its proximity I only visited the island several times. I think in all cases the occasion was a birding trip to look for the Island Scrub Jay, an endemic species found only on Santa Cruz Island. Biogeographers delight in islands for their evolutionary treasures, and the Channel Islands off California provide much material. There are many species and subspecies of plants and animals endemic to the Channel Islands. The scrub jay, the Catalina ironwood, the island kit fox, and lots of others.

In the Pleistocene, when sea level was lower and the Northern Channel Islands were connected to each other, there were even pygmy mammoths there, horse-sized creatures four to eight feet tall. It is believed they could swim between the island and the mainland.

Who's to say magical islands don't still exist?.

Posted by Numenius at September 16, 2003 10:37 PM | TrackBack

Comments

Thanks for this Numenius. As a non resident of the US I've been looking forward to hearing a bit more about your country and its landscape. I was hoping more of you could talk about actual islands in your country so that we "foreigners" could picture your places a little easier. I will look up Santa Cruz Island today!

Posted by: Jenny at September 17, 2003 12:41 PM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2003/09/16/the_isle_of_fabl.html

Glastonbury Tor

By Mulubinba Moments

I first saw GlastonburyTor in 1997. It rises from the Somerset Levels and can be seen from miles away as if beckoning to the traveller to "come hither". The Tor, also known as the Isle of Avalon (It appears that I am continuing on with the Ecotone Wiki topic of Islands and Place), is a magical place and one I keep returning to whenever I visit England. Centuries of legend and folklore have gathered around the Tor. It is believed that the "veil between the worlds is thin" here. The Tor has a powerful spirit of place - it attracts and fosters all kinds of ideas on nature, mythology, paganism, and Christian legends. For a very good tour of the Tor, visit The Magical Tor.

On December 31st 1999 I returned to Glastonbury to see in the New Year and the new Millenium. There was a choice of activities offered for us from the ecumenical candlelight service in the ruins of Glastonbury Abbey to taking part in a ceremony which involved surrounding the Tor's terraces with flares and lighting the Phoenix beacon at midnight on the summit Midnight on the Tor. It was freezing with a light misty rain falling, but mystical - I would not have spent this time any other way.

The Tor is a place that has the power to move me even though I live at the other side of the world - it is a place where I feel connected with the spirit of mother earth and celtic spirituality. It is a place where Goddess worshippers and Christians can comfortably co-exist. It is indeed a holy eclectic place - my kind of place.

September 18, 2003 in Jenny's posts, Religion | Permalink

Comments

Jenny--what a great post! I have somehow never managed to get to Glastonbury; all those years I lived not too far away. Oh well. Seems like a must-visit next time I'm in England.

Posted by: Pica | September 18, 2003 at 11:22 PM

Source: http://mulubinba.typepad.com/mulubinba_moments/2003/09/glastonbury_tor.html

Islands in the Sky

By Laughing~Knees

Clouds scudding over the Sudbury countryside, England, 1995

(This is the 7th installment of the ongoing Ecotone: Writing About Place bi-weekly discussions. Please see the other essays contributed: Islands and Place)

From a jet plane the Earth sits under the hard mirror of the sky. The Sun glares down, its one unblinking eye pitiless with power, seeing all, the vast film of water, air and rock. Indifference beats upon any harborer of precious fluids, hissing admonishments to turn tail and burrow into the nearest cleft. To a watcher in space the blue marble of the planet might at first seem stillborn, but if it watches carefully the swirling surface would give away the secret: like milk roiling in a cup of coffee clouds belie both a smoldering heart and a mind fanning the idea of regeneration. The clouds themselves would give birth, like whales in an ocean of air.

The land that clouds inhabit lies forever just out of reach. I might brush the clouds during brief passages along the crests of mountains, and when gazing out of plane windows they whip by like shreds of cloth or spread out below like slow herds of buffalo, but forever they remain denizens of the troposphere and I only a guest, fit only for momentary appearance or required to press my face to a porthole, sealed like an astronaut.

Clouds possess the insubstantiality of ghosts and as such offer proof of the existence of dreams and imaginary kingdoms. You can see them and yet pass your hand through them. Castles and pots of gold vanish with the first shift of the wind. The mind instinctively seeks out corporeal definition, seeing familiar faces and rabbits and dragons, but blink your eyes and the forms have billowed out into abstractions, confounding your potter's hand.

And yet I have witnessed the towering mountains and valleys of the cloud realm. The planes I have perched in passed among the walls like slivers of glass, crawling amidst halls of divinity that humbled the voice whispering within as I peeked out. Bergs of vapor rolled across sheets of metallic sea, trawling their nets while some god harpooned the void with spears of lightning. Clouds have uttered the most titanic sounds I have ever heard, the vibrato in their bassoon vocal chords plucking the very air of its emptiness. And clouds have given me dantean visions of perdition, such as the memory of a night time New York City glittering at the bottom of a well of circling thunderheads crackling with electricity and flashing with gunpowder.

They move in the tier above me, casting their huge shadows on the windswept hills, and softly reminding me of my mayfly existence. Like islands in the water ocean gaps define their hierarchy, and for tithe they only require that I close my eyes and take that leap of faith. All islands require faith in navigation, clouds require unremitting belief, or you end up falling. As if nothing were there.

Posted by butuki at 01:16 AM in Nature and Place | Permalink

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20041206235012/www.butuki.com/archives/2003_09.html#000065

Discussion

Just a little request to all of you - particularly those bloggers in North America. Please please don't take for granted that your readers all come from your part of the world. Speaking for myself, I am really interested in ANY island you can tell me about whether it is that tiny island in the middle of the river or lake to Manhattan. I'm interested in hearing about the landscape, the animals, the birds and the plants, the bookshops, the coffee shops (if it is a city island) - We might speak the same language but we all live in very different places and I want to be inspired to visit them. I've enjoyed reading the posts so far - looking forward to reading some more (with pics if possible!). Jenny.

Ancestral Place

Bi-Weekly Topic for Oct 1, 2003

Ancestral places (Ecotone)

By Mulubinba Moments (Geoff)

Ancestral places are not just old places, they are places where we can feel a connection with the generations that have gone before us.

If I go back a few generations, my ancestors lived in England, Scotland and Ireland. Thanks to my father's genealogical research, I know that my great great great grandparents were married in a church in Wishaw, Lanarkshire, Scotland in 1845. I have not visited the church, but if I did I could stand at the back and look towards the altar and imagine them taking their vows. Perhaps if the register they signed still exists, I could gaze at their signatures. I could even attend a service in the church and know that many of the words spoken and sung today would be similar to those of 158 years ago.

Last year we visited Ubirr. Ubirr is an Aboriginal site in the Kakadu National Park of the Northern Territory and it is truly ancient. Humans have lived here for at least 23000 years, and there are rock paintings reliably dated at over 20000 years old. We did not personally meet Bill

Neidjie - Kakadu Man - who died in May 2002, but his presence was throughout Kakadu. He was the last surviving speaker of the Gagudju language, and he recorded enormous amounts of indigenous knowledge. It is thanks to him that we know that the painting in my photo is part of a series depicting the story of a young girl who breaks tribal law by killing and eating Barramundi in the wrong season. This story is part of an oral tradition thousands of years old.

Bill Neidjie could hear the voices of his ancestors from thousands of years ago, and thanks to Bill and his people, when I stood and gazed at these paintings I could clearly hear those ancient voices too. They are not my ancestors, but I believe they belong to all of us.

October 01, 2003 in Geoff's posts | Permalink

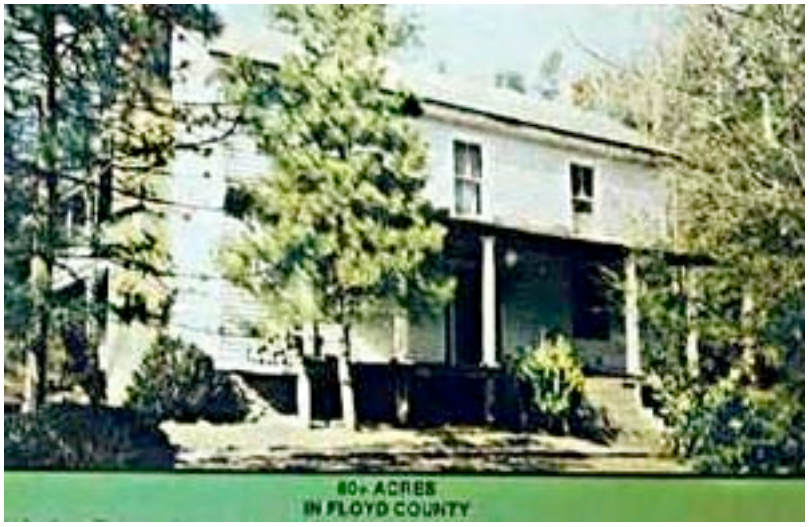
Source: http://mulubinba.typepad.com/mulubinba_moments/2003/10/ancestral_place.html

Ancestors: The Grafted Roots

By Fragments from Floyd

The roots of my family tree run shallow and short. Someone gave me the "First" coat of arms as a gift when we were married; I appreciated the thought but it connected me only to the lineage of a biological stranger and a name not my own. Any meaningful connection with my father's paternal lineage was severed by divorce in the 1930's; my surname by true inheritance should have be Strickland. This is a twig of our small tree I have not been able to trace with the little information that I know. My mother is an only child. I never knew her father who died in a hunting accident when she was very young. Her father's Dillons go back in remote history to Ireland (Henri of Lion migrated to Ireland in the 1100s'-- du Leon becoming O'Doullin, then Dillon over the centuries). Mom's mother's Harrisons disappear in the genealogies earlier than the mid 1850's when my granny's grandparents moved to Mufreesboro, Tennessee.

I can walk the same dark high school hallways and over the summer camp trails that my mother walked; and I can visit neighborhoods where we lived in Birmingham as I was growing up. Beyond that, I cannot stand in hallowed places known to known ancestors. I cannot conceive what it must be like to have relatives spreading across the hollers and back through time for five or more generations as many of my neighbors here in the southern Appalachians do. For me, there will be no retracing ancestral footsteps to the places from which, in some sense, my true roots arise. Nevertheless, with the quick passing of decades, I do feel some need to find roots. If I am to know ancestral places, lacking any of the old-fashioned kind, I will be happy to adopt them: this old house, this patch of land, the Blue Ridge Mountains... and the people who have loved them long before I did. If they will have me, my belonging will be here to these places, these hills, these people.



Since we've been married, eight places have been "home" for us. It was not until a year ago that it dawned on me that, even after both Ann and I had marketable careers that would pretty much let us find work anywhere, we have consistently chosen to find our place in the southern Appalachians. This must be our home, as warm a hearth as we are likely to find in this life. We've adopted its traditional music as our own. The particulars of the language have settled in comfortably along the margins of our speech, modulating the rhythm of our neighborly conversations with snatches of the Elizabethan English that our geographical ancestors brought into these mountains two centuries ago. The gentle grandeur of the Blue Ridge seems to appeal to us as if we had known these broad ridges and gentle valleys in a lifetime long ago. Yes, I've adopted all of this, but there seem to be unknown lines of pull that make the Appalachian hills lay a deeper claim on me.

But what of my children? They suffer the same rootlessness and lack of history I have known; they cannot go back 'home' unless they are content to visit a half dozen houses in which others now live. This patch of earth I look out on, lying peacefully in a natural bowl between two little creeks; an old farmhouse that comes with a history and kindly ghosts of its own going back a hundred and thirty years, full of memories; the rugged hillsides and slender pasture bordered by the old stone wall, and the crude field-rock foundation of a little barn where ash trees are growing from it's center-- all of this recently claimed ancestral ground can become 'the old homeplace' to my children's children. Perhaps here we can lay down a soil in which future roots can grow, where unborn feet can walk and hearts can feel with deep certainty that "those from whom I come walked here, they sat on this old wall, saw these same high ridges swept by west winds that sounded just like this wind today, and I belong here".

My children and theirs may have these buildings and creeks and ridges to hold their history. But having this daily journal as a record of the everyday details of life here on Goose Creek, I'd have to hope that it too can become part of the ancestral roots of those who come after me and from me, though I will never know them. Those dear ones, as they age and wonder about the infinite regression of generations past and future, as I do, will not be ignorant of the peculiar lives of ancestors at the turn of the twenty-first century who adopted a region, then birthed a homeplace in the flesh-- one that will carry on, perhaps, into future generations of Southern Highlanders.

The topic this week at the Ecotone:Writing About Place is "Ancestral Place".
Read the posts, join the discussion.

Posted by fred1st at 8:40 PM | Permalink | Comments (4) | TrackBacks (3)

Comments

When I saw Holli last month, I told her that we were "Stricklands, really," and that baffled the two of us, as we both tried to dig back and inward, to see how much that changes things. I guess it's still settling in, really. Rootlessness is something that most of this generation has inherited. I usually wear it as a badge, but, then, I do the same with bruises. Still, we DO have roots, Papa. Your chilluns have grown up with one more generation of ancestors than you had, and better, we've had your farms, your Wendell Berry, your hot buttered rum and parties on porches and Prairie Home Saturdays, and our own kids will have Goose Creek, Grannie Annie, and Dumpa Dumpy. Thanks for them roots, Parentals. They stretch to BC.

Posted by: Nathan | October 1, 2003 2:46 AM

There you go!

Posted by: Coup de Vent | October 1, 2003 4:50 PM

Wow, there's a testimonial if I ever saw one! Your Nathan must warm your heart as your post warms mine (at a particularly salubrious moment). Plus which, this post seems to me to contain the kernel of a preface to your book. Nice going. Fan request: write about smells? What are the scents of Appalachian autumn? I long to know!

Posted by: Doc Rock | October 1, 2003 9:54 PM

"Perhaps here we can lay down a soil in which future roots can grow. . . " Fred, your essay struck a deep chord in me re what we're trying to do with the pine trees (the 100 acre wood) in northwest Florida. I want each grandchild to have their own small grove where they can have a bench if they wish or make some art to mark their area, and mostly to know those quiet interior dirt roads will always, always be there for them. There's only a very small house there now, so Buck is working right now on the design for the "old home place" expansion.It will include a kind of funky observation tower sort of place where we can all watch the little trees grow and the abundant wildlife. Thanks for helping me pinpoint part of why it's so important to me (who has been bootless and unhorsed for much of my life) to do this. Beth

Posted by: Beth | October 2, 2003 7:43 AM

Source:
http://www.fragmentsfromfloyd.com/fragments/2003/09/ancestors_the_grafted_roots.html#comments

Frodo

By Laughing~Knees

Rose Window, Sagrada Familia, Barcelona, Spain 1988.

This is the seventh installment of the bi-weekly collective essay topics in Ecotone: Writing About Place. This week's topic is Ancestral Place

I came across my first copy of "The Fellowship of the Rings" from J.R.R. Tolkein's "The Lord of the Rings" in 1974, when I was fourteen, while browsing a musty old used bookstore in London with my father. He mentioned the book in passing and I picked it up, curious. Since we were headed for Germany in a few days, I decided to buy the entire set, so that I would have something to read while in Germany. Little did I know that these books would turn over my world and grab a hold of something in my heart that to this day has never left.

The summer of 1974 etched itself into my memories in a way no stretch of time ever did before or since. It was the summer that my parents toured Scotland and left my brother Teja and me with my grandparents in Hannover, Germany. My grandfather, grandmother, and great aunt, whom we called respectively "Opa", "Oma", and "Tante Luise", had planned a summer of travel and adventure for us. We spent a few days at a pension in the Harz mountains, where Opa took us on long walks in the woods and my imagination bloomed with images of Elves and Dwarves and Dryads among the great oaks. For two weeks we stayed at a summer camp along the northern Elbe River, where I fell in love with my first girlfriend (and one of my oldest friends) and experienced my first kiss. In Hannover Teja and I took skulling lessons on the broad expanse of the artificial lake, the Masch See. In my grandparents' apartment the rooms filled with the aroma of boiled German potatoes, rolled cabbage, fresh sauerkraut, and rotisserie chicken. The grandfather clock on the wall chimed on the hour. The coal cellar at the bottom of the echoing wooden stairwell wafted up its breath of chilly air and the acrid smell of carbon and stored gunny sacks of potatoes. The voices of my grandparents and great aunt fluted through the rooms as they bantered, laughed, and bickered in German, a language that carries the texture of time and warmth for me. And all the while, whenever I had a chance to sit or lie back uninterrupted, the Tolkein books occupied my attention and loyalties. The world of the Ring sank so deep that, one evening, while walking back with my newly returned parents, from an outdoor Handel concert at the Herrenausen Gardens, I could swear I glimpsed a band of Dwarves marching amidst the woods surrounding the Gardens.

It took me years to recognize that something about Hannover stuck with me and described a solidity in my world that the actual sifting of day-to-day experiences never seemed to coalesce. While writing my travel book about bicycling through Europe alone in 1987 it came to me just how much the spirit of the people and the town of my birth rubbed off onto my inner chalkboard. I came to realize that much as you might like to imagine that your past is a blank, or that the places you sojourn in or pass through never leave traces, in reality all the places you awake in draw scratches in the slate that forms you. Each place speaks through both its landmarks and the voices of the people and creatures that you have encounters with. It is as Gregory Bateson described in "The Ecology of Mind": all existence is a shifting of balance... nothing that happens is without significance or consequence.

While exchanging comments with Fujiko Suda over her recent viewing of the first movie "The Fellowship of the Ring" and her observation that in both the movie and the books Frodo never really made an impression on her, I spent the evening reminiscing about those first weeks with the Tolkein characters and why they seemed at the time to infuse in me an identification with the German landscape. The books invoked a yearning for connection with a place that I, with my life divided between Japan, the U.S, and Germany, never could quite grab hold of. The books took each of the characters away from the places they held most dear and which defined most succinctly who they were. The interesting development occurred in Frodo himself, who, of all the Fellowship characters, most wanted to follow in the footsteps of Bilbo Baggins and who perhaps least fit into the Shire's social structure. The further he wandered from the Shire, however, the less defined he became, and the more ephemeral and lost he seemed. For readers such as Fujiko Suda and me, Frodo never grew into a really likeable and identifiable personage... he just flickered out and turned to ashes, it seemed. On the other hand, Sam, Merry, and Pippin, who characterized the very soul of the Hobbit people, and who least wanted to leave the Shire, all began to grow and develop into more than their original counterparts, until all the strangeness and need for calling up heretofore unused emotions sculpted them into characters in full bloom. Frodo didn't seem to really learn anything, or even lose anything, perhaps because he carried little for the reader to identify with from his ancestral home.

I often wonder if that sense of identity and that sense of place, including knowing the ancestors who shaped you, arise out of being washed in the waters of familiarity with a community. Familiarity takes time and as such a drifter, by definition, cannot accumulate enough duff to be able to express the richness of a place. I've spent more than half my life living in Japan, including my childhood, and in many ways it speaks through the timbre of my vocabulary and in my body language and temperament. However, few Japanese myths or folktales have ever evoked such strong sense of identity that the myths, legends, and folktales of Europe have. The same goes for American folktales... somehow they never awoke excitement or longing in me and I easily bored of reading them. The Lord of the Rings breathed European mythology and as such sang the very notes of place that had me devouring the story. I *needed* something in the books that had to do with place, had to do with a long line that stretched back into time forgotten. And yet, today, I still haven't found that sigh of relief in knowing exactly where I am and exactly where I wanted to be. Like Frodo the uncertainly hangs around my neck like the Ring.

I envy those who find no crack in the mirror of the place they inhabit and who can, without a moment's hesitation, look around them and see their ancestors and feel the grounding. The place where your heart discovers rest cannot ask for description; it just knows, because all the voices down the ages rise up in one chorus. The place of belonging is a sound, not a name.

Posted by butuki at 04:45 AM in Blogging and Computers | Permalink | Comments (5)
Comments

Your post makes me think how familiarity and of belonging can be quite separate things.

Posted by Coup de Vent at October 2, 2003 06:54 AM

A very succinct and insightful observation. I hadn’t quite thought of it in that way, but you’re right… often people who have lived somewhere forever are the least likely to see it and those who just come passing through recognize what it is about a place that makes it special. Perhaps

not being familiar with a place, but being sensitive enough to recognize its value helps one come to belong to a place in its full complement. Hmm… you've got my gears churning again…

Posted by butuki at October 2, 2003 07:13 AM

This is a beautiful piece. How lucky to have read Lord of the Rings in that place; it's perfect. And it's very interesting how you perceive Frodo's uncertainty to be like yours, to weigh heavily on your chest. This is really good stuff, Butuki.

Posted by Pica at October 3, 2003 12:24 AM

When one can claim several corners of the world as an ancestral home, it is hard not to feel both incredibly rich and very poor in some bounty that supposedly grows from the shelter of familiarity. Add to this mix a love of stories and myths … and you get a beautiful and beautifully written account (such as your post is) of world inhabited not only by memory, but also the creative imagination!

Posted by maria at October 3, 2003 06:29 AM

Thank you.

Your entry "Frodo" has evoked so many thoughts and remembered feelings within me, I have been struggling to sort them out since I read it yesterday.

I too was in Germany. I was twelve. My first boyfriend there, my first kiss with him.

I left Japan not by my choosing either. My mother remarried an American, and that was that. During 18 years I lived in US, I always thought myself to be Japanese, always dreaming of one day coming back to Japan. Then when I did return, I discovered I was not really Japanese anymore inside, no matter how hard I tried. And even outside, my body language is more American than Japanese. After all these years, just this year, it has become clear to me that Americans perceive me as Japanese, and Japanese perceive me as American, and any other nationality perceive me as someone who acts American with Japanese soul.

I am now a part of a "normal" family which I wanted more than anything else during the first 35-years of my life. People constantly tells me, "You seem so happy!". Yet I hunger for something still. It could be likened to Cruella's craving for fur! I am now at a point in my life I search in ernest for the holy grail.

Perhaps it is our age, you and I. Just as a child learns to crawl, walk, talk, 40's might be the age of struggle to seek the meaning of it all.

Posted by Fujiko Suda at October 5, 2003 07:27 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20041206235938/www.butuki.com/archives/2003_10.html#000073

October 01, 2003

By Bowen Island Journal

This week's Ecotone topic is Ancestral Place

I have a friend who was raised in the farmland of the St. Lawrence River valley on a farm near Cardinal, Ontario. He moved out to British Columbia for a couple of years in the early nineties, but he came back saying that he could make it out here. He said that from the time he was born he ate food that was grown in the soil of Ontario. It was as if his body had been constructed from the raw materials of that land, and when he moved out here, he resonated on a different frequency.

Homesickness for the ancestral lands is what that is all about.

This place, Bowen Island, is not my ancestral homeland. This is not the land I grew up on, and as we move into fall, I feel most acutely that sense of displacement. In fall in my ancestral land of Southern Ontario, the climate changes in particular ways, the snow starts to think about flying and the days are crisp and clear with a sky so blue that it seems as if nature has conjured up sheer light from the natural pigment of air. Here, we get to clear days, but we start in fog and soon enough, we'll be drenched in rain as the Pacific Ocean soaks us for the winter.

I think we resonate with parts of the land that live in our genes. I felt at home the moment I arrived in Saskatchewan for the first time, having never been there before. My great grandparents farmed that part of the world and as a result gave me a piece of that place for my own. Other relatives lived in Toronto, Port Perry, Grey-Bruce and a myriad of other Ontario towns and villages, some for thousands of years, some as recent immigrants.

My ancestral place is not here. As much as I love it here, the ancestral place draws me home at this time of year.

Urge For Going:
by Joni Mitchell

I awoke today and found the frost perched on the town
It hovered in a frozen sky, then it gobbled summer down
When the sun turns traitor cold and all the trees are shivering in a naked row

I get the urge for going
But I never seem to go
I get the urge for going
When the meadow grass is turning brown
Summertime is falling down and winter is closing in

I had me a man in summertime
He had summer-colored skin
And not another girl in town
My darling's heart could win
But when the leaves fell on the ground
Bully winds came around, pushed them face down in the snow

He got the urge for going
And I had to let him go
He got the urge for going
When the meadow grass was turning brown
Summertime was falling down and winter was closing in

Now the warriors of winter they gave a cold triumphant shout
And all that stays is dying and all that lives is camping out
See the geese in chevron flight flapping and racing on before the snow

They got the urge for going
And they got the wings so they can go
They get the urge for going
When the meadow grass is turning brown
Summertime is falling down and winter is closing in.

posted by Chris at 12:59 PM |Trackback

Source: http://www.chriscorrigan.com/miscellany/bijournal/2003_10_01_archive.html

Ancestral Places

By London and the North

I'm looking out for more exhibitions on artwork coming out of Germany.

In London, tomorrow, opens the Sigmar Polke exhibition at the Tate Modern, Bankside.

In Liverpool, also at the Tate, until 11th January is a Rebecca Horne exhibition.

But it's Anselm Kiefer's work which takes me (a)back the most.

Contemporary Berlin is, for me, an ancestral place. It's where my family lived. And quite a few family members still do live there.

What I like these days about visiting Berlin is the creative tension between the old run down corners and the contemporariness in art, streetlife, architecture. The house where my aunt lived which I visited during my growing up years is now no more. It was in East Berlin. Plum and walnut trees in the garden. The most unusual house in Pankow. For a start it was privately owned. Secondly, it was large so, after her parents died, my aunt took in paying guests who were either official guests of the DDR or Westdeutcher who came to visit their relatives.

I've not been to see the block of flats they built on the space where the house and gardens stood. I don't want to do that to myself. I can peep out from behind a blanket at scarey movies but I don't want to see that. It was the most exciting thing after finding my own way from Checkpoint Charlie to get off the number 49 Strassenbahn and walk up the long path to the house to see my aunt, arms open, waiting for me on the top step.

Going to post-wall Berlin with Paris is like visiting a different city. And you know what, that's okay. It feels good for it to be so different for me. The old Berlin of my childhood lives on somewhere inside me. But it's gone. It's still in some of my furniture from grandparents, it's in my mother's memories, it's in the language I can use as required, it's in tales and shards of evidence of a community shattered, scattered.

And I find I prefer and trust conscious, contemporary German art to the scarey paintings of old rabbis I grew up with. Kiefer knows how to describe a very particular set of concerns which are so much more relevant to the world I feel I now live in.

[Today people writing about place through Ecotone are thinking about Ancestral Places.....]

Posted by Coup de Vent at 10:42 PM | Comments (2)

Comments

I remember when, in 1995 I first visited what was formerly East Berlin. When we drove across the old border the cobblestone roads and Trabant cars bumping along everywhere confirmed my James Bond reared imagination of what East Germany ought to look like. What shocked me in more ways than I can understand was that East Germany wasn't black and white! There were green fields with tan barley and yellow rape weed, blue sea with pristine waves and a warm, golden shafts of sunlight. And the paths in the countryside were overrun with tracks of badgers, hares, hedgehogs, foxes, and roe deer. I kept asking myself, "You mean those poor, downtrodden East Germans actually were able to enjoy the sunlight? They might actually have had tans???

Posted by butuki at October 2, 2003 10:28 PM

A fabulous film to see is 'Goodbye Lenin'. Anyone who has ever been to Berlin would particularly enjoy this amusing and touching commentary on the changes through the eyes of one 'East German' family.

Posted by Coup de Vent at October 3, 2003 07:09 PM

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20040103120417/www.airenet.co.uk/alife/2003_10.html

I have no ancestral place, to speak of

By P.

I have no ancestral place, to speak of — or else I have at least a dozen. My ancestors are scattered from Cork (maybe) to Tunis (maybe), depending on how far back you go, and I know of only one of their many places, a hamlet in Sicily that Gen. Patton once roared through. In my woodpile I can claim a mainland Italian as well; a Huguenot; a Welshman and some Scots; it was an Irishman who made my mother eligible for the DAR; while one of the Germans fought at Gettysburg.

I claim the northern African by way of the family name, which might mean “assassin” and might mean “soldier” and might derive from Arabic.

Years ago, an old woman in a sun-splashed, noisy London laundromat quizzed me on my ancestry and concluded, “Well, you’re all mongrels over there.” I suspected she was insulting me, but I had to acknowledge she was right. It wasn’t till later that I realized England itself had hosted enough immigrants for her to be somewhat mongrel too.

And where, I thought, is the shame in that? From my mother’s line I inherit stubbornness and a small nose; from my father’s, a measure of intelligence and big teeth. Somehow, all the ancestral grievances went to purer lines of the family. And I can love rouladen and tortellini, Beaujolais and scones without feeling it’s anything but “mom food.” I decline to learn the Tarantella: Blood is meant to be stirred, not distilled, but I draw the line at shaking it.

Northern Climes

By Feathers of Hope (Pica)

A contribution to the Ecotone Wiki's biweekly topic, Ancestral Place.

When I first moved to the United States from England, I was astonished by how important it seemed to be to people where you came from. This is of almost no consequence in England, where far more importance is placed on the way you speak, the school you went to, your name--all the important class indicators.

There are lots of class indicators here too, but they're different, more hidden. Having "come from" (i.e. having "people" who "came from") England places you on a higher social rung than having "come from," say, Serbia, or Ghana, or Armenia. Much higher. Having "come on" the Mayflower (the fact that most of the people on the Mayflower were barely literate is irrelevant) gives you the highest cachet of all. Since I do, in fact, have a Mayflower ancestor, despite my English accent, my Ancestral Place is sort of a guessing game (I get asked where I'm from at least once a week).

But it's mostly Lancashire, it turns out. Both sides. From sheep farmers to mill owners to petty bourgeois shopkeepers. Lancashire is a wet, soggy place, much blackened by the ravages of the industrial revolution and neglect from the center of power in the south, which no doubt contributed to the spread of nonconformist sects. Its inhabitants are gritty, silent, phlegmatic, and excellent cricketers (a sport that requires infinite patience). Lancastrians are given to interesting turns of phrase when particularly inspired.

I hope I have some of the resilience they are known for.

Posted by Pica at October 1, 2003 11:14 PM | TrackBack

Comments

I didn't realise you are from Lancashire! I live less than ten miles from Colne which is exactly as you describe: a soot blackened run down mill town with now only a few industries of an obscure nature. Actually it is a good place for walking - Pendle Hill with its white cotton grass and the continuation of the Leeds-Liverpool Canal going up and up over the Pennines!

Posted by: Coup de Vent at October 2, 2003 01:08 AM

I suppose 'where we're from' is evident in our respective voices. Enjoyed hearing your British roots, which I suppose you will never lose, nor want to. I am often told "you don't sound like you're from Alabama" which I accept as an intended compliment of the back-handed sort; but the southernness of my spoken roots runs deep. Hope you find that Lancastrian resilience when you need to call on it!

Posted by: fredf at October 2, 2003 01:40 AM

You do. Have Lancastrian resilience. I've experienced it for the past, oh, ten years or so. And then there's all that War of the Roses stuff way back in there somewhere, too.

I, on the other hand (as you know), get, "I thought you said you're from California. But you're . . . SMART!" With what's coming up here in the next week, I guess it's better to be here than somewhere else, getting looked at funny.

Posted by: Doc Rock at October 2, 2003 06:25 AM

Just how big was the Mayflower? It's always a little funny to hear people speak of their Mayflower heritage... there are so many people who've told me that they have ancestors who came on the Mayflower you would think it was an oil tanker or that no other ships ever came to the Americas! (it especially makes my right eyebrow lift when a black person tells me that they have ancestors from the Mayflower...)

Not that I don't believe you, Pica. Maybe this is an example of six degrees of separation. But I would like for someone once to tell me that they had ancestors who came across on the Nina! Or the Cutty Sark!

Posted by: butuki at October 2, 2003 02:15 PM

I think there were 134 passengers or something tiny. But these people, and their children, were vastly prolific. So yes, it's meaningless (except it's so interesting how very important it seems to be, in this culture, certainly in New England).

Posted by: Pica at October 2, 2003 03:16 PM

I didn't know you were from Lancashire ... must be quite a change for you from those northern climates to the sunny, dry part of California -- about which you write so well!

Posted by: maria at October 4, 2003 10:31 AM

Great blog you have here. Thanks bbw size lingerie lady

Posted by: plus size lingerie at April 9, 2005 03:54 PM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2003/10/01/northern_climes.html

Ancestral Places

By O'DonnellWeb

When I stop to think about ancestral places, a spot on the earth where I know my forefathers walked before me, a place where I can still see what they saw, feel what they felt, connect with my past, only one place comes to mind.

Fenway Park.

The ODonnell side of the family hails from Boston. Of the six siblings, my father is the only one who ventured far from the nest. He joined the USAF at age 18 or 19 and never looked back. That decision cost me my chance to be a New Englander and all that goes with it. Even though we've spent plenty of time in the Boston area visiting, I've never felt like one of them. I don't have the accent or the point of view of the folks that hail from Boston. Boston was never home to me.

Fenway Park is different. I feel connected to the past there. My great grandfather attended games there. He almost certainly saw Babe Ruth, Cy Young and the greats of that era. My grandfather would have seen some of that era too. My father, growing up in post WWII Boston, would have seen Ted Williams, Dom Dimaggio, Bobby Doerr, and Johnny Pesky play. I never lived in Boston, but most summers he was stationed in the states included a trip to Boston and a game at Fenway was always on the agenda. My Red Sox heroes were guys like Fred Lynn, Jim Rice, Carlton Fisk, Dwight Evans, and Bernie Carbo. My kids have been to Fenway too, making them the 5th generation of ODonnells to see a game there. Posters of Nomar, Manny, and Pedro grace the walls of my son's bedroom.

The stadium itself has not changed much since Babe Ruth patrolled the grounds there. The field dimensions are the same, the stadium layout is pretty much the same, and according the locals, the same family of rats still occupy the bowels of the stadium. (Although I suspect the rat family is several hundred generations old by now - sort of puts my 5 generations to shame).

When I'm at Fenway, I can imagine my father and his father sitting in the same seats enjoying a game, complaining about the Red Sox pitching, bitching about the Yankees, and bemoaning the Red Sox lack of success in the postseason.

I guess that would be the unfortunate side of things not changing.

But this year is different. Go Red Sox!

This week's Ecotone writing subject is Ancestal Places. Permalink

Comments

Wonderfully evocative picture of Fenway, where I first learned to love baseball, and am now in mourning because they blew it last night... we watched the game at a friend's house (ardent A's fan). Sigh. Here we go.Posted by: Pica at October 2, 2003 10:28 AM

I felt the same way about Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto. And I still remember my first (and only) trip to Fenway. I was a Red Sox fan before Toronto got a team in 1977, and Fenway was a storied place for me.

Sorry they blew it last night.

Posted by: Chris Corrigan at October 2, 2003 12:09 PM

I love Fenway. I remember my dad dragging me to games (I have 2 younger brothers) and growling as I fell asleep on the bleachers. I have a soft spot in my heart for that park and freak out everytime there's talk of tearing it down to build something newer and better. THAT would be a tragedy!

Posted by: Mala at October 3, 2003 03:01 PM

Thanks for this reflection and participating at Ecotone, Chris! Appreciate your insights.

Posted by: fredf at October 5, 2003 07:39 PM

Thanks, Chris, for this good post and your off-beat, refreshing response to the Ecotone question.

Posted by: beth at October 6, 2003 09:54 AM

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20060103210119/www.odonnellweb.com/mtarchives/000717.html#000717

ancestral place

By alembic

This post is my response to ecotone's biweekly topic: ancestral place.

Ancestral place, for my family, is a tale twice told, an imaginary land, a landscape of bones, blood run dry in the sepia-toned photograph, the rusty ridge in the scrimshaw frieze of stories we have been carrying with us from town to town, from country to country, from continent to continent ... from language to language.

My mother's ancestral place was a capital city along the muddy banks of the Danube. When she was born, the city was still splendid and glittering from an imperial veneer, barely touched by a war that played havoc with the borders of her world. There was sweet pastry and plenty of violins to make her heart beat in measured feelings under the canopy of stately chestnut and plane trees that lined the wide avenues. Her roots went deep beneath the pavement, and she felt as solid as an oak in her wooden expectations that she'll waltz through her life with the grace her own parents had.

My ancestral place is a little darker, a bit more mysterious in its obscurity to those who treasure reason's focal length. A town with Roman roots and medieval scraps in the near hinterlands of what some consider properly Europe -- the place of my birth was past any glory in its shabbiness and poverty made that much more so by a string of wars. There was little sweetness to be had there, unless you count the few weeks when lilacs, peonies, or roses were in bloom and teased your senses, until you knew the meaning of desire better than any French structuralist could ever imagine.

My earliest memories in that place have to do with standing in line on streets carpeted with patterns of dust, waiting for some store or other to open so that we could redeem our allotted coupon for bread or sugar or butter or flour. The music I remember is the cacophony of languages (Hungarian, Romanian, German, Romany) at the weekly market, mixed with the squawk of chickens and hens, in the spring, the bleating of lambs whose atonal chorus grew thinner each time the axe came down, following as successfully negotiated transaction.

The ancestral place of my sons is no home to me. I will always be an alien -- an Other -- here, betrayed by my accent in all manner of things, not just in my speech. Here in these sunlit hills of Marin, California, the towns have known no wars -- nor imperial glory. In spite of the abundance of light that teases forth an embarrassment of riches from the soil, my imagination is rootless, unable to send deep shoots into the land that's my children's home, the rock beneath their feet.

Posted by maria at October 2, 2003 10:26 AM

Comments

Your writing certainly doesn't carry any accent... it is beautiful! Well I understand that sense of dislocation that you feel in your new home. When I lived in America is was mostly the natural world that voiced the spirit of the landscape, not the human settlements, which seemed to me still rough and unkempt. But then, you're in California, which is quite a lot different from such places as New York or Boston. And I did find the deep roots among Native Americans that I met and got to know though. They speak both the names that arose out of millenia living close to their land and the collective stories of generations that went before them. America does have a long history... it is just not told in the palaces of the European immigrants.

Posted by: butuki at October 2, 2003 12:14 PM

My Jewish mother-in-law who grew up in Chicago said that when she first arrived in California she couldn't bear the sun, the perpetually smiling tall blond beautiful people, the abundance--it made her feel so alien. Your piece reminded me so much of how she described this.

Your writing is beautiful, full of the richness and sensuousness--and promise--of a sprig of lilacs. Thank you for sharing it with us.

Posted by: Pica at October 3, 2003 06:55 AM

Beautiful, evocative post, Maria.

Posted by: beth at October 6, 2003 06:57 AM

Yes sound or smell is as much to do with place as colour, landscape. At times it is people who make "place" - it's what they do in it. I wonder also if you are of a generation like so many who are culturally between the places of your parents and your sons? One could say that *your* place then is in time and as a witness to the ownership by others of place.

Posted by: Coup de Vent at October 14, 2003 11:48 AM

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20051219230653/www.ashladle.org/archives/000223.html

Ohio Roots

By Feathers of Hope (Numenius)

A note on Ancestral Place for the Ecotone Wiki.

Both my parents grew up in Ohio, they meeting as undergraduates at Ohio State University in Columbus. My father's side was the more recent arrival in the state; my mother's side arrived first and settled in Lorain County, a bit west of Cleveland, around 1840 or so. There they stayed for well over a hundred years, apparently staying out of the limelight, working as small farmers and laborers.

One of these years I'll poke around Lorain County to learn what I can about the lives of my ancestors and their land. In the meantime I'll content myself with resources such as the Lorain County Genealogy page, and a memory of a winter birding trip up to Lake Erie during which I saw my first rough-legged hawk and northern shrike, and returned via the ancestral territory.

Oh, and I pronounce "root" with a short vowel. Is that an Ohio thing?

Posted by Numenius at October 2, 2003 10:40 PM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2003/10/02/ohio_roots.html

Saturday, October 04, 2003

By Cassandra Pages

This post is a very belated contribution to the recent Ecotone topic, Ancestral Place.

I'm back home in New England, and in that transition period that feels like twilight, half here and half there, my head filled with vivid comparative impressions of two places and two lives: myself as a child and young woman, myself as I am now.

This has been a very intense week and a half for me and for my family. If it's possible, we all got to know each other better, and became even closer. I'm reluctant to write too much about any of the personal details, but I have thought a great deal about "place" during this time: how that particular place on earth where I grew up, and where some of my ancestors have lived for

centuries, formed and shaped me -- and how deeply I carry it with me despite time and distance.

During the worst, most frightening and uncontrollable recent moments, I realized the land was steadying me. The Cooperstown hospital is set into one of the loveliest glacial valleys imaginable, at the foot of Otsego Lake, a long ”finger lake” much like the ones further west in the state. Fall was just beginning to come, with a branch of red here and there among the maples, and the air was crisp and cool, the night skies as I walked back from the hospital brilliant with stars.

Standing one evening on the edge of a field while J. took some pictures, I noticed the rocks scattered every inch or two in the dark, plowed topsoil – rounded rocks, grey, an inch to three or four in diameter, so integrated with the soil as to be part of it. Glacial till. I smiled, realizing I hadn’t seen anything like this in Vermont or New Hampshire, and yet how familiar it was. Glaciers shaped these low hills and valleys, dug the lakes, made the ridges where tertiary roads run, hugging the sides of the hills. The terrain has a particular shape and form that I associate with “home”, and have never seen anywhere else. Other landscapes have more grandeur and drama, but none has ever struck me as more beautiful.

Back at my parents’ home, about forty miles west, we talked about the difficulty they’ve had keeping the lake level low this year. A few weeks ago, some of the men finally discovered that the lake outlet had been dammed by a beaver. Yesterday afternoon I walked over to check out the dam. I went through the woods across the road and couldn't believe how much they had grown up in 25 years. You cross a fence line and break out into a beautiful meadow that right now is planted with clover - it was corn the last time I was there. I followed along the outlet – the stream flowing form the lake to the river - walking in the furrows. A lot of deer had been there before me - there were sharp pointed hoof tracks in the mud and I found myself trying not to walk on top of them, I liked seeing them so much. Then the outlet became a swamp, and almost a pond above the beaver dam, which was close to the river, a very smart spot just before the old culvert and above a grove of willows. There was water flowing over it pretty strongly since the dam had been knocked down, but I saw a freshly-chewed tree, so I think the beaver is still around. I loved it - there were frogs and minnows and a lot of bright yellow-green duckweed, and I wanted to just sit down and watch for a few hours. And it was wonderful being there again. I used to walk through these woods and over to the river when I needed to get away and clear my head. The field is always breezy and quiet, with a few big hickory trees in one spot, and the woods between you and civilization. You’re alone with nature, and in a place that few people ever come to.

From the dam you can walk right over to the river. I saw a deer path and followed it and there

was a whole "wallow" where the deer had knocked down all the grasses and laid down to sleep. I also saw muskrat holes in the bank and surprised a mallard who flew off down the river a little ways. When I saw the river I realized I've had a dream of this exact spot many times over the years. It's pretty fast there but shallow, with long grasses trailing off the sandy bottom, like tresses of emerald hair in the current. It's nothing like the river near my own home at all, flowing through a field rather than rocks: everything about the geology is different, not to mention the lack of people and suburban sensibilities.

Yesterday, coming back from the nearby college bookstore, I watched the cows coming home at Red Gate farm. Mom says the farmer, who came down here from Canada, has about 600 head. There are black-and-white Holsteins, brown-and-white Holsteins, Jerseys and Guernseys, and they were all making their way back across that big field just above the lake to the barn for their afternoon milking. It was nice to see them -- their big dumb faces and lumbering gait and swaying swollen udders -- and thinking about how they do this every single day made me feel calm. That's the comfort of real rural existence. The land lies under everything: underneath time, under your days, under the seasons. Rocks, trees, wildflowers, the deer and the coyote, the heron and goose, the horse and cow and goat and the man and woman who care for them all have their place and their role. I grew up this way, even though I gardened rather than farmed as my ancestors had done, and it still makes sense to me: a woman with her laptop, speeding between worlds.
8:50 PM | postCount('106531500155497879'); Comment (0)

Source:
http://cassandrapages.blogspot.com/2003_09_28_cassandrapages_archive.html#106531500155497879

Ancestral Place

By bird on the moon

It has only been recently that Ive really considered the blood that flows beneath my skin as a transmission from the past, a ruddy sea of names and faces, graces and infamies that exist as shadows within nucleotides and tracings on yellowed, dog eared family records. We all contain

within our mere bones memories of whole villages, kingdoms, islands and prisons whose stories somehow remarkably lead up to this very moment. From this moment, what shall flow from us? We tread daily across the backbone of the ancestors, and breathe thoughtlessly the wind of our successors.

As a child growing up on the banks of the Delaware River, I began to uncover my own peculiar place in this flux. I would toss out driftwood, pretending it was a sailboat, pretending it was a wish. Id watch it disappear into the muddy currents and toss another maybe some other kid would pick up the same gnarled, wave-tempered branch and christen it with yet more hope. On the beach, softened glass; blue, pink, green as smooth as gull flight, shattered a forever ago against the rocks, to be perfected, a boys jewel. In the pocket. Pieces of china, blue and white faded and crackled, but occasionally youd find a familiar shape; a leaf, a flower, lines of colonial ink frozen into a tiny shard, speaking for a former whole, like the remnant of an archaic word. This was a slight history lesson in a boys hand, of people that had gone before, built the town, and dashing their plates on the rocky shore. The rocks themselves, ancestors of us all the exhale of volcanoes and extinct seas, collected by little hands, scoured for uniqueness, pocketed for remembrance. Id skip rocks into a future filled with wonder, and trembling. Then my father would call from the house for dinner. During the whole meal, there with one half of what made my body, Id be silent, thinking of the river, the reeds, and wishes downstream to the bay, the ocean.

Sundays wed make the journey to visit my grandmother. Her house was a museum of whod gone before; my late grandfathers upper-crust honky-tonk in the basement was perfectly preserved, untouched except for my little fingers, looking through dim bottles, imagining a hubbub of grown-ups, laughing, clinking glasses, doing incomprehensible things. There were photos of my great-grands, and great-great-grands, facing the camera with stoic, firm jaws and piercing eyes. Calendars frozen in time, this was a wonderland. I may have easily slipped down the rabbit hole, fascinated by what may family had at one point done with such style and abandoned in such haste. I didnt know them as a child, and their past was only spoken of in whimsy and passing. The house, the epicenter of the family, where we all gathered, yielded few answers. Perhaps thats why I still dream of it it was the encasing of many generations history, and little was ever spoken of it.

Now, a lifetime has passed since those days when I was a short, towheaded and impulsive child. Now I can say, somewhat, that this is where I came from. I wish I could speak of more, of lines further back, exact places and dates. I cannot. My mothers family is kept behind a heavy, creaky-hinged door inside her heart. When she speaks with lips so like my own, its of pain and disdain for what they put her through. I can easily be walking on her forefathers footpaths and be oblivious. The ground beneath me now is mixed with the lives of Cherokee, Scots, Germans and the mournful dust of slaves. When I drink apple cider from the produce stand, the water is someones ancient mother. I live on land where I was not born; Ive had to nurture a connection, find stories, and weave them into the place in the soul reserved for our own kinships. I have a name, but I know little of what made it. So I must accept all ancestors as my ancestors, that this shelter is built upon an earth that budded an aspect of my beingness, somewhere. It doesnt matter. Were all gifted with a temporal entitlement to cast a shadow and make light, and our brevity is shared by every twist and turn of the branch of humanity, ultimately originating from one thick trunk, roots embedded deeper than imagination. My mother, so far away, is in these

mountains. My family is as close as the dewy October grass that I run my fingers through, just to say hello.

When Ive crossed boundaries and time zones to cast myself into the willed alienation of being far beyond my cultural context, I find myself at home. In Hungary, in the gypsy settlements and the Turkish bathhouses, certain faces would poke through my fascination and seem to remind me of those old photographs and well-worn photo albums that bind legacies in camera smiles. Familiarity, connection, relation, suddenly and oddly shining clear as I clutch my passport and straighten my backpack straps. In Prague, the cobblestone arc of the St. Charles Bridge seemed to belong to some part of my soul that knew it, some blood cell that was jumping up and down and hollering in recognition, for indeed my genes carried a memory of walking across the Karlovy Most, even if my mind didnt the flux of time bridged over the Moldau. I remember thinking, walking that moonlit, violin-strung span, that ancestry, and place, are mutable, and depending simply on how much Id want to relate. On a train just outside of Auschwitz, my eyes welled up for the heavy air still screaming over that Polish plain where some of my own life must have been heaped in piles of ghosts shoes.

In Haiti, a land of people whose skin contrasts from mine but whose composite soul drums in the place where I go to dream, I felt instantly at home, utterly surrounded by family, by great-grands and great-great-grands whose portraits do not adorn the walls in my grandmothers house. The bare mountains, the steep hillsides cultivated almost vertically, the sound of the conch whistle and cacophonic roosters were as much a homeland as Delaware or western North Carolina, if not oddly more. The ground there still swells with blood of runaway slaves and the colonial oppressors they overturned, so far removed from my youth of manners and contrition, yet it swallowed me as easily as it swallowed the sun on my first day there, tossing up iridescent reds against a sky scented with wood fires. In the presence of some original soul, some ancient predecessor of what now moves me, I wept under blazing moonlight from the roof of an orphanage as I watched a procession of candles, drum and song disappear into the night. Somehow, some way, we are kin; an ancient lineage was intoned as distant chanting filled the air. The soul knows this even if the body doesn't.

The legacy that flows within you exists for the sake of the continuation of love, and the same could be said of this sweet Earth we are graced to experience, for all its trials and struggles. All of my ancestors, whoever they were and whatever they did, came into being through the same sensual passage, and made do with the land and time they were allotted by fate to harvest. One day I shall lay in the same dewy grass and become it, and people will walk or run upon it and suddenly see themselves bubbling up from the green, running their fingers through it. Or they may simply keep walking, whistling whatever tune thats fit for that eventual sunny day. You are soil and dandelions, on the verge of becoming, in cosmic time. You yourself are an immortal, an ancestor, and the stuff that makes your own brave brow may one day become the ploughs and troughs of a new and unreckonable culture.Where you are now shall be a homeland staked by countless names, now waiting inside the pulsing of cells.

Every place is the dwelling of ancestors. Any time, they can emerge from the ephemera and viscera of the everyday and surprise us with elder wisdom. Even today, at the elementary school where I work, an African ballet performed for the children, and amid the twitter of giggles at the funny costumes, many little heads of every shape bobbed in time to the drum and dance, the stage became holy ground of venerable names, and perhaps, who was then speaking through the

rhythm every one of us could call grand, and great-grand, and great-great-grand here before us, that we may continue the legacy to savor the present.

This post prepared for the bi-weekly topic "Ancestral Place" over at Ecotone Wiki. Please join in and enjoy the responses of many excellent writers.

jaybird gave you this @ 20:10 in *"Journaling the Infinite"* | Birdfeathers (1) | Moonbeams (0) | Permalink

Comments

Thanks for this very thoughtful post. You bring up the point that as we mature, identifying with our specific, individual ancestry can become less important, and yield to a greater identity with all of humanity. I wonder if this is hard, or even impossible, unless we come to some understanding of (and security about)our own roots first...?

Posted by beth at October 10, 2003 09:29 AM

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20031231153718/birdonthemoon.com/cgi-bin/mt-comments.cgi?entry_id=722

Discussion

Funny...here we are again. All place writers writing about other-than ancestral places.

Is this kind of distance from one's own roots a prerequisite for writing about place? Do we need to be "out of the fishbowl" to write about the fish? Can Tuscans write about "being Tuscan" or do they just write about "being me?"

-- Chris

Not everyone in the world is a "pureblood". And not everyone in the world has lived exclusively in one place all their lives. Not everyone in the world knows everything about their ancestors. Not everyone in the world can even define what "ancestral place" means. And not everyone in the world sees "place" as purely a physical location. The word "home" is not even a concrete noun... you can't always use an article like "the" or "a" with it, because it is not something you can touch. Yet to everyone it is a place.

--Miguel

So many of the contributions seem to be from people who are themselves, or have descended from immigrants. I wonder how many generations have to pass before you can "adopt" the local ancestors.

--Geoff

I guess that's my point Geoff...travelling gives us eyes to write about place...it gives us the distance between the seer and seen that is necessary for analysis of place and landscape. I think ancestral places are probably those places where we are so embedded that we cannot think of ourselves as seperate from the land. We are literally rooted there. Only with the human experiement of migrating to we learn to see other places in the context of where we have come from. That difference allows us to gaze outwardly upon something rather than dwelling entirely within. -- Chris

Chris, maybe the writing that we have in this discussion group reflects the way modern society has altered from what we tend to see as givens in the way humans have inhabited places. Certainly Americans are some of the most mobile people in the world. When I lived in the States, for a total of 20 years, I moved a total of 30 times, whereas during my 22 years here in Japan I moved only 5 times, and 3 of those because of changes that took place in the States. In general Japanese tend to move, until now this is, very seldom throughout their lives. Now with money and greater ease of transportation they are beginning to move in ways they never did before and are losing nearly all of their traditional connection to their roots. I have met very few Americans who have not moved a number of times in their lives. This mobility must make it extremely difficult to adopt any kind of sense of "ancestral place". How does one embed onself within a place if one only passes through? And how does one come to identify with any place or people if one does not belong to any of them, as I don't? You asked earlier for Tuscans to write about being Tuscan, but as a German-Danish/ Filipino-Chinese/ African-American-Cherokee-Jew from South Carolina/ who grew up in Japan, the United States (New York, Oregon, and Boston), and Germany, exactly where do my loyalties and roots lie? I am not alone in this. The modern world is breeding a new kind of human being... call them uber-mongrels, if you will... who arose out of all those people migrating continually around the world. Ancestral places, as traditionally defiined, are dying out.

-- Miguel

Nice comments Miguel. I think this actually speaks to post-modern notions of identity. Which leads me to maybe seeing if we can't add a topic to the BiweeklyTopics? list on Place and Identity.

At any rate, I think you have produced your contribution on that. I love the idea of "moving in different ways." I think we are all learning how to do that.

-- Chris

Miguel, I think you put your finger on one of the reasons behind another aspect of American culture -- that one is defined by one's profession ... rather than by one's place.

-- P.

What an interesting discussion! P. makes an importnat point, I think. I know that my own concepts about ancestral place are shaped by the fact that I have really only lived in two places in my 50+ years: central New York, and Vermont/NH. That's it, and it's rather unusual nowadays. As Chris so rightly comments, you can't write about a place until you've left it, but I also think you can't necessarily have much to say about a place until you've lived there for a good while. Thus many of us are rather place-less, and have had to find other ways (such as our work) to define ourselves. For me, as I've gotten older and analyzed this more, "identity" involves both my physical relationship to a real place, with its landscape, rocks, trees, fauna and so forth, (a relationship which was ingrained in me from a pre-language point in my life) and a more metaphysical sense of inner identity that is independent of any particular place and yet has a certain sense of groundedness or "location" about it. I find that these two interpenetrate and inform each other quite a lot. --Beth

That's really the irony isn't it Beth. I mean, you can write about a place you've never left, but then you are just writing about life. You don't know that your place is any different from any other.

I think too that writing about place, especially a new place is a great way to get into it deeper, interpreting and pulling apart the threads that make it up. When you show that writing to others and they see themselves relfected, it's pretty groovy. -- Chris

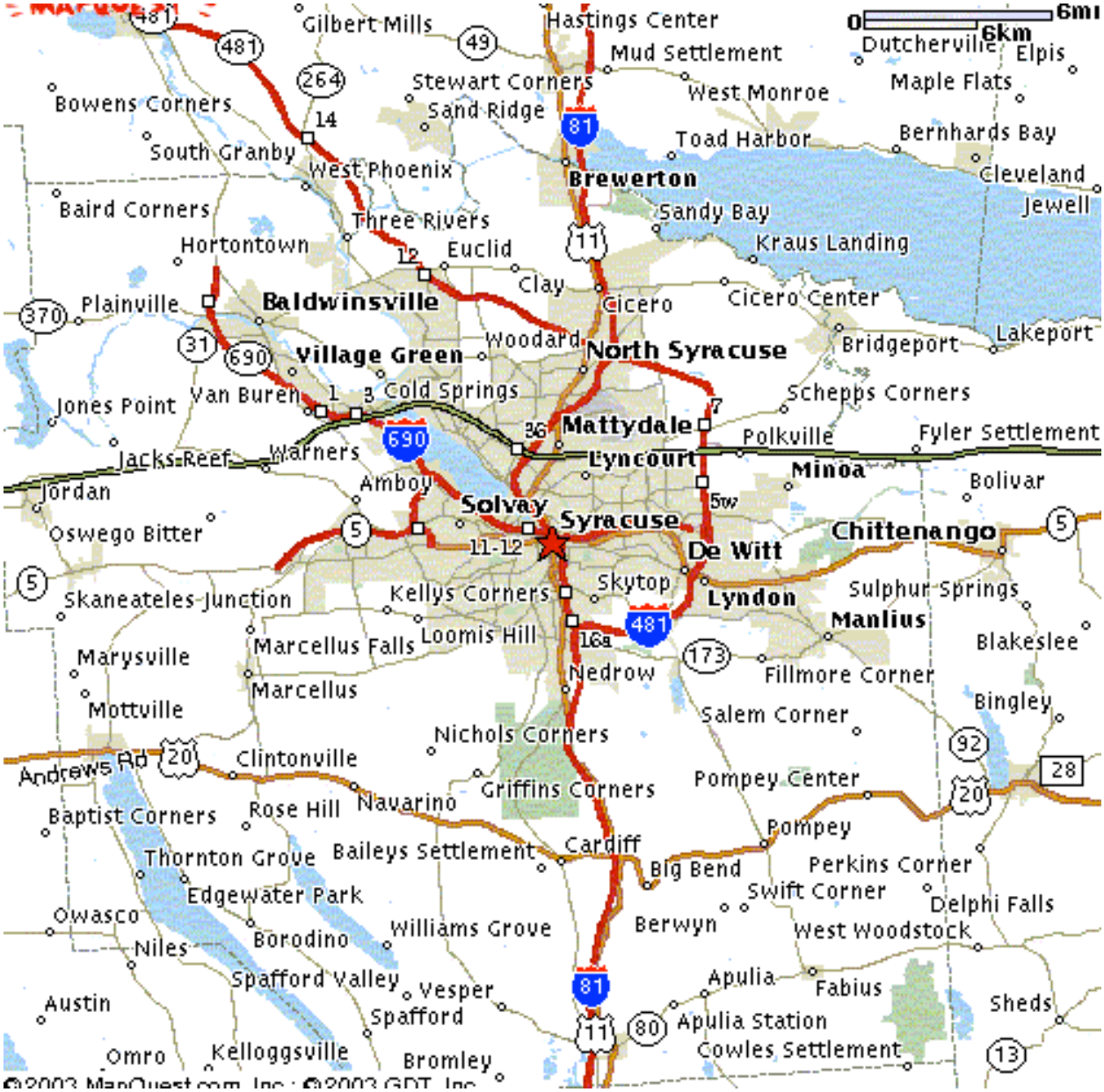
Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20051217215822/www.magpienest.org/scgi-bin/wiki.pl?DiscussAncestralPlace

Place Names

Bi-Weekly Topic for Oct 15, 2003

Place/Name

By P.



A place's name is not the place itself, but it can be a snapshot of its history, if it's old enough to have one — and I'm not unaware of how peculiarly American it must seem to others, to have "places" too young to have a history.

The standard local history of my hometown maintains that after a church was burnt down by a carpenter who wasn't paid for his work, the town fathers were so embarrassed that they renamed the place in honor of a War of 1812 naval hero. The hero's subsequent career didn't add much to the village's luster, but the name remains, pinning the town to the early 19th century.

Around it is a welter of places named for home by the ex-New Englanders who settled the region: Sherburne, Mt. Upton, Afton, Coventry and places with names borrowed from a vague understanding of Indian languages, like Otsego, Otego, Otsdawa, Chenango and Susquehanna.

When the interior of New York opened up after the Revolution, the state parceled out names as fast as Adam must have and the tracts given as pay to Continental Army soldiers drew a library of names from classical literature, then very much in fashion: Syracuse, Manilius (now Manlius), Clay, Cicero, Pompey, Apulia and many more. D.G. Rossiter of Ithaca posits that the names came from John Dryden's translation of Plutarch's "Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans." Whatever -- The stately architecture of the region's oldest buildings echoes the theme.

Among my favorite origin stories, though, is that of Delhi, a county seat in the northern Catskills: When the time came to give the narrow valley and the township around it a name in 1802, politicians thought to honor Judge Ebenezer Foote, a landowner and state senator known as "the great mogul" to his buddies — for wealth, but also because he was short and fat. They offered "Delhi," it being the Indian potentate's home.

Proponents of "Mapleton" grouched about the choice, and Erastus Root, a fellow politican who eventually became lieutenant governor (he was buried in Delhi for a while), quipped: "Dell-high, hell-high — better call it Foote-high!"

The maple lovers got Maple Grove on the East branch of the Delaware River, but Delhi became the county seat — graced by a lovely, warm-brick French Empire courthouse and the ample homes of well-to-do 19th-century lawyers — while Maple Grove remains only in the bitter memories of onetime residents; it was lost under the Pepacton reservoir.

Now, you should take origin stories with a grain of salt. They're no more provable than Homer's (another Upstate New York placename) tale of the Trojan Horse, but they're just as important to the town's identity, and you question them at your peril.

The names that ring my bells, however, are the ones that don't go with "official" places. "Camel's Hump" is the humplike pasture, now gone to scrub woods, that projects into a curve of the Susquehanna near my hometown; five miles east, Jackass Mountain Road climbs the same ridge, leaving you to wonder what pioneers thought that animal looked like. "Frasers" was a whistle stop and a creamery on a long-defunct rail line near Delhi. "Yaleville" is the ambitious name of a trio of houses along a country road near my hometown.

Near Delhi, "Meridale" boasts a post office at the foot of the long-defunct Catskill Turnpike, which once led settlers from the Hudson River deep into the forests of western New York. Someday, someone will explain to me where "the Barkaboom," a track leading to fishermen's camps near the Pepaction Reservoir, came from.

I think that back when a five-mile ride in the wagon was an all-morning expedition, little places mattered more. When you got to Coopers Corners after an hour of hot plodding up from the river valley to the south, you knew that you were almost to Yaleville and your long, 300-foot climb was almost done. Now it's just a couple of houses before the turnoff to the road that goes past the old dump, and you haven't accomplished anything because you've got much farther to go.

None of the places I think of as old are old by European standards. But, disused now, they still hint of the lives and loves of people a lot like me, and the names they bear still speak of hard work and hope, and they never fail to stir a response in my own soul.

Source: http://my.core.com/%7Epzicari/text/Placenames.html?

You can't get there from here

By One Pot Meal

Written for Ecotone: Place Names

In the town where I grew up, the one I call Salthill when I write fiction (a name with its own story, you betcha), you can tell how long someones lived there by what they call things. Theres a section of town called Egypt, parallel streets of near-identical houses and near-identical lives, streets named Cairo Circle and Kings Way and Delta Lane. On the edge of that neighborhood is a small old single-story building wedged into a junction where five roads cross. According to the sign, its the Egypt Country Store.

But if youve been around a while its the Postie, because in addition to those five roads theres an old railbed that crosses there, too, and the whats now a store was once a post office, sacks of letters coming and going daily. Maybe on those hooks Ive always enjoyed in model trains but never seen used in life—a bag of mail hangs outside the building and the train grabs it in passing, never stopping, sometimes hanging out its own bag for the station master to grab on their own hook. Ive wondered, once or twice, about people who spend entire lives seeing the same faces everyday but never meeting for real—waving to the conductor as the train rattles by without ever learning his name.

We live in places that way, spending our snatch of months or years on the surface of a town, the first generation of our family to live there and knowing all along that it isnt forever. We learn the names we're surrounded by, but not always the ones they replaced (and I'm not even going back far enough to consider that the town's name itself is a misappropriation of a Wampanoag word). In my case, we moved to Salthill when I was ten, and I left when I was eighteen, and Ive visited but havent lived there since, and, knock on wood, wont ever again. When I think of the century of investment the family has in my current neighborhood, in my current city, twenty years of a single generation hardly seems worth mentioning, but I mention it anyway, more often than not.

When I mention the Egypt Country Store Ill call it the Postie, but I never knew it for anything but groceries; the train pulled up years before I arrived. A whole other set of names probably went with it.

On the east side of town, only a couple of miles from the Postie, theres another store called Dads or Pops or something like that. In high school it was called something else, something that came and went so fast Ive forgotten, and earlier it was Sams Variety, but I always only called it Bishops because thats the name I learned from older kids, kids whod been in town longer, and remembered when it actually was Bishops. If Id told one of my neighbors I was going to Bishops, theyd have known exactly where I was headed, though the name was long gone, but now its buried under so many other names that Im not sure how far Id get.

Outside Bishops once I opened a package of some confection that came and went, cookie sticks and a tub of chocolate sauce like those crackers and cheese with red plastic sticks. You were supposed to dip the cookie in the chocolate and eat it, but instead I dipped them and hurled the dripping missiles at the hair of a girl my age, who I probably had a crush on but truly now cant remember. She shrieked, and she ran, and I chased but never got any closer than hurling cookies before she moved, after high school, becoming an actress on some TV show you may have heard of and changing her name to something you wouldnt recognize if youd grown up with her.

Closer to my house, the store was named after a local family that owned a few of them and competed with another local family who owned even more small convenience stores, sometimes buying each other out. The first chain is gone now, the second is huge, and if I stood outside that store down the street from my parents and told people coming and going that the son of the

owner, the namesake of the store, once accused me of stealing and made me open my inevitable black trench coat (it didnt mean a thing, at the time) to show him I wasnt, or that my brother once epoxied the lock of his car door in revenge for something or other… if I told them all that theyd ask, Who? and Where was this, now? Ive never heard of that place? or they might not use exactly those words but Id know what they meant.

Farther away, at the north end of town, is a store that was called Curtis Compact when I arrived, and I still call it that, though later it was bought by that bigger chain I mentioned and had been something else earlier and may be something else again, now. In the middle of the night, when I could first drive, I went there for pints of Ben and Jerrys and soda, the only 24-hour business in town so the only excuse to get out of the house and come home past the beach and park by the lighthouse to watch the lamp go around and around, blocked on the seaward side in those days of decommission so it only cast light across land and went dark when it came to the water.

Reading over, now, what Ive just written, I notice that my life for a time was framed by these four convenience stores like the points of a compass, but that since then, after moving away and building my life elsewhere, its come to be framed more by their names instead: who I am when I visit is a person who calls businesses what they once were, who got lost a few weeks ago driving to the house he grew up in because woods have turned into streets and what was once navigation by the absence of landmarks—a fork with trees in the middle, a street without a sign—is now a jumble of mansions in developments with big signs facing the streets to announce names Ive never heard.

I listened to some old timers complain once in the restaurant where I worked through high school about how the town had gotten uppity in their youth, changing all the street names that didnt appeal to the new class of people moving south out of Boston with money and aspirations and schemes. Goose Turd Lane became Elm Street, and I could give more examples but none would mean so much next to that. At the time, I just thought it was funny, but now Im picturing a map in their grizzled grey heads with Goose Turd Lane at the center of town, and another map where you head past the Postie going east if you want to get to Bishops, and it doesnt seem funny at all that the names on either of those maps would get me hopelessly lost on the road.

14 Oct 03 | Comments (5)

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20040307104433/www.onepotmeal.com/2003/10/index.html

Place Names

By Fragments from Floyd

The biweekly topic at the Ecotone for October 15 is Place Names. Got any interesting place names near you or place name stories you'd be willing to share? You can leave them as comments here if I can't talk you into contributing to the Ecotone.

My wife thinks it odd that if I can find an old road map under the seat of the car somewhere, I can amuse myself for a half hour while she is in the fabric store. And this is a fact, I admit. It doesn't matter how old or of where; a map contains a hundred stories in the names that places have been given, and the imagination is free to ponder and concoct. While there may be the

kernel of a fact wrapped up in the names of villages, mountains, crossroads and rivers, more often than not, the names make me wonder about the part of the story that they don't tell.

Just glancing at the map of southwest Virginia now, for instance... over there is Barren Springs. I bet there's a story in the name. Maybe it wasn't the springs that were barren. Perhaps it was thought at one time that the water contained a poison that would result in stillborn children. Hmmmm. And over a county or two is Porter's Crossroads-- like many names, commemorative for an unknown (most likely Mr.) Porter. Some once-significant roads intersected there, and so it became a center of commerce. Maybe it was just a farming community, but possibly it nurtured an early industry related to the lead mines that made shot for the Confederate Army. And obviously this was a former glory as PC now lies now in the middle of nowhere. Shooting Creek, right here in Floyd County, was the scene of a fierce battle between the moonshiners and the revenuers come to bust up their moonshine stills, if I'm remembering my tales right, and I would have imagined just such a history from seeing the name on a county map. Boone's Mill; Haymakertown; Yellow Sulfur Springs... all tell of a central enterprise that once happened in those places with enough regularity or importance that the little settlements got labeled by them.

Other names are more geographic, like Five Mile Mountain that meanders down the Blue Ridge towards Ferrum; Bent Mountain that plunges zigzagging off the same geology toward Roanoke; and Buffalo Mountain, so named not because the creatures used to live there but because the outline of the 4000 foot tall monadnock looks in outline like a resting buffalo. It is the most outstanding single physical feature of the county and the high school teams take their names from it.

Place names can be mystifying. You wonder what the town fathers were thinking when they came up with the name Breeding Ranch over in a nearby county, until you understand it was named after a Mr. Breeding and does not promote promiscuity in any way, as your mind might at first have imagined. What you can't tell from looking at map names is that town names often take on their own local pronunciation. Wytheville, where we lived for 12 years, was widely pronounced Whiffle; the nearby sleepy village of Rural Retreat (the home of Dr. Pepper) had way too many "R"s to get your teeth around, and it was called simply "Earl Treat". One was thought affected if they enunciated the third syllable of Fort Chiswell, and instead it was often simply Fort Chissel. Nearer to Floyd, Staunton is Stanton, Buena Vista is Byou-na Vista, Meadows of Dan (near the headwaters of the Dan River) is MedduzzaDan...all one word. You know you got yourself a tourist if they pronounce the "of".

When we first moved from Alabama to Virginia long ago, I was a little ruffled to find that so many of the counties in the "commonwealth" (Virginia is technically NOT a state, you see) were high-falluting names of colonial royalty: Prince William, Prince George, Prince Edward, King and Queen, King George Counties. I imagined powdered wigs and lacey collars and poofy cuffs on all the local farmers in those counties. Where I had come from we were less pretentious, more earthy and yet also recognizing of our roots: Lochapoka, Notasulga, Saugahatchee, Euphapee, Chewalkla, Sylacauga, Coosa, Tallapoosa were little Alabama towns or creeks near Auburn where I first started enjoying maps and map names. They were the multisyllabic names the Cherokee and Choctaw (two Alabama County names, by the way) had given to those places; although how they knew one place from another without these convenient municipality lines and county seats layed out nice and neat on the map is a mystery to me.

So. Next time you get stranded in an interstate motel room with nothing to read but Gideons Bible and the Rand-McNally Atlas, after you've read a selection from the Psalms and one from the gospels ('cause this is as close as some of ya blamed heatherns are gonna get to going to church)-- head straight for the atlas pages that show Idaho, Minnesota and Vermont. Find the three most intriguing place names on each; amuse yourself by making up stories to explain each name. By the time you're done, you'll be ready to nestle down under those stiff, smoky sheets and listen til morning to the ice machine and the biker dudes in the room next door.

Posted by fred1st on October 14, 2003 6:09 AM | Permalink

Comments

Great post, buddy! I always liked the way the folks in Buchanan and Buckhannon both call home with the same pronunciation.

Posted by: ronbailey | October 14, 2003 8:54 AM

What is the story behind Rural Retreat being the home of Dr Pepper? I would like to hear more about that. I always heard that it started out at a drugstore in Waco Texas.

Posted by: bill | October 14, 2003 9:48 AM

Hey, now! I'm from King George!

Is the fabric store where Mrs. Fred shops Schoolhouse Fabrics? I loved that place. Autumn in southwest Virginia.

Posted by: Jane | October 14, 2003 2:33 PM

This is true where I come from too, feste...most people who aren't from Toronto think that the city is pronouced "TRAW-na" by locals. The truth is that locals pronounce it "To-RON-o" and anyone who pronounces is "TRAW-na" is probably from 'Frisco.

Dig?

Posted by: Chris Corrigan | October 16, 2003 2:37 AM

Our Toronto, NSW, is pronounced by the locals as
To-RON-o also. I'm struck by the similarities in our respective countries' histories - our place names have a similar theme to yours.

Posted by: Jenny | October 16, 2003 6:02 AM

Frisco is only marginally worse than San Fran, which is what airline employees and travel agents call it when they're trying to book you a flight there given that your last one got cancelled on account of the fog...

Posted by: Pica | October 16, 2003 10:11 AM

Well that was a good read. Nearly as good as reading a map! Maps are like books where at times you want to read between the lines and try to work out as you say "about the part of the story that they don't tell."

Posted by: Coup de Vent | October 16, 2003 10:20 AM

It's "Chewalcla"

Posted by: Rivers | March 17, 2004 11:35 AM

I dont know but Porter's Crossroads might be related to Porter's mill, which was owned by Porter Jessup and is up around that way on the Dan River.

Posted by: matt | April 6, 2004 1:35 AM

I enjoyed your blog because I had lived away from the area for a number of years and realized that some of the words we used in sw va were not as spelled. You left out Buchanan (pronounced Buck-Hanan)You may also wish to note that a stranger may be tested of his southern roots by being asked the name of General Lee's horse (Traveler). Just some thoughts, Cline

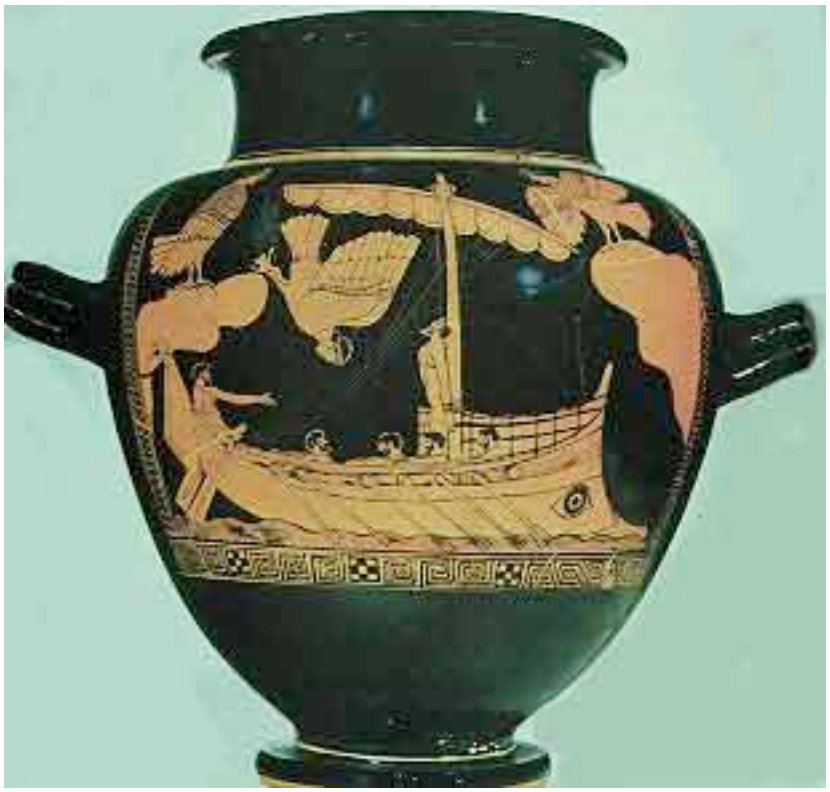
Posted by: Cline Hall | June 8, 2006 9:55 PM

Source: http://www.fragmentsfromfloyd.com/fragments/2003/10/place_names.html

Wednesday, October 15, 2003

By Cassandra Pages

This is a contribution to the ECOTONE Topic for today, "Place Names".



Odysseus lashed to the mast while tempted by the Sirens (on a red-figure vase in the British Museum)

PLACE NAMES
Listening with rapt attention to my mother reading a child's version of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, I couldn't have predicted that the nine-year-old girl I was then would grow up to study classics – or, for that matter, give a "virtual place" someday the name *The Cassandra Pages*. Place names are supposed to tell us something about history, but how often does our own history get caught up in theirs? In my case I think it did, to some extent, giving me a tacit permission to do something out-of-the-ordinary with my life, and to identify with a history that went even further back than the colonial and Indian names that also made up the map of my childhood world.

It's impossible to ignore the native American legacy in central New York. The beautiful Iroquois names that trip musically off the tongues of local people and confound newcomers -- Susquehanna, Chenango, Unadilla, Chittenango, Canasawacta, Oswego, Sacandaga, Canajoharie, Skaneateles (give up? you say "skinny-AT-las") – are just one part of a local culture that has never moved very far away from woodsman lore and craft, hunting and fishing for food more than sport, and interest in early history, artifacts, and antiques.

The Dutch colonists gave their own names to the early settlements in the Albany region (Rensselaer, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Watervliet), but as you move west in the state, they give way to British place names brought by settlers from Massachusetts and Connecticut who were moving westward (Hartford, Norwich, Oxford) and names that commemorate famous American colonial figures (Hamilton, Madison, Herkimer). The area I grew up in was still "frontier" at the time of the American Revolution; in fact when I was in Cooperstown a few weeks ago I saw an exhibit commemorating the 225th anniversary of the infamous Cherry Valley Massacre. This 1778 raid by Indians on a frontier settlement occurred about 40 miles east of my hometown, which in turn wasn't settled until 1792.

But in addition to the native, European, and early American place names that surrounded me as a child, there were the classical ones: Utica, Syracuse, Cicero, Ithaca, Marathon, Homer. (William R. Farrel has recently written a book called Classical Place Names in New York State: Origins, Histories and Meanings. I haven't read it yet, but I know some of these names are traceable to Simeon Dewitt, who was Surveyor-General of the State of New York (ca. 1789) and owned of a good deal of land in the Syracuse/Ithaca area.)

The Homeric names my mother was reading to me rang a bell: they were words I'd already heard; towns I'd visited, and somehow that made the Greek stories not only alive and real, but made me a participant in them. I wonder now if that was a subtle influence on me, a little added permission granted by the gods for a bookish, country girl to feel connected to classical history and literature. Of course, my family's bookshelf had more to do with it, as well as the fact that I had a great-aunt named Minerva -- but the weaving of Ariadne-like threads was never more apparent to me than the momentous day I first opened my copy of *The Iliad* in a university Greek class, in Ithaca, New York. They wrap me still: here in my office I can look up at a framed page from an early printed edition of *The Odyssey* -- or reach out my hand to hold an Iroquois axe-head, polished and black, that my grandfather dug up in our garden, on the floodplain of the Chenango River.
4:55 PM

Source:
http://cassandrapages.blogspot.com/2003_10_12_cassandrapages_archive.html#10662416720840320

Place Names

By London and the North

Ecotone
Ecotone has become a place on the internet. I don't know what Ecotone means. I have read why the word was chosen but I can't remember it. I don't think I want to. It has its own meaning to me: a community of conversation, a group of people who don't just write about place but care about place and the things that influence it. The current topic is Place Names and other people's entries can be found here.

Acorn 1075
Acorn was the old exchange for Acton until the late 1960's. It was the first phone number I learnt. In the old Ealing films, you sometimes hear people answer the phone saying Acorn ****.

The West Riding
The West Riding is where I lived most of my childhood before and after Acton. In Those Days the county of Yorkshire was divided into three ridings: east, west and north. Apparently the village I live in now used to be just in the North Riding and the boundary was on the other bank of the canal where the West Riding began. The buses said West Yorkshire on them but people

were very identified with the ***Riding*** in which they lived. By the time I was about eighteen, the Ridings had gone off the map altogether. It was a hugely emotive issue for people of Yorkshire and a purely administrative decision by central government. The area I lived in at the time became part of the new North Yorkshire County Council. As it happens, I am living in NYCC twenty eight years later. But there's a campaign locally to get our postal address and post codes back to saying North Yorkshire. For the last few years it has been West Yorkshire with a Bradford post code.

Pic source

I applaud the people in Otley who took action against the sudden appearance of the Welcome to Leeds signs outside their town. Talk about bureaucratic insensitivity!

Pic source

Appletreewick
Appletreewick was childhood heaven. And the thing is, it still exists. And it's still quite heavenly. Sometimes in summer we go for a peach beer in the garden of the New Inn. Now that's improved. When, in the nineteen seventies I took a partner camping in Appletreewick, we went to the New Inn and it was so depressing. The landlord read us a poem - an epic poem -about how his wife had died of cancer from smoking and made my partner by some strange means which involved holding some minty liquid in her mouth for the duration of his poem, give up smoking. Anyway, I love the name Appletreewick and may be trying to say it when I die!

Posted by Coup de Vent at 11:31 AM | Comments (5)

Comments

Terrific pics and remarks on place names, CDV! Loved them.

Posted by beth at October 16, 2003 12:02 AM

I can picture you on your deathbed, muttering "Appletreewick" and all the newspaper reporters heading out to scour the country for the meaning of it. A plot line worthy of an Orson Wells flick...!

Posted by Chris at October 16, 2003 07:41 AM

Great post. I think English place names are the best in the world!! For example : Great Snoring and Little Snoring in Norfolk.

Posted by Geoff at October 16, 2003 10:00 AM

As you probably know, the Ridings take their name from a Norse word - I think it was 'thridding' - which divided Yorkshire in thirds.
As for the dreaded Leeds Creep, Wetherby is also annoyed at being associated with it.

Posted by JL at October 17, 2003 08:14 AM

Names can be so misleading though can't they ? Not Appletreewick of course. The place lives up to its gorgeous appendage.

Over the Pennines in Manchester, we have a windy country lane (honest !) that runs between Oldahm and Manchester. Its modern name is the A62 but most locals know it as Manchester or Oldham Road - depending on where they live.

As you perambulate from Oldham down to Manchester you will pass through the deligtfully bucolic Hollinwood. Soon after the whimsical landscape of Newton Heath appears. A mere cock stride later and the magnificence of Collyhurst and Harpur Hey are at your beck and call. Within the half hour the rustic charms of the deligtful Miles Platting hove into view. Finally a short stop for refreshments in the hamlet of New Cross before the heady deligts of Manchester.

Hollinwood
Newton Heath
Collyhurst
Harpur Hey
Miles Platting
New Cross

Could all be villages in the Cotwolds couldn't they ?

Believe me - you wouldn't want to live in any of them !

You've got me hankering after Yorkshire in Autumn - I might suggest that Dearest and myself go for a drive in the next few weeks. It really is a wonderful part of the world. You and Paris are very lucky to live there.

Posted by Steve at October 18, 2003 02:09 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20031023192204/http://www.airenet.co.uk/alife/2003_10.html

October 15, 2003

By Bowen Island Journal

When I first moved to Bowen Island, I wrote a piece on the place names of Howe Sound which stands up pretty well today as my contribution to the Ecotone Wiki's collective blogging about place names for today. From that original post, I wanted to reiterate something Robert Bringhurst wrote about the Squamish name for Bowen Island, "Xwlil Xhwm." Bringhurst referred to that name as "a stony protuberance of meaning cloaked in a forest of evergreen consonants" which of course perfectly captures the sense of the place here. "Bowen" was a British Navy captain who never saw this part of the world. "Xwlil Xhwm" is all about the creation of the earth, the transformation of humans and the origin of the black-tailed deer.

Lately, there has been a wonderful effort underway to write history back on the land. Julian and Kathy Dunster have been busy naming all of the creeks on Bowen. Julian is a forester and Kathy is a biologist who hand drew a four by six foot map of Bowen for the Islands of the Salish Sea mapping project. Together they have been covering every square inch of the island searching for watercourses, and naming the ones that haven't been named yet. All of this naming reflects the post-European settlement and character of the island. Among the names of the creeks, streams

and rivers are a bunch that reflect the names of Bowen Islanders past and present, and then there are these whimsical ones:

- Bong Creek
-
- Bang Creek
-
- Drum Beat
-
- Purple Haze
-
- Kill Creek
-
- Whine Creek
-
- Stream of Consciousness
-
- Drinking Cougar
-
- Hanging Deer
-
- Om Creek
-
- Donny Brook
-

- Dharma Creek
-
- Dogma Creek

Wonderful, eh?

posted by Chris at 11:21 PM

Source: http://www.chriscorrigan.com/miscellany/bijournal/2003_10_01_archive.html#106628528683886005

Place names - NSW

By Mulubinba Moments

This week we are discussing Place Names on the Ecotone Wiki (see side bar).

Australia's place names come in four categories:- the Aboriginal place names, European place names, names describing a feature of the landscape (Redhead, Blue Mountains) and places named after Explorers, Bureacrats and Free Settlers. Some place names are simply unimaginative - we have for example a Macquarie St, a Macquarie Fields, a Macquarie River, a Lake Macquarie and a Port Macquarie - all named after Governor Macquarie naturally! One suburb boasts first second, third and fourth streets, another suburb has streets named after every wine known to man. We do however have our share of more interesting place names - try for example, Dunedoo, HumptyDo, Boggabilla, Boggabri, Woolloomooloo, Woy Woy and personal favourites of ours, Moolip and Mooball. The naming of our national capital, Canberra, could have been a disaster. A public call for suggestions elicited more than 700, including Kangaremu, Sydmeladperbrisho, Empire City, Democratia, Australamooloo, Utopia, Cooee, Swindleville, Gonebroke and Revenuelia. Sense prevailed, with the declaration in 1913 that the Aboriginal name given to the area since the 1850s would remain.

A closer look at our area reveals many interesting names - there is Toronto (named in honour of a Canadian sculler who settled there!): Wallsend, Gateshead, Greta, Abermain, Scone, Abernethy, Swansea - no prizes for guessing where a number of our first settlers came from. Our indigenous roots give us names like Wangi Wangi (place of the night owls); Boolaroo (place of many flies); Teralba (place of ticks); Booragul (summer or warm place)- much more descriptive and imaginative.

In my search for the meanings of some of our local place names I came across a small piece on the "imaginatively called" Lake Macquarie (after Governor Macquarie of course). This is the largest salt walter coastal lake in the Southern Hemisphere (four times the size of Sydney Harbour) and is only a 20 minute drive away from home. The lake's foreshore consists of 174km of beaches, bays and headlands. From 1800 to 1826 however it had another name - "Reid's

Mistake". Captain William Reid was the first European to make his way into the lake. Sent from Sydney to collect coal from the mouth of the Hunter River he mistook the channel entrance of the lake for the river estuary, ventured inside and encountered some members of the Awabakal tribe, who then occupied the area from the bank of the Lower Hunter to the southern and western shores of Lake Macquarie. After he inquired about coal the Aborigines directed him to some embedded in the headland. It was only upon his return to Sydney that he realised his error. The lake was thus known as Reid's Mistake until 1826 when it was renamed Lake Macquarie. Although I like the sound of "Reid's Mistake" I wonder if it really should have been named Lake Awabakal.

October 16, 2003 | Permalink

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20031203182239/mulubinba.typepad.com/mulubinba_moments/2003/10/index.html

Californian Place Names

By Feathers of Hope (Pica)

This post is a contribution to the Ecotone Wiki's joint blogging topic, Place Names.

The European colonization of California was at first northward expansion, from New Spain (Mexico), of Franciscan Missions. The tribes encountered by the friars already had names for the places they lived in, paddled to, the rivers they fished from, the woodlands whose acorns they ate. A lot of these names still survive--near here, for example, Napa, Sonoma, and Petaluma are all indigenous names--but for the most part California as far north as Sonoma, which is where the northernmost mission is located, is a quilt of Spanish--and often Catholic--place names. San Francisco. Santa Maria. [Sagrado] Sacramento. [Nuestra Señora de] Los Angeles, the largest city in the world dedicated to Our Lady.

Above Sonoma there are another 300 miles of California, and along the coast, where there were Russian outpost colonies in the eighteenth century, we have the interesting juxtaposition of Sebastopol next to Santa Rosa.

Then the Gold Rush ushered in the new waves of English, Germans, French, Spanish, and other Europeans, who turned to farming when the gold was gone. The small farming communities around here have mostly English names. Davis, originally Davisville, was named after a prominent farmer here in the late 19th century. (Vacaville, the most absurd place name I can think of in the vicinity--literally, "cow town" in Spanish then French--was named after a Mr. Vaca.) Arranged on a neat, orderly grid, Davis streets were named First, Second, and Third, with the cross streets the logical A, B, and C, and so on, which allow for expansion as needed, at least as far as the twenty-sixth letter.

New housing developments, however, eschew this pleasant logic and instead impose an arbitrary conglomeration of theme names, Disney-fashion. Thus, in Davis, we have the "college" neighborhood (Rutgers, Villanova, Radcliffe); the "painters" neighborhood (Picasso, Gaugin, Manet); the "bird" neighborhood (Mockingbird, Sandpiper, Pintail); and the "golf" neighborhood

(Fairway, Country Club, Greenview). You get extra points for figuring out the relative socioeconomic status of the inhabitants.

There is one Davis neighborhood, however, whose street names are on a theme I find quite tickling. Village Homes, where we stayed back in spring for a couple of weeks, has street names straight out of *Lord of the Rings*. Imagine having an address like "420 Rivendell." You'd pay a lot for it: two-bedroom houses in this little progressive utopia sell for nearly $450,000 these days.

Posted by Pica at October 16, 2003 06:22 AM

Comments

I've never understood why there is such a contrast in the States between town names which echo a very mixed cultural past and street names which get into a frighteningly basic description in numbers. Presumably this only happens in some towns. I wonder if any towns have resisted or renamed their numbered streets or vice versa?

Posted by: Coup de Vent at October 16, 2003 07:15 AM

There'a a history in those "mercantile" street names, too. Lakewood, a streetcar suburb of Cleveland, has a development known as "birdtown" because all the teens, '20s and '30s streets are named for birds. The East Side of Cleveland was into Anglophilia in those days. Farther out, a raft of college names implies that somebody admired the Ivy League. Then there was the fellow who named streets in Kent after his family, "Rellim," for "Miller," being my favorite -- '60s stuff. Now that they pluck names from focus groups, future cartographers will get a snapshot of what focus groups like -- a slice of pop culture in any decade.

Cleveland, btw, was among the first to rename a welter of downtown streets according to a numbering system. It seems soulless at first, but it has a great advantage -- whereever you are, you have an idea of how far you have to go, so it's difficult to get lost.

Posted by: Pete zicari at October 16, 2003 01:53 PM

Suburban street names are as vapid as their developments. Years ago as I was travelling in Calgary I went to find my friend's house. I had directions through the twisty suburban streets, but I forgot the street name; all I could remember was that it started with "Oak." I reasoned that I would easily find it.

Soon I came across Oakside Road and thought I struck gold when I arrived at an intersection with Oakside PLace. Following that street I found Oakside Crescent and Oakfield Drive, Oakcliffe, Oakwood and Oakmoor. It was hell. I knew I was really lost when I stumbled onto Cedar Ridge. Followed by Cedarbrae, Cedarpark, Cedarbrook and so on.

Whoever developed that street naming scheme in Calgary South, must have been smoking crack.

Posted by: Chris Corrigan at October 16, 2003 02:07 PM

There is a similar pattern to the European colonisation of both our countries - each culture leaves its own mark of ownership on the land by naming it in their own language. I wonder if these place names will exist in 100 or even 200 years time or whether they will be changed again?

Posted by: Jenny at October 16, 2003 11:20 PM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2003/10/16/californian_plac.html

Place-names

By under the fire star

This is my contribution to the Ecotone group-blogging topic, Place names:

Living in an ex-colony, I've discovered, means that place-names are highly mutable. The funniest example came during the Vietnam War, when the American Consulate in Calcutta went to sleep on Harrington Street and woke up on Ho Chi Minh Sarani - a little joke played on the Americans by the Communist government of the state of West Bengal, which continues to this day. (There's a useful page here with old and new names for Calcutta streets - I wish there were one for Chennai.)

The city where I live was called Madras for 350 years, since the British cobbled it together from a number of existing villages. (It survived long enough to give America a fabric called 'bleeding madras,' in the sixties of the last century.) In 1996, some local politicians decided that Madras was a 'colonial' name, and should be replaced with a 'real' Tamil name, Chennai. Ironically, the writer Shashi Tharoor has some scathing things to say (this is the cached version -- couldn't get the original) about the name and the decision. It seems that Chennai was originally Chennappa-pattinam, a settlement named after a local Telugu (not Tamil) chieftain. Local historian S. Muthiah thinks that, if the name had to be changed at all - he opposed it - it should have been changed to Mylapore, the largest of the existing villages brought within the city limits. Mylapore was an ancient seaport, which sent traders and culture-bearers across the sea to Southeast Asia. However, the city's residents were not asked for their opinions, and here we are in Chennai.

Names are being changed all over the country. In the state where I live, Thirunelvelli (Sacred Rice Field) was too hard for the British to pronounce, so they called it Tinnevelly. It has now reverted to its old name. Likewise Thiruchirapalli, which the British called Trichinopoly. And Udhagamandalam, which was 'anglicised' into Ootacamund -- but never mind, everyone has always called it Ooty.

Within the city, street names are changing too rapidly for most. Mount Road and its successor, Anna Salai (named for the late politician Annadurai, whose nickname was Anna, 'big brother') co-exist fairly comfortably. I wrote earlier about how I discovered that Lattice Bridge Road, or LB Road, had been renamed Dr. Muthulakshmi Road -- and that change apparently happened at least two years ago. It is still known by its old name.

At one stage, the state government decreed that caste names should be removed from the road names -- since caste is linked with social status. So Moubrays Road became C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer Road, and then 'Iyer' was dropped. A row of small streets in George Town, which was Black Town -- i.e. the 'native' town -- until the early twentieth century, had been named for local merchants, whose caste name was Chetty. Now instead of Linghi Chetty Street, Kondi Chetty

Street, Arabulu Chetty Street and so on, we have Linghi Street, Kondi Street, Arubulu Street... I have been told that somewhere in the city there was a Lady Nair Street, named for the grandmother of a friend of ours, who had been ennobled by the British. After the caste names were removed it became Lady Street.

Some names change by popular usage: as spoken in Tamil, Hamilton Bridge lost its L and sounded like Ambittan ('barber') Bridge. It was translated back into English as Barbers Bridge. Now it has been renamed for a champion of rights for Untouchables, or Dalits, as they are called today: Ambedkar Bridge.

I'm sure that the British names which still remain - Peters, Lloyds, General Patters, Chamiers, Bishops Garden, and so on - will vanish eventually. You have to be quick on your feet to keep up with all this, or things slip out from under you. When I started writing this blog I had to decide whether to refer to Madras or to Chennai, and I opted for inevitability. But when people talk to each other it's still Madras. Or sometimes Chennai. Everything exists at the same time.

by Nancy at 17.10.03

Source:
http://underthefirestar.blogspot.com/2003_10_01_underthefirestar_archive.html#106636428250840961

Place Name Blunders

By Feathers of Hope (Numenius)

An entry for the Ecotone Wiki topic on place names.

An ongoing project in many of the world's natural history museums is to digitize their collections. In this modern era, typewritten herbarium specimen labels, handwritten field notes, and labels dangling from the feet of taxidermied mice are much more useful to people if they're captured in a database, and, ideally, placed online.

One attribute that is very important to record digitally is the locality of the specimen, needed to make any sort of map of the critter's distribution. Nowadays we all run around with GPS units which means that it's easy to record the exact latitude and longitude of a specimen, but the naturalists of yore didn't have such luck. Usually they would record localities in a telegraphic description such as "Sonoma Mt. Road, 4.2 miles E Adobe Rd., Sonoma Co., Calif." It is possible, with a large supply of undergraduate laborers and a good map collection, to convert these text localities into lat-long coordinates, and many museums are now diving into this tedious process.

Alas, some of these localities are a bit more cryptic than one would prefer. Lake of Boys???

Posted by Numenius at October 18, 2003 10:25 PM

Comments

I like the Failed Motel. Used to be the Bates Motel, right?

Posted by: Doc Rock at October 19, 2003 01:21 PM

Funny, and all too typical. In some ways, I found the list refreshing (if un-useful) in this age of data-detail.

Posted by: beth at October 19, 2003 03:19 PM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2003/10/18/place_name_blund.html

Coffeeshop as Place

Bi-Weekly Topic for Nov. 1, 2003

A Sip or Two

By Laughing~Knees

Japanese Maples aglow in the autumn woods of Okutama, Japan, 2000.

This is the 9th installment of the ongoing essay series at Ecotone: Writing About Place. The current topic is Coffee Shop As Place. Please drop by and read other contributions, or feel free to submit your own essay.

Gathering around the water hole to share each other's thirst must be as old as time itself; nearly all communal creatures do it, from willows crowding the river's edge, to ants at a strip of spilled water on a baking pavement, giraffes and elephants stepping to the swamp's edge, to moose at the forest boundary and brown bears swiping for salmon. Water is life and water is the common denominator. We humans have perfected the art of carrying the water off and slaking our thirst in relative safety.

Coffee shops, tea shops, bars, pubs, taverns, beer halls, all promote the drink, and like our thirsty savannah ancestors we flock to them as if bidden to partake of the fountain of youth. There we sit bantering, flirting, watching, spilling our hearts and ideas, contemplating, laughing and crying together while the essence of our lives trickles down our throats. Sitting in a coffee shop you get the impression that in spite of the time occupying a chair, the human drama unfolds right before your eyes. You can sit for hours watching, just simply watching, and the time seems filled with meaning.

Three coffee shops in particular have made impressions in my life, the Beanery in Eugene, Oregon and Cafe Algiers in Cambridge, Massachusetts, both in the U.S., and Ben's Cafe in Takadanobaba here in Tokyo. They each harbored times in my life during which great changes were taking place both in my heart and in my outlook.

The Beanery was a college coffee shop, located right outside the University of Oregon campus. I passed by it every morning when I headed to my undergraduate English courses and later, in graduate school, on my way to architecture studio. Altogether it accompanied 9 years of my life, and as I matured from a wide-eyed eighteen year old straight off the boat from Japan to a 26 year old man who was transformed by the wild mountains and trees around the town, I also watched the Beanery change from a remnant of the hippie movement into a popular gathering place for yuppie bohemian wannabe's.

My years at the University of Oregon were some of the most memorable in my life, with hordes of friends filtering by each time I stepped out of my dormitory room or apartment. And yet they were also filled with apprehension and self-doubt as I struggled with my place and identity

coming from a childhood growing up in Japan, where I intensely disliked the humiliating arrogance of the Americans I went to school with. I was living in the very country that bred the people who forced the 75% of students in my international school who didn't come from America to study seven years of American history, one year of world history, and half a year of Japanese history, to play American football and basketball when most wanted to play soccer, to take secondary roles in the musicals that the school held every year because the main roles had to feature white characters, and even to have our non-Anglosaxon names made fun of because they happened to sound funny to the Americans. I carried all these resentments and cautions with me when I went to America and was struck quite dumb when I found out that people in America are not like the Americans I knew back in high school. It took a number of years to realize that I could actually relate to a lot of Americans and even become intimate friends. When the first white American woman actually professed that she was in love with me, I couldn't believe my ears; me, a dark-skinned, skinny half-Asian, who in the first few years in America just didn't get what Americans were laughing at so hard at the dinner tables because the jokes seemed so black and cruel, loved by a white American woman? It didn't seem real.

The hours that these friends and lovers spent with me at the coffee tables, hours and hours of talking until the secret places of my heart and mind, that I had never shared with anyone in my life before, no longer seemed so unusual or vulnerable, mingled with the stories that my friends shared with me, and the friendships became bonded. Coffee and tea ran with humanity, with messages of understanding. The caffeine brightened our recognition of one another.

Boston brought all that glittering camaraderie down. Out of work, nearly penniless, with no friends, I spent a lot of time wandering the streets of Boston and Cambridge, looking into shop windows and sitting along the banks of the Charles river, watching nighthawks dive and rowers slicing the shining waters. After rent and food, what little change I managed to save I used on books and for cups of precious coffee at some of the coffee shops around town. I especially savored my time in the dim, smoky warrens of Cafe Algiers right near the center of Harvard Square. All sorts of characters gathered here, and the nooks and crannies allowed you to hide for hours engrossed in a book. I met various people here, some of whom became valuable friends who made Boston easier to bear. One time a woman wearing a white shawl noticed that I was reading Peter Mathiessen's "The Snow Leopard" and she took a place next to me to discuss why she thought Mathiessen was a cruel, irresponsible man for leaving his son alone back in America just after his wife died. It was a long, stimulating conversation that to this day I have not forgotten.

Cafe Algiers helped nurture a certain boldness and willingness to be a bit tougher as I struggled to survive in the city. It countered the great anger that overcame me at times when I continued to fail to find work as an architect. It was one of the places that helped me realize that perhaps I wasn't really cut out to be an architect and that the desire to write, which had always pushed its way into the forefront of my ambitions since I was a boy, might better serve my bent. In the cafe I met the kind of people I enjoyed working with, spending time with, talking to. They were the people with whom I could scheme and plan for the future. As coffee splotched the napkins upon which we jotted our ideas, the limitations of the lighting of the place curbed the early rush into becoming an architect further and further into the demands of my scribblings.

Boston never really panned out, in spite of the keen friendships and sublime bicycle rides on those cold, winter nights. When a drunk roommate broke down my bedroom door one evening

and threatened to bash my face in, and the police came swarming all over the apartment threatening to bring us all in (and even my girlfriend refused to come over afterwards to offer some comfort), I felt that it was the last straw. America was just too unhinged, too accepting of unacceptable behavior. My brother had recently been hit by a car and the driver had refused to apologize (which was all my brother had asked for), and she had had enough money to hire a better lawyer than my brother could afford, so she didn't even have to pay my brother's hospital bill. My mother had been mugged, twice. My uncle lived homeless in Brooklyn. My brother was attacked by some teenagers, beaten, and his bicycle stolen from him. I bicycled along the Charles river one afternoon and watched, helpless, as three teenage boys accosted a woman on her bicycle and demanded that she hand it over to them. When she refused, they moved in to beat her, only to be stopped by two huge, football-player-like men, who warned the boys to stop. The boys sneered at them and said, "You can't touch us. We're juveniles. If you touch us you'll get time. If we go to jail, we'll be out tomorrow." One night, while working a part-time, graveyard shift job as a giftshop clerk at the Park Hotel in downtown Boston, a character, a young white man, came sidling into the store and started furtively shoplifting chocolate bars. When I asked him to put the bars back, he slipped a pistol out of his pocket and pointed it at my nose. "Ya gonna do somethin about it, punk? Why don't ya fuckin' Ayrabs go back to where ya came from, huh, mother-fucker!" He ran off, leaving me so shaken I collapsed to the floor. When my helper, a black woman two years older than me, returned from the toilet, all she said was, "Man, you sure ain't got no street smarts, kid." There wasn't even mention of calling the police. And behind all this was the Gulf war, cheered on by most of the people I saw around me, and so little thought of that on the day that America attacked Iraq, while working part time in a bookstore, hearing the announcement over the store's intercom radio, I dropped the books I was carrying for a customer and whispered in shock, "They actually attacked Iraq. They actually started the war." The customer kicked one of the books and growled, "I don't give a shit about any goddamn war! Pick that shit up and finish getting my order for me." And mumbling to the side, "Goddamn Arabs think they own the world." Words like that tend to stick, no matter how misguided you know them to be.

And so I returned to Japan, left my girlfriend behind, my friends, my hopes of being an architect. When reaching Narita Airport in Tokyo, the broken connection hurt so bad that I immediately grabbed a phone and tried to reassure myself of my girlfriend's faith in me… she had no words, no assurances that she would be waiting for me to return. And what right did I have to expect that? I broke down sobbing in the middle of the arrivals area, hundreds of strangers staring at me in puzzlement. It was perhaps the most humiliating moment in my life. And an ignoble return to the country that had imprinted itself upon my childhood and adolescence.

I settled down, got married, eventually finding a place to live in Tokyo. Architecture became a distant dream. I began to spend lots of time up in the mountains, walking, thinking, living close to what I had always imagined I understood best. I started and finished my first book. That book was born in the third great coffee shop of desire: Ben's Cafe in Takadanobaba, a student dominated area in west part of Tokyo proper. I went there nearly every day, sometimes for hours, to sit and write and write and think and write some more. Three thick notebooks were filled with hand scribbled words. After finishing the writing for the day, I would sip a cup of cocoa and converse with the New Yorker owner Ben or with the two Japanese waitresses who were both studying art. It seemed I was making a few friends here in Tokyo now.

Then in 2001, a week after a personal tragedy, while sitting and talking with the owner, the news hit over the radio. Ben didn't react at first he was so shocked, but when he recovered he turned up the volume and the distinct words, "At roughly nine o'clock this morning a plane flew into one of the towers of the World Trade Center." We sat listening, speechless, neither the bite of the words quite real, nor the bright lights and drifting cigarette smoke of the coffee shop. Ben began to babble with another American in the room, repeatedly scrambling over to the computer installed in one corner of the room, to check the news. But I didn't hear much of what he said. My only thought was of my mother, who lived in midtown Manhattan and my brother in Boston. I rushed home and fumbled with the telephone, dialing the number several times, but each time getting only a busy signal. I got my brother right away and he was okay, but I couldn't get through to my mother, and my brother hadn't been able to contact her either. For five days this lasted before I could get through. When I finally did, her voice was shaken and so full of fear that a great, great rage awoke in my heart. At all people who would either cause or influence events that would make my mother so fearful and and so overflowing with tears. To find out what was happening I stopped by Ben's Cafe every afternoon before work, and asked Ben what he had heard. The place was abuzz with ex-patriot Americans trying to make sense of what had happened.

As the buildup toward another war began and the world seemed as if it was on the verge of coming to an end, the fear and anguish of all that was happening seemed about to burst out of me. One evening, while sitting with my Japanese students out in the terrace of Ben's Cafe, one of the students, a young woman who had a difficult time comprehending all the to-do that Americans were inundating the world media with, asked me why I was taking all this so personally and with such conviction. "You're much too serious." she said, much too flippantly. I turned to her, and before all the students all the apprehension melted into grief and sorrow and helplessness. I had a duty to be their teacher and to protect my position, but just being human was all I could manage. I broke down, once again in public in front of many people I didn't know well, and it seemed as if the tears would never stop. My student, the woman, held my hand and comforted me, and sat just saying soft words, as did the other students. It was their first experience of a foreigner in pain.

And so the coffee shop protected me and healed me. The draw of the watering place and its power to remind you of life. The place where the community gathers to remember that all that matters is that life goes on and that it is beautiful enough just to watch.

In the final half hour at Ben's my student friend stood up and went into the shop. She came back with a new mug of cocoa, set it down in front of me, and smiled. "Maybe this will make you feel better," she said. Perhaps language is a barrier that is often difficult to get past, but the magic of a warm drink between the palms, a sip or two of elixir, and no words need be spoken; we can understand each other perfectly well.

Posted by butuki at 04:02 AM in Nature and Place | Permalink | Comments (4) **Comments**

Coffee shops have always been dear to me, it is one of the things I miss most where I live now. Search as I may, I have not found a comfortable coffee shop here in the West Nowhere. When I lived out in Chiba, I would spend a few nights a week in the local coffee shop. I did not have a proper phone in my apartments, so in order to send and receive email I had to use a local payphone. Once I downloaded my messages, I would move on to the coffee shop to read and reply while sipping on a nice warm bottomless cup of coffee. I would spend hours there a few

times a week, and I think that I did some of my best writing there. Some days I would sit with a notebook instead of the computer, and jot notes, or sketch the other patrons. I really do miss those coffee shop days. It was just so simple, sitting there seemed to put everything in perspective, the stress melted away while I sipped the warm coffee and put my life into words…

Posted by Steve at November 1, 2003 09:28 AM

This is a moving story, and parts here make me quite uncomfortable about being an American. I have to remind myself I can't take responsibility for 220 million people, who are just people, after all; I need to seek out the small communities, in person and online, where I can learn and, like you, find comfort. Good luck.

Posted by P at November 2, 2003 08:08 AM

I am honestly not trying to attack Americans here. It is just that most of the biggest events in my life occurred because of and around Americans, both good and bad. I simply very rarely experience such a tumultuous run of events and attitudes in the other places I've lived. I've never felt in danger for my life here in Japan or anywhere in Europe. Police have never spread-eagled me against a police car here nor has anyone ever threatened me with a gun anywhere else (both of which occurred in the Sates).

As to the good things… most of my close friends are in the States. My philosophy about nature and social justice originated in the States, from getting to know people who practiced this way of living. In its best form, American education is bold, inquisitive, and ground breaking… simply the best. And when Americans put the best of their hearts and minds into doing some good for the world, they really can have hearts of gold.

I myself am culturally and ethnically and family-wise in great part an American, and am trying here to speak with a different voice from the usual one, to make it clear that when someone speaks of and about America, it is not always the expected opinions and presumptions. I want to ask and look at hard questions that need to be answered and faced. This can only be done if one doesn't shrink from looking at unpleasant and often ugly truths. It can only be done if individuals are willing to accept responsibility for their participation in the whole community.

It is not enough to always deny that an individual is not responsible for the entire population. If the hard questions are not solved by individuals, then who will start to ask them and try to do something about them? Who but those who, as individuals, ask the dissenting questions?

So often people commenting on my comments about America use the excuse, "But it wasn't ME who caused the American government to attack Iraq!" Yes, of course not. But if, as Americans adore trumpeting all the time, you actually live in a so-called democracy, doesn't it behoove each and every indivual to BEHAVE as if they are responsible? Americans ELECTED the damn president… they sure as hell can UNELECT him!

Posted by butuki at November 3, 2003 03:26 AM

This is wonderful, deeply personal writing, Butuki, thank you.

Posted by beth at November 12, 2003 09:50 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20031125045917/http://www.butuki.com/archives/2003_11.html

Coffee/house

By P.

My daughter and I are killing time at a secondhand table in the sunny storefront window of Mickey's Coffee Bar in Cleveland Heights. We have walked all the way up from home, via the library -- a hike for even a sturdy 5-year-old -- and juice and coffee, or juice and carrot cake and coffee, are an important part of the program

Mickey's is, or was, an independent coffeehouse. It is now the Phoenix, really, and one of several, but I think of it as Mickey's, in honor of the first owner, who built the long, ornate, oaken bar and hung rare posters for obscure movies along the walls.

I spent quite a bit of time in Mickey's before my daughter was born, and I remember some of those posters clearly, even though I am not a movie fan: "THE MEXICAN SPITFIRE SEES A GHOST" and "THE KID FROM CLEVELAND," and a dozen more. Perhaps they helped to finance the change of ownership, for now the posters have to do with French countryside, as accessed via the "chemins de fer d'etat du sud."

Mickey's also boasted a logo I loved for its muscular obscurity, wherein a robust man with a bushy mustache toasted the dawn with a dump truck and an industrial skyline beyond him. He wore a fez and something like a Nehru jacket. I guess his old-movie Turkish look said something about "coffee" and the industry beyond him might have suggested the coffee's strength. Deconstructing coffehouse symbols is most likely not a wise use of time.

Nowadays, the purple phoenix on the front window behind my daughter is a reference to the current owner having been involved with Cleveland's first coffehouse chain, Arabica, before it was a chain, and to his coffee roastery, which used to perfume the funky Coventry neighborhood. Then the roaster caught fire and a couple of buildings burned.

The roastery moved downtown, and since the fire, Coventry has stopped being funky, to the point of driving away hacky-sack players outside the former Arabica, which has closed. The funky action is moving to Lee Road, where Mickeys/the Phoenix is. Arabica is moving in. Starbucks, of course, has already arrived.

My daughter is uninterested in French travel posters. But she is not yet old enough to be bored by her parents, and demands a story. We have passed the time with several, in fact, some true and some made-up. She wants to hear how the vacuum cleaner was invented (God knows why), and I begin to tell her an anecdote I read once, but she has already begun to crawl under the table, with her feet in the air, and I know it's time to go.

She and I have been regulars for a couple of years. I haven't forgotten the first visit: The young woman at the counter, who had short black hair, a strikingly fair complexion, a whole carrillon of rings in her ears, and a stud through her eyebrow that I tried hard not to stare at. She thought the long-haired moppet peering gravely into the pastry case was utterly cute, but let me know with a withering look that I was superfluous, and perhaps unclean, even if I was the one with the wallet. Happily, I never saw her again.

After the incident with the chocolate milk, I think that is just as well. Later, the Phoenix's introduction of carrot cake sealed the relationship. Biscotti you can gnaw the icing from are all right, but carrot cake is the real deal where my daughter is concerned, and now every trip to the library comes with a plea to go to the coffeehouse.

I wish we had time to go more often. I am sure my wife does, too. I like to think Mickey's helps to anchor my daughter in space, as one of the landmarks she might forget but won't lose, like the walk up from home, past the hide-and-jump-out trees and her "old school" -- a preschool in a picturesque church -- along scary, busy Lee Road; to the library, where the computers have cool games; and to the climactic snack at Mickey's. I suppose it anchors me, too.

As we walk out, a woman remarks that she enjoyed eavesdropping on us. We were talking like adult friends, she said. I can hardly be troubled about about the eavesdropping, for when I'm alone in Mickey's, I do it, too.

Mildly pleased, I lead my daughter out, thinking to myself that what attaches me to places often isn't the place but the community in it.

Source: http://my.core.com/%7Epzicari/text/Coffee.html

In The Company of Coffee

By Notes from An Eclectic Mind

The following is my contribution to the Ecotone topic for November 1, Coffee Shop as Place.

Toward the end of the sprawling Texas epic *Giant* Rock Hudson takes his movie family including his Hispanic daughter-in-law and grandchildren into Sarges diner. The proprietor, an Ernest Borgnine look-alike with a no service policy toward non-whites, asks them all to leave and when Hudson refuses, Sarge kicks the crap out of him. Of course its a victory in defeat scene because until that moment Hudson had some pretty bigoted ideas toward those members of his family as well. But its always the diner that gets me, the quintessential small town Texas diner with the red booths, swivel stools at the counter, and a world-weary waitress. Ive walked into a thousand of those places and always theres the guy in dirty work clothes who takes a seat and says, Mabel, gimme a cup of black coffee.

Where I grew up coffee houses were perceived to be seamy pits playing host to throngs of bongo pounding beatniks stoned on mary-jew-juana cigarettes. Like a scene from the cautionary classic Reefer Madness, parents warned their college bound children to stay away from places like that. Since my favorite coffee quotation, a Turkish proverb, contends that, Coffee should be black as hell, strong as death, and as sweet as love, perhaps the stuff would give timorous parents pause.

The local caf in the Little Town keeps a pot of Joe hot at all times and throughout the long slow afternoons locals wander in to have a solitary cup or to join various klatsches. Those who dont partake of the black stuff order the house wine of the South, ice tea, so that the general air of having a place to take a load off and exchange some lies prevails for all. Ive never seen anyone at the back booth with a book and the once or twice I tried it, I couldnt read for the waitress asking me if anything was wrong. Staring into space over your cup is okay; reading is suspect, lonely person in public behavior.

Even when I went to college and became a dedicated coffee drinker expressly to make friends with a much-admired professor, I had not experienced the atmospheric side of the addiction. I started consuming gallons of the beverage to spend time with Dr. R. and wound up drinking it, through nine years of classes for a bachelors and masters, just to stay awake and working.

After I came to the Big City and hit a romantic pitfall, I began to frequent the coffee bar in a bookstore near my apartment. I was lonely and miserable and I could take my laptop, books, and journal there and feel as if I were with people. Good coffee houses are places where you can be both known and unknown. The bar tenders make your drink appropriately and leave you alone to engage in a kind of removed public cordiality set at a distance from the real commitment of an attachment. They know your name and your sweetener of choice but none of the sour details of your reality.

But bar tenders also have an ability to know when youre reaching your limit, when youre not drinking to be cordial, but out of a quiet desperation. Yes, you can drink coffee the same way you can drink booze, to excess, until your hands shake when you dont get it and your eyes retreat into black circles in your head. I remember well the afternoon when the coffee bar sat deserted and I knocked back cup after cup, writing obsessively in my journal until a hand entered my field of vision, plucked the pen away, and grasped my fingers. I looked up into the face of a stranger with whom I traded jokes every day and she said, Tell me whats wrong. My eyes filled with tears and I said, My Dad died.

When I moved to my condo I began to hang out at the Starbucks around the corner. It hadnt been open a week when I first went in, so Im a part of the history of that store, one of the old-time regulars who sigh when we have to break in a new barista and glare at the walk-ins when they behave rudely toward our kids. Before R.s stroke I used to spend long afternoons at my favorite table availing myself of the wireless Internet access to do my work in public rather than turn into one of those Gollum-esque geeks who seldom sees the light of day and clings to her laptop lisping, My precious. Nasty little humanses. Dont touch the precious.

The store manager used to put Billie Holliday CDs on just for me and wouldnt let me have more than four shots of espresso a day. I could stretch them out over any kind of drinks I wanted, but after four I had to switch to decaf. The best afternoons were during rainstorms or cold fronts when I could sit there dry and warm with a steaming cup in my hand and watch sheets of rain drench the parking lot. Of all the changes that have come into my life since I became a full-time caregiver, I miss those coffee house afternoons most of all.

Coffee and my personal evolution seem to run on a parallel course. When I look back to the Little Town diner of my youth I see an adolescent Rana who carried a particular set of angsty baggage. The girl at college and in graduate school toted different luggage, funkier than the psychological Samsonites of her youth but no less heavy. Only the woman who built web pages, listened to the blues, and had a limit had begun to travel a bit lighter. I evolved from bitter cups of pure acrid blackness to smooth, tall glasses of latte laced with vanilla, meant to be slowly consumed in a winding down of the system rather than knocked back like rot gut to jump start the nerves into action.

Now I am a kind of elder statesman of the coffee house, the funny, good-natured regular who shows up every day, tips well, and learns the baristas names. Ive never seen a single bongo drum in any coffee house Ive frequented though Ill take the Fifth on the availability of the mary-jew-

juana. This morning when I popped over to the website for the regional newspaper, the one that tells me if anyone has expired in the Little Town, the front page headline declared, Starbucks opening perks up coffee lovers. In the accompanying photo of a young woman looking down at her book the caption read, E.C. (left) spends Friday morning writing and reading at Starbucks, located at the intersection of S. Way and Avenue N. You know, I just love the coffeehouse feel, C. said. Yes, we do know.

Posted by Rana at November 1, 2003 11:04 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20031206062546/http://www.ranablog.com/archives/000527.php

The Three O'Clock Cookie Run

By Feathers of Hope (Numenius)

A note for the Ecotone Wiki topic on Coffee Shop As Place

Not far from the building where I work is the main student center on campus, housing the bookstore and the student-run eatery (supposedly the largest restaurant in Northern California). I always get my lunch from there -- the food is cheap and wholesome. Students being students, their newfound coffee habit well nourished by too many all-nighters, naturally there is a place to pick up a mocha during a five-minute run between classes. There is no place to sit down in this little coffeeshop, and people who want to settle into their coffees often sit on the tables and chairs just outside the MemU. Because no one lingers, this coffeeshop doesn't seem to have much of a sense of place, though I'm sure it does to the student workers there.

Myself, I'm not a coffee drinker, but the coffeeshop is my destination for the usual mid-afternoon baked good run. Most often a cookie, but if I'm lucky they have blueberry muffins. Bakeries as place -- now there's a topic.

Posted by Numenius at November 1, 2003 09:35 PM

Comments

I usually don't drink coffee now, either. Usually it's cocoa or chai now. But coffee shops are still wonderful places to spend time in. Too bad there are almost no teahouses in the States, though. That's another great place to go.

Posted by: Miguel at November 2, 2003 06:08 AM Source:
http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2003/11/01/the_three_oclock.html

Coffeeshops

By Conscientious

[This entry is also a contribution to the Ecotone Wikipedia - "Coffee Shop as Place"]

For a while now, a recurring theme of my life has been to realize all the things I miss about Germany, things that I didn't notice while I was living there or, more accurately, discomfortably living there.

Germany is not famous for its coffeeshops. France might be, or Italy, or Austria, especially Vienna. Yet I miss German coffeeshops a lot. OK, I have a problem here already. Let me call them cafés to get a little bit closer to what they are or, in this case, what they're not. Unlike most of the coffeeshops in the US, their prime purpose is not to sell something. They're more like restaurants. Of course, you pay for the coffee but most of them don't sell coffee in packages. And they don't sell crappy easy listening CDs or other overpriced nonsense. If you want to buy coffee you'd go to a shop that sells coffee.

If, however, you want to go to a public place and drink a coffee while chatting with friends, reading a book or doing nothing you go to a café. You don't even necessarily go there for the coffee, you go for the atmosphere. By atmosphere I mean what's so sorely lacking when you go into pretty much any coffeeshop here. There just isn't any. Big chains are driving smaller places out of business and everything looks pretty much the same. The only chance to find anything decent is where there are lots of students. But even then, it's just not the same.

In the US, not too many people seem to like the idea of doing nothing. It's almost like you always have to do something here and, extrapolated from that, your work has a completely different meaning. It's something many people use to define themselves. You simply don't find that to this extent in Germany. People there are quite happy with doing nothing. Or, to be more precise, happy with going to a café and looking as if they were doing nothing whereas, in fact, they are doing something, namely having a good time. Thing is you can have a good time doing

nothing other than sitting in a café, drinking coffee and reading, say. I don't think you'd find too many cafés in Germany where there are tons of people with laptops. I mean a café is not some sort of public library that serves coffee.

People also are allowed to smoke in cafés in Germany. I don't smoke myself but I will admit that usually, cafés in which people smoke have more atmosphere than cafés where people aren't allowed to smoke. Not that there are that many of the latter anyway. That's another one of those differences, btw. People here are obsessed about how bad smoking is while, at the same time, eating food that basically has no nutritional value. Yes, you do get cancer from smoking. But you also ruin your health quite effectively by eating no vegetables, say, and eating meat from animals that are treated with hormones and antibiotics. Plus, you don't get cancer from going to a café every once in a while. Actually, you might. But you also might get cancer from all the other stuff that gets into your food and that is definitely not designed for human consumption. Did anybody say genetically modified food?

Anyway, there's also this thing about service. When you go to a café in Germany it might happen that you'll have a hard time hailing down a waiter. They just won't come and, God forbid, they're not say anything like "Hello, my name is Günther and I'm your waiter today. How may I help you?" They also don't bring you your check when you've just started drinking your coffee. There isn't anything that can destroy a nice atmosphere - provided there is any - more effectively than that check on the table. "Whenever you're ready" - well, let me decide when I'm ready. I don't even want to see that check before I leave because, you know, usually I think about paying when I'm ready to leave and not a long time beforehand. A café is no fast-food joint. Things take time. That's the idea.

And if the café is crowded that's even better. You don't make people leave because other people might be waiting or coming in. You don't put their tab on the table. Usually, in Germany, people don't wait for a table to clear up anyway. If Germans hate anything it's waiting. If the café is too crowded you go elseplace. And café owners know that. Having a crowded café is a good thing. If people can't find a table that's even better. A It's-hard-to find-a-table-there café is a good café. People come back, people stay.

It's actually one of the things I really dislike, in principle: A crowded smoky place filled with people. If it's a café, though, that's it. I'll sit down and stay. I miss that tremendeously, living in the US.

Posted by Joerg Colberg at November 2, 2003 05:33 PM

Comments

Suprised you didn't mention how hard it is to get a "latte to go" in Germany. I love that. You actually have to take the time to sit down and drink your coffee, with or without friends. There is no getting coffee to go. No drinking coffee while you are walking around in the bookstore or in the grocrery store. In Germany you drink it the civilized way - in a proper cup, with friends. PS. Have loved your site for ever. Thank you.

Posted by: Mary Thull on November 2, 2003 10:42 PM

There's no "to go" usually. Why to go? There always is enough time to drink a coffee. If you don't have the time to drink your coffee you don't deserve one, right? ;-)

I think that's one of those very big cultural differences between continental Europe and the US: In Europe, eating food is part of your life and not some inconvenience that takes up the valuable time you rather spend doing work (or sitting in traffic).

In Germany, work in an inconvenience and to this date, people who define themselves mainly through their work are being looked at as if they had some sort of psychological problem. So if people say the problem with Germany is that people put in so few hours they're missing all those aspects besides "the economy" that mean a lot. At least that's how Germans view life.

PS: Thanks for stopping by! I'm glad you enjoy the site.

Posted by: Joerg on November 3, 2003 11:15 AM

Hello,

I have been living out of Germany for almost nine years now (London and currently Tokyo). I have to say that often when people ask me "what is this-and-that like in Germany" I often don't know. I will say "well, back in the early 90s it was such-and-such, but don't just take my word for it." Especially in Japan, that surprises people. One's nationality doesn't give you authority on cultural matters and all that.

Anyway, your post gave me a little glimpse how things are like back home. It now seems exotic to me too. I think I got a little to anglosized over time, for lack of a word. Oh, and UK is certainly not included in your definition of Europe. People there see eating as a necessity which you should not spend much time and especially money on. In Japan, this is fortunately rather different, and people love to meet up for long conversations, even if it is in a fast food joint. In fact many students study in so-called family restaurants.

Thanks for the post & all the best.

Dirk

Posted by: Dirk on November 3, 2003 08:54 PM

It's interesting how we (USA and Europe) seem to be so different on our attitudes about work.

Posted by: bill on November 5, 2003 08:57 AM Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20031230213738/http://www.jmcolberg.com/weblog/archives/000650.html

coffee shop

By prairie point

It’s possible I am the last man in America never to have set foot in a Starbucks. It’s certainly not for want of availability since, according to their website, they have 22 stores within five miles of my home, two within walking distance. I would be tempted to say that it’s my disdain for chain stores, were it not for the fact that I actually may have never been in any kind of establishment that could properly be called a coffee shop.

Apparently they do not fill any need that I have recognized yet. I should point out here that I do not even drink coffee regularly any more. Some years ago I gave up Bustelo and switched to Earl Grey as the delivery system for my morning fix of hot caffeine. Though I still order coffee when I take breakfast away from home, as I often do on Saturday mornings or when traveling.

From what others have written though it is my impression that coffee shops are not so much about imbibing hot java but are apparently some kind of place to hang out in public either alone or with others. In my travels on the backroads of Texas I have found that most small towns have a café or a diner where locals gather during the day to take a break and linger over a cup of coffee or two. If you live there it's usually a good spot to catch up on the latest gossip or if you are just passing through it is a good spot to get a feel for the place. My best guess is that the coffee shop is kind of a big-city version of this for people who either don't have jobs or else have jobs that don't confine them to an office.

It's been years since I was able to spend time like that doing nothing. Back in my college days I would often head over to the student center to get coffee in the evenings, partly to keep from falling asleep in the library but mainly in the hope of finding any kind of diversion that would prevent me from studying. That is probably the closest that I have come to experiencing what a coffee shop is like.

The coffee at the student center tasted like weak dishwater. After college I spent a winter in Chicago and that is where I really learned to experience coffee. I spent time there with a group of students from the Art Institute, and one of them knew how to brew coffee in an hourglass-shaped contraption. It screwed apart into three sections. She would pack the coffee into the middle section and put water in the bottom and then set it on the stove. Somehow the water would get sucked up into the top section when it was done. That was the best coffee I've ever had. It was strong and you needed it to fortify yourself before heading for the El in the bitter cold.

Michael Pollan wrote in an article recently that the modern coffee break actually started early in the last century as a "booze break." Only during prohibition did it turn into a break for coffee. I find that interesting because the other thing I keep thinking about is how much what I hear about coffee shops reminds me of a bar.

Read what others have to say about Coffee Houses at Ecotone.

Posted by Bill Hopkins on November 1, 2003 04:01 PM

Comments

Well here in the Seattle area, it is considered an abomination if you don't drink coffee. There are "starbucks" everywhere, and every othere kind of coffee company too. Espresso stands on every corner, drive thrus every where. It is really hard to NOT drink it.

I went from weak dishwater, to french roast and I have to have it before I can function.

I do LOVE a good Earl grey Cuppa though!! especially when I'm tired achey and cold.

Posted by: Mary Lou at November 3, 2003 11:42 AM

I've been in a Barnes and Noble cafe where they ~serve~ Starbuck's coffee, but they tell me that it's not really a Starbuck's.

Posted by: Joel at November 3, 2003 03:36 PM

You're describing a "machinetto," -- at least that's what my wife's mother called it. We had one for years, till one day it refused to unscrew for a new charge of water and espresso. I liked the thing not only for the strong coffee it made but for its cleverness: when the water in the bottom comes to a boil, steam pressure forces almost all of it up through the coffee grounds and out, very quickly, as coffee. And there was the element of dangerous old-world technology to it. Theoretically, if you somehow clogged the outlet, you could make it blow up. I never let that bother me. But as I became a volume coffee-drinker, I realized the machinetto's down side was that it wasn't very big.

You can still buy them here and there.

Posted by: P. at November 4, 2003 06:52 PM

I didn't know about the origins of the coffee break being a break for booze.... You are right, there is quite a bit of that expectation of better times associated with booze that is there in a coffee bar too.

Posted by: maria at November 5, 2003 09:40 AM

i'm indifferent towards coffee -- i'll drink it if it's put in front of me but i don't go out of my way for it. my husband, on the other hand, can't function without his morning "fix".

as far as i'm concerned the best thing about starbucks is free coffee grounds for my compost pile! i'll buy a cup of something in return for bags of grounds :-)

Posted by: erica at November 8, 2003 02:54 PM

Well, Bill... I'm with you on the small island of folks who have never set foot in a starbucks. AND, while agree that there is a certain something about those small town cafes (I live in Lincoln Nebraska, so know plenty of 'em), we here in Lincoln are blessed with several INDEPENDENTLY OWNED Coffee shops who ROAST their own coffees-- YUM! The only starbucks that I know even exists in Lincoln is at the airport! Yeah, I might live in a bland, modest midwest city... but at least I don't have to suffocate in mass-produced product. (Okay, I'll get off my high horse now!) :)

Posted by: jen at November 11, 2003 01:33 PM

Coffee Houses

By Feathers of Hope (Pica)

Another joint Ecotone entry; this one is on Coffee House as Place.

I remember the first time I entered a Starbucks. It was on Massachusetts Avenue in Cambridge, Mass., and what seemed so different about it was how people seemed encouraged to linger: to buy only one overpriced cup of designer coffee but then to sit there all morning. It was almost

opposite Harvard Law School and I suspect most of its clientele were law students, choosing a study environment that would never, ever work for me. But I liked it that they weren't chased out. I ordered tea.

Since those days, Starbucks has covered the globe in much the same way MacDonald's has, and its cookie-cutter designs render it identical in Cambridge or Davis or London. I avoid it, especially since I stopped drinking coffee many years ago. Yet there are several coffee shops here in Davis: Common Grounds, Mishka's, Espresso Roma, Cafe Roma, Chamonix--that offer a similar "we won't chase you out of here even though you've only spent $2.65" message. Many of them offer free wireless internet as well (unlike Starbucks, where you have to pay). Cafe Roma features poetry slams and concerts; Common Grounds has book readings and political gatherings.

For a drink that seems to load people up with an energy that leads to the shakes, it's a civilized antidote, this relaxed notion of how long you can stay. I like it. I can't give any kind of critique of the quality of the coffee, but each of these havens has its own defining sense of place. Appealing to neo-hippies, Euro-wannabes, or aging grungers, the coffee houses become an extension of the people who sit in them for hours. Even when they're almost empty, it's easy to tell if you'd fit in or not.

Posted by Pica at November 2, 2003 08:52 PM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2003/11/02/coffee_houses.html

Coffee shop as place

By frizzyLogic (qB)

(For Ecotone)

Long ago and far away I was going to write a book about coffee. Swimming in the wake of Cod: A Biography of the Fish that Changed the World, my coffee progeny was to join the gigantic spawning of "take an object and do a timeline" small volumes of populist history.

There are a number of reasons why my contribution to the remaindered piles never materialised. One was that I'd never written anything longer than a letter of complaint to the local bus garage (although it was quite lengthy, and the prose style racy); another was my being seven months pregnant when the thought occurred to me; the clincher was the fact that someone else had already done it. Or at least most of it.

In the few weeks between the birth of the idea and the birth of the baby I had managed to do a little research on coffee. It's a fascinating subject but is probably too huge to cram into one cod-like book. The aspect most interesting to me was the history of coffee shops. I had known vaguely that they'd been rather important in the past, but even a brief potted history hints at the excitement:

...during the 17th and 18th centuries, there were more coffee shops in London than there are today. Coffee shops were nothing like the trendy shops that we have today. A true coffeehouse was crowded, smelly, noisy, feisty, smoky, celebrated and condemned. On the street in London

you located the nearby coffeehouse by sniffing the air for roasting beans, or by looking for a wooden sign shaped to resemble a Turkish coffee pot.

It was the coffeehouses of England that started the custom of tipping waiters and waitresses. People who wanted good service and better seating would put some money in a tin labelled "To Insure Prompt Service" - hence "TIPS".

Coffee shops then were influential places, used extensively by artists, intellectuals, merchants, bankers and a forum for political activities and developments. When they became popular in England, the coffee houses were dubbed "penny universities". It was said that in a coffee house a man could "pick up more useful knowledge than by applying himself to his books for a whole month". A penny was the price of a coffee....

In 1674 The Women's Petition Against Coffee was set up in London. Women complained that men were never to be found at home during times of domestic crises, since they were always enjoying themselves in the coffee houses. They circulated a petition protesting "the grand inconveniences accruing to their sex from the excessive use of the drying and enfeebling liquor". A year later, King Charles II tries to supress the coffee houses because they were regarded as hotbeds of revolution but his proclamation is revoked after a huge public outcry and the ban lasts just 11 days.

Some of the coffee houses in London became very well known with different groups of workers and soon became the kingpins around which the capital's social, political and commercial life revolved. Jonathan's Coffee House in Change Alley was where stockbrokers usually met - it eventually became the London Stock Exchange. Likewise, ship owners and marine insurance brokers visited Edward Lloyd's Coffee House in Lombard Street - it too moved on and up in the world and became the centre of world insurance and the headquarters of Lloyds of London.

And that's just London. Thinking about it, I realised that, with apologies to Mr Prufrock, I could measure out my life with coffee shops.

Prior to my teens coffee was copious but instant and drunk at home. Then I went out into the world and swallowed the bitterness of pride. I was in Italy, visiting relations. We went out shopping in the small provincial town where they lived. "Let's have a coffee" my cousin said, and we staggered with our bags of meat and vegetables to her favourite espresso bar. "Do you drink coffee like this in England?" she inquired as I told her I would like a double espresso, "it's very, very strong... would you prefer a cappuccino?" "No, really, I *love* strong coffee" I said, with determination. I am stronger than strong coffee. I will not admit to doubt. I can do it. I can look after myself. I know best.

When it came it was small, viscous, black and of a strength and bitterness I cannot even begin to describe. I had to drink it, of course. My tongue and the interior of my mouth shrivelled and collapsed in on themselves. Everything disappeared - the tall, small-topped round table at which we stood, the heavy bags of shopping between our feet, the loud chattering of the packed lunchtime crowd. The world was reduced to the black and white of the coffee and the cup and my implacability. When I had finished it my cousin called for a glass of water and watched silently as I re-hydrated my vocal chords.

Roll on a few years. There have been coffee shops along the way - the one in Venice, Florian or Quadri, I can't remember which, where my brother and I sneaked away from our parents and

learnt all we were going to know of each other's nearing adult selves before he died; in London the ersatz frills in the cafe where the waitresses wore lace-trimmed aprons and mob-caps and my mother tricked me into meeting her lover.

The next coffee shop was in an African city. It was run by Ethiopians and the customers were entirely ex-patriots. The prices were far too high for residents to afford. There were chairs and tables inside, and a few outside on a little verandah with an elevated view of an enormous car park. I had never trusted the hot chocolate since a child I had taken there for a treat found the corpse of a cockroach the size of squash ball in the bottom of his mug. The coffee was made in an imported gaggia machine (the Ethiopians had good Italian connections) and I figured any unwanted Blattodean would be blasted into smithereens and sterilised by the steam.

I went often to this coffee shop, almost always alone. I was also intensely lonely. On the night in question I sat on the verandah watching the cars coming and going while the meagre froth collapsed on my cappuccino. I had just discovered that my highly part-time lover was seeing not one, but three other people. Which went some way to explain the infrequency with which we saw each other, and a long way to explain my state of mind that evening. I wasn't crying. I had forced myself into a public place in order not to cry. But I was bereft.

The only other customer that night was also sitting on the verandah. I knew him, vaguely. I knew he was a playwright and actor, but not really very notable at either. I had heard the usual incestuous-community-driven tittle-tattle about divorce and alcoholism, now overcome, but you never know do you. I sat, ignoring him and ignoring my coffee, facing the car park, letting the random and meaningless movements of the cars pass across my field of vision. Eventually he cleared his throat and leaned across the small gap between our tables. "Excuse me, I know it's none of my business, and do forgive me, but you look so very very sad, you look as though you have just had your heart broken. And I wanted to say that although the pain is terrible, it does go away, eventually."

I stared at this man in disbelief. This person who had had the temerity to think they might know me or understand me in some way. To wave at the battlements and endanger the fortifications. "I'm sorry, I have no idea what you're talking about. I have to go now."

More years, more coffee shops. The one where, having just bought my first mobile phone and programmed it to play "Mary had a little lamb", I listened in disbelief as a mobile rang with exactly the same tune. Astonishing. But why didn't the owner answer it? the noise was terrible, the tune unbearable, and it just went on and on. Only when every other customer there was staring at me did I realise the phone ringing was mine.

And so to the coffee shop opposite work a few months ago. I had to meet my boss to discuss returning after many months off sick. I wasn't choosing to go back to work, but my money was about to disappear. It was summer but I was wearing an enormous thick jumper because I was so cold. He bought me a double espresso and a glass of water. I held on to the glass as a way of holding things together until I noticed the trembling of my hand was setting up concentric rings on the surface.

He was kind, very kind. "How would you like to do this?" he asked. "I don't know," I replied. "I just know I can't do it by myself."

Posted by qB at November 3, 2003 05:15 PM

Comments

A wonderful post. The more I read about what you've been through, the more I realize how gutsy you are. May your coffee always be just the way you like it.

(I trust you won't take it amiss if I point out that the "tips" etymology is total nonsense? The origin of "tip" in the sense 'gratuity' is not clear, but it's certainly not an acronym.)

Posted by: language hat at November 4, 2003 06:06 PM

I don't take the "tips" tip amiss at all, I relish it! I just hope the rest of the information isn't similarly baseless, but I do know the women's demo is true.

Posted by: qB at November 4, 2003 06:28 PM

Ooh yes, I liked this post. And I don't even drink coffee!

Posted by: Anne at November 5, 2003 02:25 AM

Source: http://www.frizzylogic.org/archives/000344.html

double espresso

By alembic

This post is my response to ecotone's biweekly topic: coffee shop as place.

Family legend has it that my great-grandmother used to run a coffee house in Budapest. As the story goes, she was a formidable woman who did not take to fools kindly. Perhaps it was all that caffeine that made her run the lives of her four daughters like a business, while she babied her coffee house. As for my great-grandfather, he seems to have disappeared from everyones memory, faded into oblivion, much like a coffee stain thats been ground into the patterns of dirt in a well-trodden floor.

I am probably embellishing here, for I have little to go on, but I tell you, there is something of that womans love for the dark brew in my own blood. I remember my first taste of coffee. I must have hounded my parents -- at least that is how I would like to remember it -- until they relented, threw their hands up in the air, and with a resigned sigh, a long Hungarian ach, they dipped a sparkling white sugar cube into the black pool of the fine Rosenthal china cup, the one adorned with a garland of blue cornflowers -- which I still have, safely packed away in depths of some cupboard or other.

Unlike the speaker of the Poem of Darkness, quoted by qB in her post on Hungarian pessimism, I found in my sugar cube soaked in black coffee not the bitter brew of the cruelty of time, but the promise of better times to come -- a sweet nectar that could, eventually, draw the bees of possibility to me.

That first taste of coffee, like my great-grandmothers mythical coffee house, is a place in memory now. In that place of memory, where so little changes, the coffee is always the perfect temperature and bitterness is always tempered by the sugar of promise.

Nowadays, I sweeten my occasional coffee shop coffee with whatever sugar substitute happens to be on hand at my local branch of Peets, the Bay Areas answer to Starbucks. At this particular Peets in the Greenbrae (as in all other branches, I imagine), commuters line up in the early morning hours to get their bucket-sized lattes to last for the road into the city. Later, once the sun is up, the stay-at-home moms appear, dressed in their workout gear. I dont go much to Peets when this crowd is there. Though seeing them and hearing their laughter erupt in small waves does make my heart race a bit faster, like a jolt of caffeine, there are not enough sugar substitutes to take away the bitter aftertaste of my memories of high school -- but thats another subject.

I tend to frequent my neighborhood Peets mid-afternoon, when I sometimes end a small trek through the hills there or, after a long day of work, I need a shot of caffeine that can only be delivered by a double espresso. At these times, I am always greeted if not by the voice, at least by the face of someone familiar, a regular or two who has been as much a permanent fixture of this Peets as Peets has been in the shopping center.

- the man in his seventies, most likely, wearing biker shorts and an inordinate number of athletic gadgets to support his knees or ankles, as if these were badges, a proof of bravery in some war or other
- the old, tiny couple, like dolls with heads made out of dried apples, he silent, as if trapped in that senseless world of dementia, and she, smiling like a twelve year old and jabbering away at any and all about the state of her health ... so that by the time you spend two minutes with her, you wonder which one of them is the one out of touch
- the woman, who was born in Romania in some distant, almost mythical time, and is now old and as thin as a rake, but she is always dressed to the nines in some fantastic preppy style, in swaths of plaid or camel hair, her porcelain white skin stretched over her high cheek bones, the rest pleated near the jaw, giving away her age, and her head framed by a halo of fine hair one imagines the property of angels

When the weather is good, which is pretty much most of the time in our part of California, I take my brew outside and sit at one of the bolted down metal tables in the company of pigeons and starlings that act like true Maranites, strutting about between the chairs and up on the tables, squawking and demanding their share of crumbs from the muffins, cookies, and pastries, as if they were entitled to it.

Posted by maria at November 04, 2003 06:06 PM

Comments

i feel like this post gave a very clear picture of Peet's. although i have never looked inside the local Starbuck's, this is very close to what i imagined it to be like.

Posted by: bill on November 5, 2003 06:21 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040128135648/http://www.ashladle.org/archives/000238.html

One more cup of coffee for the road

By Guild of Ghostwriters

I think the only cause of disappointment is expectation but it doesn't stop me expecting. I had hoped rather than expected that yesterday's little private screening would trigger something - I'm not sure what. 'Closure' seems such a naff and inappropriate word right now. In practical terms I suppose I had deluded myself that once the id parade was out of the way I would burst forth with NaNoWriMo activity but I haven't. My NaNo remains stuck on less than 1,500 words of shameless padding. And it can stay there for all the enthusiasm I can muster right now. I don't feel blocked though - I keep writing blogs for one thing. I just don't feel bursting with 48,600 plotless words. I do feel like writing about Coffee Shops - I'm not sure if I qualify as a blog about place but I have spent a lot of my waking adult life in coffee shops.

I can't remember coffee or coffee shops meaning much to me before 1991 - during that Summer I toured Europe and experienced my first proper espresso in Udine. When I got back I noticed Costa Coffee in Nottingham's Victoria Centre and that became my first coffee haunt. I'd sit there alone with a notebook, an espresso and some kind of cake with a soft, dark chocolate heart - or sometimes with Number 66, a civil service colleague (we taxed the dead rich - or the rich dead if you prefer) and friend. It immediately established the main functions of a coffee shop in my life:

1) a place to roll and smoke cigarettes
2) a place for people watching
3) a place for work/job avoidance (and later avoidance generally)

All I remember about Costa now is that it introduced me to the Gaggia - they used one and sold others and I've coveted one ever since. Generally nowadays I avoid coffee shop chains if I have a choice.

My next coffee haunt is/was a capuccino counter in the Victoria Centre Market. Owned by Peter, a Sicilian, and staffed by Ahmet from Iraq. Off work with depression, I spent weeks on end there chugging down Capuccinos. In the end economics moved me on - Peter's Capuccinos were a quid a cup, Broadway's bottomless coffees cost something like 1.20 and lasted all day - well, until 5pm anyway. Regardless of the economic reasons for moving on, Broadway became my favourte coffee haunt and the one where I most felt a sense of belonging in that cheesy Cheers' everybody knows your name sense. It felt like a hub of arty activity in Nottingham at the time. Common as Muck writer Billy Ivory had an office nearby and was often in and out, his big Ducatti parked next to my ever-present Vespa out front. Shane Meadows and his actors were often around - I remember chatting with one of the waiters about Meadows' film 24/7, which I had just seen, only to find out later that he was in the film (sorry Johann!). I also remember

scootering away from the place with the shakes after 5 pints of coffee and no food. Eventually I moved away from Nottingham and Broadway got renovated. I think Number 66 still patronises the joint though, when he has coin to spare.

I have never managed to find a proper coffee haunt in Doncaster. Eating Whole is pleasant but lacks coffee options and, like Escorama (which has coffee options aplenty), opportunity to people watch. Both are pleasant enough places but not ones I'd ever go to out of unhealthy compulsion. So my latest coffee haunt is not in Doncaster but Oxford - the Cock and Camel near Gloucester Green. Oxford is an inaccessiblly expensive place. I invariably felt grubby just by virtue of being working class and having a northern accent. At first the Cock and Camel looked like another shiny, exclusive, expensive place but it was actually as close to proletarian as the centre of Oxford gets. The staff were a frequently changing bunch of overseas students who felt as underclass as we did and the coffee was as cheap as we found without leaving town. I could people watch for England, my young mate Danny (22) could get off with the waitresses and our mate Simon (40) could write his essays undisturbed.

These days I don't need a place to roll cigarettes and not smoking can make sitting drinking coffee a strangely incomplete experience. One coffee place worth a mention is a mobile one that parks up in front of Doncaster College. Proper espresso is served from the specially adapted back of a three wheeled Vespa van. I don't want to drink there so much as I want to ride away on it in the direction of the sunset.

Posted by Ghostwriter Number 96 at November 5, 2003 06:17 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20031207013935/http://www.guildofghostwriters.com/archives/000062.html

Near my apartment is a little district of coffee shops...

By Rachel

Near my apartment is a little district of coffee shops, yoga studio, upscale grocery and crafts boutiques. Trees and old houses abound, and dogs, and people in Birkenstocks. When I ride my bike here or walk to the grocery, there are always people sitting outside one or the other, often with dogs, reading the paper, sipping drinks, and chatting.

Also near my apartment is another sort of neighborhood, one in which Hispanic families cluster outside small stores, play on the sidewalks, and stroll in the evening.

On the surface, they seem very different places, and the homes of very different people, but shaping both is the urge to be part of a community, to be out and be seen, to be in the presence of others instead of alone.

Tea Rooms

By London and the North

Tea Rooms as Place (- should be Coffee Shop as Place - topic of the fortnight at Ecotone!)

Whatever a person might think about Jackie Mason's humour (it can be quite offensive) he understands something about some Jew's priorities. He tells a story about a man being asked about his first ever trip to Europe. "Have you been to Vienna?" he asks his friend back. "The cake! The cake! Sensational. To die for. Oy, the cake!"

Living in Hackney was positively extending socially and culturally after Harrogate. I leant about caffs and street markets, Merlot, chicken bricks, garlic, Elizabeth David and the differences between African and Asian people. But after I moved to a squat in Swiss Cottage in 1978, I so enjoyed my Kaffee und Kuchen at Louis' patisserie on the Finchley Road. A well orchestrated shop window showing off it's stunning variety of cakes. What did I used to have? Hmm. Apple strudel perhaps. Strange that I can't remember. I'm sure I had a favourite. It's changed now. The Finchley Road is a different creature. Not the same degree of Austro-German-Hungarian accents with similarly accented shopping bags. A couple of weeks ago I went into Cafe Mozart at the bottom of Swains Lane in Hampstead. Oy, the cakes! The cakes! To die for. Apfeltorte, pflaumkuchen, poppy seed cake, lemon sponge, almond whatevers..... It was like coming home. A great Gugelhopf of an encounter. I bought more than any of us could eat and felt a desperate need to stock up on essential items. (A car full of bread?) Heaven. The coffee, was okay maybe. I know I should remember. But under the circumstances - I don't remember anything else.

Now the Fat Rascals of Betty's are Paris' favourite. Personally I go there for the cinamon toast - cut into thin soldiers piled crossways. The Morrocan Mint Tea is wonderful but does not really go with cinamon toast though I will insist on ordering this combination. The first time I ever went to Betty's I must have been about eight. My Nana took me. For lunch. On the menu there was something quite extraordinary - Hors D'Oeuvres which I read aloud no doubt pronouncing the s's to make a quite unlikely sounding meal. Which I ordered. I can still see the small piles on the plate of grated carrot, potato salad, cole slaw and - not sure what else. That must have been about as foreign as food got in those days. Both my grandmothers took me there on no more than four or so occasions in school holidays when they were looking after us.

When Betty's moved to it's current location I couldn't remember what the previous cafe in that building had been called. It came back to me when I chanted some of the history to Paris on our visits to Harrogate. "Next to Queen Victoria was Standings - deli downstairs, tea rooms and restaurant upstairs. Betty's was over there where Lloyds Bank now stands opposite the cenotaph and this was really the Imperial. Cafe downstairs, restaurant upstairs." (Virtual Tour) And then there was The Royal Baths, no longer serving the smelly-but-good-for-you-waters of this spa town but serving coffee to the piano playing of Clarry Wilson on the piano.

Paris and I went through a stage many years ago of frequenting caffs in east London and stocked up on cholestrol and nicotene. A caff is not a cafe. And a cafe is not a coffee shop. The cafes of my childhood were tea rooms. White tablecloths and silver services. Great cakes. And very quiet. Where children were expected to behave, adults talk in low voices and cakes consumed. No problem there.

It's not the same anymore - "coffee shops"! But the coffee is good. Mostly. Though not, in my opinion, at Starbucks. Read what Jackie Mason says about Starbucks.

Is this entry more about cake than coffee? The truth is they go together. They are inseparable. It's a cultural thing. I rest my case.

Posted by Coup de Vent at 06:59 PM | Comments (4)

Comments

Oh, I LOVED this entry. Yes, it's the cakes. And the coffee, but tea will do...for cake lovers. No coffee shop will ever compare to my grandmother making me tea when I got home from school and bringing down a tin box full of "biscuits" from England, especially those amazing cookies you can still get there (you probably know the ones) which are hard tea biscuits with an intense coofee-flavored glaze on top. And CDV, I also have a passion for cinnamon toast, cut in strips. My mom always made it for me, and now I make it when I need some comfort. But I've barely heard anyone else ever mention it!

Posted by beth at November 13, 2003 12:12 AM

The names of the German cakes and strudels evoked rich, rich memories of my childhood in germany, when my grandparents would take me and my brother round to the local cafe to have "zucker kuchen mit sahne", or "kirche kuchen" or the wonderful "pflaum kuchen" that you described. Just thinking about all the images makes my mouth water. I wonder if I will ever sit in such an atmosphere again, now that my grandparents are gone: the clinking teaspoons, the inquisitive banter of elderly women, the gentle bite of warm sugar's aroma, and the swirling storm of cream in a cup of steaming coffee...?

Posted by butuki at November 13, 2003 04:47 AM

CdV : the Cafe Mozart in Swains Lane, that's just up the road from me! Yes, the cakes, the cakes! But the coffee is so-so and in very small cups. Their Viennese coffee is also no match for the real thing as served in Vienna.

For an excellent cafe mocha, I recommend a little Italian place at the start of Carnaby St., around the corner from Gt.Marlborough St.

Posted by Natalie at November 14, 2003 11:37 PM

I saw Jackie Mason once. He was having afternoon tea in Fortnum and Masons. Seemed to be enjoying the cakes, but I'm not sure if he was drinking tea or coffee.

You brought back memories of the Finchley Road cafes of twenty years ago.... mmmmm.

I remember too seeing for the first time, in one of those cafes, the old women whose tattoos emerged from behind their sleeves as they reached forward for another piece of cake, for another refill of coffee.

Posted by qB at November 17, 2003 12:20 PM Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20031204014426/http://www.airenet.co.uk/alife/2003_11.html

Saturday, November 08, 2003

By CassandraPages

It looks like most of my readers have been very loyal during the serialized narrative about Gene Robinson's consecration, but I thought a digression from religion and politics would be welcome (for me, too). So here is a response, very belatedly, to the

ECOTONE TOPIC for November 1, 2003: COFFEE SHOP AS PLACE

Back home, I don't go to coffee shops. There aren't many, to begin with, and those that exist fall into the categories of "self-consciously-hip-and-pretending-to-be-urban", or "here-we-are-in-a-mall-looking-at-books-let's-have-latte". Neither appeals. I prefer the atmosphere of a greasy diner, actually, with truck drivers and lumbermen next to bikers and local sad-sacks, all downing their java in shoulder-to-shoulder silence at the long stainless-steel counter. I'd rather sit in the Polka Dot, next to the train tracks, writing and drinking coffee, than go to the hip joints with the rural yuppies and artsy types who seem so desperate to bring Boston and Manhattan to rural New England.

But when I'm here, in Montreal, I'm in a city filled with bistros and cafes, with bookstores-avec-espresso; upstairs aeries for people-watching and chic basements for warmth and escape; internet cafes; outdoor spots for rendezvous and long afternoons. No city in North America can claim better food, although most can claim better weather. So I have my choice, but I keep going back to one little lunch/breakfast/café in particular.

It doesn't have a name, or at least I don't know it. It's near the internet place I used to use, and I went in the first time to have some coffee in the middle of the afternoon, and immediately saw that the food in the small, refrigerated display case was all Middle Eastern, and homemade. There was shish taouk, fresh falafel, and spinach piestudded with sesame; bread with fresh zatar; and an array of homemade vegetable salads: taboulleh, cauliflower, beet, carrot, lentil, beans and chick peas – un plat, trois choix. And there was baklava. Not many things, but good ones. The grey-haired proprietor, a man of 40 or 45, didn't look Arab or Persian or Greek or Armenian; I decided finally he might be Turkish. I ordered a café au lait, and he made it for me, and set the white china cup and saucer on the counter. Then I realized I only had a $20. He looked – disgusted. I apologized, embarrassed. He took it, made change, and turned away.

I drank the coffee, which was delicious, at one of the small marble-top tables arranged along the windows, trying surreptitiously to watch him. He spoke several languages, but to the patrons, mainly French. He rarely smiled, and at one point engaged in a heated argument with a North African reading a newspaper, but then they both broke out laughing. I had finished and needed to leave, so I put my cup on the counter, said "shukran" and left, getting barely a nod.

The next day I brought J. there for lunch. We ate shish taouk, in paper-thin lavash lightly grilled after the sandwich was made – fantastic - and some of the salads. But that day a new wrinkle appeared: the proprietor's wife. She was very young, with a lovely face, wearing grey pants and a matching long tunic and her head and shoulders wrapped in a white veil. She worked behind the counter and moved back and forth between the café and the kitchen while her husband waited

on customers. She never looked at the men, but kept her eyes down. I immediately liked her and wondered about her, with not a little concern – where had she come from? What was her life like? Did they have children? Had she left her parents and family halfway around the world? Was she happy? There was a door on the far end of the café that opened onto a little garden with nice trees, but there were no tables out there for eating. I wondered if she went out there and sat when she had a moment; I hoped so.

I've been back a number of times, and the wife is rarely there, but when she is, she smiles shyly at me and acknowledges my feeble Arabic greetings and thanks. I'm so obviously non-Muslim, but I don't want to offend, even though they must be used to it; I put on my sweater on hot days and check to see if too much skin is showing, which, of course, it always is. This time, after several months away, J. and I went in for lunch and coffee, and the proprietor nodded his head and gave a small smile of recognition. "I think it's better when you're with me," I told J. The food was great, and the coffee even better.

I guess the thing that keeps us going back to such places is that we're equally drawn by the quality of the food or drink, and the mutual untold story. Cafes are not bars where everything hangs out and personal stories run freely out of people's over-lubricated minds. In cafes you see other habitués, and you wonder about them, but there is discretion and distance. (Matisse went to a café frequented by many other artists every day for years, and no one ever came to sit with him, so respectful were they of his air of private dignity – Francoise Gilot mentions that this actually hurt Matisse.) I want to discover the stories, but I won't ask. I also want, I suppose, to become regular enough that perhaps they will wonder about me. It is a game, perhaps, a gentle human game of curiosity, hunger, thirst: all satiable for a moment, but bound, like us, to return tomorrow.

6:33 PM

Source:
http://cassandrapages.blogspot.com/2003_11_02_cassandrapages_archive.html#106833442504218113
postCount('106833442504218113'

How Visitors Affect Your Sense of Place

Bi-weekly Topic for Nov. 15, 2003

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20051217214318/www.magpienest.org/scgi-bin/wiki.pl?HowVisitorsAffectYourViewOfPlace

Personal/space

By P.

I'm as territorial as my cousins the chimpanzees, and while I have learned to control the impulse over the years, my first thought upon having my space invaded is to throw sticks and leaves and hoot at the interloper.

I have largely repressed a memory of the time some other kids in my Cub Scout pack threw me bodily out of my own house for being obnoxious at a meeting. I don't recall it clearly, but I have the impression my mother offered no sympathy.

So maybe it's my hermetic psychology or the low frequency of my visitors, but admitting a guest to *my* spaces transforms them.

Just the thought of a visitor brings my sense of my house's inadequacies to a quiver, but it doesn't help that the maintenance and cleaning jobs multiply a bit faster than I can keep up with them. The wallpaper, foolishly buried under off-white paint by the previous owner, now wants to peel. The white woodwork is worn where it was washed and grubby where it hasn't been, and a decade of bumptious laundry baskets has exposed little outcroppings of dark-brown trim everywhere.

I am not alone in this. This is from *The Wind in the Willows*, in the chapter where Mole and Rat return to Mole's burrow:

Mole's face beamed at the sight of all these objects so dear to him, and he hurried Rat through the door, lit a lamp in the hall, and took one glance round his old home. He saw the dust lying

thick on everything, saw the cheerless, deserted look of the long-neglected house, and its narrow, meagre dimensions, its worn and shabby contents--and collapsed again on a hall-chair, his nose to his paws. `O Ratty!' he cried dismally, `why ever did I do it? Why did I bring you to this poor, cold little place, on a night like this, when you might have been at River Bank by this time, toasting your toes before a blazing fire, with all your own nice things about you!'

The strangest thing is to actually have someone visiting, though, and to feel how odd it is to have someone else filling the chair by the fireplace, making casual conversation and consuming coffee or beer. The whole place feels a bit alien, as if I am subconsciously trying to see my home through my visitor's eyes. My family and I are all relatively small, too, and when someone who isn't arrives, the dislocation is almost comical -- you feel you want to want to spread a sheet around their feet and water them, for the only thing over six feet tall that usually spends any time with us is the Christmas tree.

Having to admit an estimator to my home before I moved here a decade ago was painful. As he poked through my overfull closets and peered into the attic ("are you gonna take all that?"), I could think of nothing but colonoscopy, an experience I put off for years afterward. And contractors -- now, there's an odd thing ....

The guy who enclosed the back porch did the work in a sub-freezing spell of January. When he got too cold, he'd come in and warm up, which was fine, but at lunchtime he'd settle down in the dining room, adjacent to the job, rather than go away. On the basis of long acquaintance and general goodwill, the choice wasn't unreasonable on his part, but the urge to hoot and throw sticks grew strong in me. Having this large, shaggy and dusty person good-naturedly chewing his hamburger at my distressed-antique table was an intrusion, and as the work wore on, it got to be nearly intolerable.

The room had toys cluttering one corner in great profusion and a rampart of papers, unopened mail, undelivered gifts, and homeless objects in the opposite one. It's not that I was ashamed of the mess -- the contractor was making a bigger one -- but maybe that I had become attached to it, in the intimate the way you become attached to the pair of jeans you wore through the entire camping trip. I wasn't delighted with the project when it was done, but I didn't complain, I felt such relief when the workers went away.

I can thank him for the psychological insight, but I wish he had gotten the door right, instead

Source: http://my.core.com/%7Epzicari/text/Space.htm

Visitors and Eggheads

By Feathers of Hope

This entry is another collaborative post on the Ecotone Wiki: "How Visitors Affect Your View of Place." See other posts on this topic here.

Coming back from a trip to the coast this evening to see family we were discussing how visiting a foreign country is a great way to learn to see afresh, since everything is so different. It makes you look at where you live in a different way.

Davis, California is not a tourist destination. There are no Roman ruins, there is no spa, no beach; the the most ancient buildings are just over 100 years old; there isn't even any wine made here other than for the purposes of study. But there is a large, world-class university, and in fact it is this that accounts for the trips made by most visitors, either directly or indirectly. (The recent runaway success of the University Retirement Community, providing different levels of care for seniors, is almost certainly attributable to its proximity to the campus. These people didn't move here for the climate.)

Pica's window at work looks out onto one of the egghead sculptures by Robert Arneson. It is actually the most photographed one in the series; entitled "Eye on Mrak: Fatal Laff," it is a Janus-faced piece where the second face, pictured at left, is upside-down and laughing. At least three different people pose next to this head every day; sometimes the number is far higher. (Mrak Hall is the main administration building on campus.)

The egghead is not a sight we bother to show our visitors. Rather, we make sure our visitors see the significant landmarks in our daily round: the Davis Food Co-op, the Davis Farmers Market if they're here on the right day of the week, and of course the cows right next to the main road loop through campus. Architecturally inclined visitors get to see the 1970s era ecotopian Village Homes, the contemporary McMansion wasteland known as Mace Ranch, and the monolithic edifice the Mondavi Center. Those who stay a little longer with some interest in birds get to see the California Raptor Center.

If Numenius were a visitor, not a resident, there is one place not mentioned above that he'd be sure to head to -- Shields Library. If the university is at the heart of this town, the main campus library is surely the heart of any university. How better to get a sense of what the town has to offer?

Posted by Pica and Numenius at November 16, 2003 09:02 PM

Comments

Roman ruins, ancient buildings are great to see but when I visit a different country I like to experience the culture and the way of life of the people - put myself in their shoes and wonder what it would be like to live in the country I am visiting. I would love to see the Farmers Co-op,

the Food Co-op, drive on the right hand side of the road, taste the food, hear the language and definitely visit the Raptor Center. I love libraries too.

Posted by: Jenny at November 16, 2003 11:50 PM

We have nothing like the egghead anywhere in Floyd County. Maybe we need one. I'll bring it up at the next council meeting. :-}

Posted by: fredf at November 17, 2003 02:54 PM Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2003/11/16/visitors_and_egg.html

How visitors affect your view of place

By Mulubinba Moments

This is an essay for the Ecotone Wiki

I love being at home - it is a child friendly, pet friendly, and tree friendly kind of place. I liked the feel of it as soon as I walked in to it for the first time with the agent. We bought our house fifteen years ago. I guess it was a mistake in some ways considering that it needed lots of work and money spent on it. We initially did spend money on it - we underpinned the foundations in order to try to stop cracks appearing in the walls, we altered the kitchen and changed the back area so that the toilet could be inside and not located in an outhouse. Then we ran out of money, time, and energy and child number three came along. Twelve years later we still have a living room that is decorated in the 1930's style - the carpet is threadbare and the wall paper is faded. The paint is peeling on the ornate ceilings. To any discerning visitor it must appear drab and unkempt. Our bookcases are filled to overflowing, our desk is always untidy and our children seem to spread their belongings into every room. It is little wonder that we very rarely receive visitors - I tired many years ago of apologising for the state of the house - visitors just have to accept us for who we are. Despite this however I have come to realise that no matter how we fight the concept, what people think **is** important. I do love our house, it is lived in and has a warmth of atmosphere about it - it is certainly not a Vogue masterpiece. Having visitors however does highlight its inadequacies and I guess, my inadequacies as a housekeeper and homemaker.

Similarly, our weblog is a special place - a place of self, in a way. It is an attempt to describe the place we live in, our lifestyle, our opinions, our wildlife, our scenery. I can look forward to having visitors to it as it makes no difference how I look or what state of disorganisation the house is in. I can escape for a while. I don't pretend to be a literary genius, I know my grammar and my expression is often unimaginative. I read other blogs with a feeling of inadequacy - I could never write like that. I know the bloggers who write wondefully and expressively, just like the people in their superbly renovated immaculate houses, would pay us a cursory visit and dismiss us quickly at first glance. We would not be worthy of their attention.

Now if visitors arriving in Newcastle don't mind an old house, sleeping in a fold down bed in the sunroom, sharing a bathroom with the family, a cat, a budgie, an axolotil, and meals cooked outside on the BBQ served on mismatched crockery I will show you in real life, the scenes you have visited on this blog. The beach, the birds, the animals are all here - things we often take for

granted living in this place, but nevertheless things we see in a different light when we can show them off to visitors.

November 17, 2003 in Jenny's posts, Place | Permalink

Comments

That's just the kind of home houseguests tend to like. I always feel very uneasy when I visit someone in a pristine home. I'm afraid I will mess something up or spill something or sit in the wrong place. It's impossible to feel at home in that kind of environment. As a houseguest, I know I am not responsible for maintenance or picking up after pets, so such things as peeling paint and vomiting cats probably cause me far less stress than the actual owner. The best rule of thumb for determining whether or not your house is suitable for houseguests is to ask yourself if you love it and feel at ease there. If so, most houseguests probably will as well.

Posted by: Tvindy | November 19, 2003 at 12:22 PM

If I could afford to visit then my hubbie and I would love to stay at yours. There are folks out there who value people more than what they have in their houses. God, you should see mine, but still we have visitors. Although my family in Scotland have bigger and better and more modern homes.

It isn't what you have, but who you are and the welcome that you give that matters.

Jan, Kent, England

Posted by: Jan Ferrell | November 20, 2003 at 01:35 PM

Jenny and Geoff, I very much hope we will spend time in each other's homes someday! I agree with Jan, it isn't what you have but who you are that matters, and my guess is that your home reflects that in wonderful ways. We can trade stories of remodeling efforts - complete and incomplete - as well!

Posted by: beth | November 20, 2003 at 02:00 PM

Source: http://mulubinba.typepad.com/mulubinba_moments/2003/11/how_visitors_af.html

What do visitors think of our place?

By Mulubinba Moments (Geoff)]

Until about 40 years ago the international airport terminal in Sydney was like a gigantic shearing shed. This was perhaps appropriate as in the early 20th century Australia was said to ride on the sheep's back because wool was the major export. Visitors to Australia were a rare thing. Most arrivals in Australia were immigrants - here to stay - and they mostly came by sea. Celebrity visitors such as actors and singers were revered, and it was very important to make a good impression.

Embarrassingly, it was common for these foreign celebrities to be swarmed by jounalists in the arrivals lounge at Sydney Airport. And wincingly predictable was the question "What do you

think of Australia?". Vivian Leigh in 1948 famously replied "I can't see it, you're standing in my way." (Frank Sinatra's visit in 1974 was somewhat of an exception as he was subjected to more hostile questioning. In response he called the reporters bums and hookers.)
Australians have always cared what visitors think of our country. However, the world has changed, international tourism has boomed and the number of visitors to our country continues to grow every year. Australia no longer rides on the sheep's back and tourism has become a major source of national income. Consequently an attitude is arising that visitors are now customers. This view presents our 'place' as a 'resource' to be exploited as if it were a seam of coal. Visitors/customers need to be treated well so they will spend their money here and then encourage others to follow. It is now the economists who care the most what foreign visitors think of our country, and they measure the answer in dollars.
Our 1981 edition Macquarie Dictionary gives this meaning for the word hospitality: "the reception and entertainment of guests or strangers with liberality and kindness". But now we have the Hospitality Industry. Isn't it good to know all those Hospitality Industry trainees are learning to treat visitors with liberality and kindness?

This essay for Ecotone Wiki's biweekly topic Ecotone: Writing About Place - HowVisitorsAffectYourViewOfPlace

November 18, 2003 in Geoff's posts, Place | Permalink

Comments

I think Western Civilization is probably one of a very few cultures in the world where its members need special training to know how to be hospitable to visitors.

Posted by: Tvindy | November 20, 2003 at 10:50 AM

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20051217214318/http://mulubinba.typepad.com/mulubinba_moments/2003/11/what_do_visitor.html

the way to the heart....

By alembic

This post is my response to ecotone's biweekly topic: How Visitors Affect Your View of Place.

Many people have mocked the place I call home. Some have done it with a good measure of talent and with sharp-edged wit chiseled with that deep love thats hidden in the spikes of irony. I am thinking of Cyra McFadden here and of her hot-tub-hopping, perpetually wide-eyed and hopelessly self-centered Marin County characters that made The Serial such a hit back in the 1970s. Others brought on the bile and the righteous tone of a musty old bible when they condemned Marin County as the alien land of sin and abomination that breeds the likes of co-

conspirator of John Walker Lindh, the American Taliban captured in Afghanistan some two years ago.

Friends and family who come to stay with me and who lend me their eyes once they are here, often arrive with their own eyes shaded and focused by these literary and political lenses that distort the territory in which I live day in and day out. Rather than try to argue and get into a debate about why neither irony nor bile does this place the justice it deserves, I first try to appeal to my guests through their appetites -- that is, yes, food.

Sooner or later, all my guests will be treated to the ritual of shopping at Woodlands Market, Marins answer to the original SoHo allure of Dean & Deluca. Conveniently located at the entrance of the leafy Kent/Woodlands enclave of homes, Woodlands Market brings a taste of the whole wide world to the well-heeled crowd of shoppers, the gardening and construction crews that tend the houses of the well-heeled shoppers, and the college students who attend nearby College of Marin and provide a bit of color and variation in age distribution. The shelves of the perpetually growing store are crammed with exotic packages of delicacies commandeered from the outposts of a gastronomic hinterland just waiting to be conquered, packaged, and marketed for taste buds that are in serious training to live for that next new new bite (apologies to M. Lewis, who wrote the book called The Next New New Thing).

During the day, class lines blur quite well at Woodlands Market. Here, the breaking of bread means tearing pieces off a ciabatta with one lunch, spooning sauce with a chapatti with the other, or measuring tiny slices from low-carb loafs with yet another -- or splitting a box of crab sushi. When evening descends and the construction crews and the gardeners have gone home, way over on the other side of the San Quentin ridge, and the college students have dispersed in every which direction, the parking lot at Woodlands Market looks much like the parking lot of an exclusive country club, what with the rows of the latest model SUVs and cars that drive home the point of their owners financial worth.

But, this post is not supposed to be about how I see this place; its supposed to be about how visitors affect my view of place....

Not long ago, I saw a group of people milling by the vegetable stand at Woodlands Market, fingering the organic quinces and star fruits, only to discover that they were recent arrivals from Russia on a tour with the relative who made it good in America. It was well past six oclock, so the shoppers were the locals, the residents of this leafy corner of Marin. The touring relatives were babbling and oohing and aahing and calling out to each other as they started to wonder off among the aisles in search of more edible curios. The host and seemingly proud tour guide started scrambled every which way to try to herd his charge back together again, and, as I caught the look in his eyes, I saw something familiar in them.

Embarrassment.

I saw it clearly, almost as clearly as if I were staring in the mirror. Here was someone caught between the roots -- the poorly dressed gawking relatives form the old country -- and the showy fruit -- the well-clad and gawking locals whose garden this clearly was.

So yes, when visitors descend on us, especially if they have come from far, I find myself forced to look both ways, back and forth, thanking my lucky stars for the bounty to behold and cursing my judgment for its poverty of perspective, or vision. Temporarily displaced, my visitors remind

me of my own displacement and of the perpetual tug of the myth of home ... that place where everybody knows not only your name, but that of your grandfather and grandmother too....

Marin may well be the place I now call home, but all it takes is one visitor to remind me that I have no roots here and that Woodlands Market, with its overwrought selection of international delicacies that had to have known the deep dark secrets of native soils, is how I can bear living on the surface....

Posted by maria at November 18, 2003 01:41 PM

Comments

Here we have "The Co-op"...another wonderfully evocative piece, Maria. Hope you'll join the running discussion about new topics and potential changes at the Ecotone. We need more and broader input, I think.

Posted by: beth at November 19, 2003 07:02 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20051218224832/http://www.ashladle.org/archives/000245.html

Tuesday, November 18, 2003

By CassandraPages

ECOTONE TOPIC for November 15

How Visitors Affect Your View of Place

My earliest memory of being "visited" was a parents' day in grade school. My parents were in our classroom, sitting along one wall near my regular seat, when I opened my flip-top desk. My father gasped. Loudly. I, of course, immediately turned bright red, and wanted to sink through the floor. He was right – my desk was a total disaster. But it was, after all, my desk. And because it was mine, and not connected to my room at home, I'd thought of it as private, not subject to the "pick-up-your-room" comments that were commonplace back in our house.

Housekeeping never did become a major priority in my life, although I like having things neat, and wish they were neater than they usually are. I did learn to pick up after myself, and am glad my parents dinned this concept into me. But I've always made a preferential choice when it comes to prioritizing housework, and my intellectual or creative life. It wasn't a far step, therefore, from my second-grade desk to my adult kitchen. Shortly after I had married, I once spotted my new mother-in-law's car pulling up outside. I quickly shoveled all the dishes from the sink into the oven, and went to calmly greet her at the door.

I do often see my personal space through the imaginary eyes of impending visitors; the cobwebs and dust become suddenly visible as well as the clutter and neglected tasks: the tiles that never made it up on the kitchen walls, the unsanded floorboards, the peeling trim on the doorframes. But I made a decision long ago that if people didn't like me for myself, they weren't going to be

swayed by an impeccable house, nor did I want them as friends if this was how they were going to judge me.

It's different, though, seeing the larger place where you live through people who come to visit, especially when you live in a postcard like we do. Visitors come here wanting to see the autumn leaves, or New England villages with white church steeples and narrow-clapboarded buildings; they want ducks on a river, and Christmas trees and sleigh rides; they want to drive through covered bridges and stop beside slightly ramshackle red barns with a thin heifer or two in the pasture – or, better yet, a flock of sheep - fenced in by old stone walls. Like most people who live here, we have a little "tour" that includes such sights, and satisfies guests that they've seen the real thing.

What they don't know, and don't want to know, is that in a neighboring town there is just one working farm remaining, compared to dozens a couple of decades ago. Or that the farms, residences, cemetery and dairy that lined the road between here and the university town exist now only in memory. I've watched them disappear, one by one, eaten up by bulldozers and their spawn: condominiums, dental offices, mail-order warehouses, upscale nurseries and farmstands bursting with pumpkins and cornstalks, a centralized elementary school. This is the new "New England" reality for the suburban and city people who move here, wanting their own piece of the country and bringing urban values and expectations that contribute inexorably to the diminution of rural life. For them a myth has replaced history: "new" stone walls, "water features" that imitate waterfalls, fake barns, pseudo-post-and-beam office buildings with white vinyl siding. A little further out into the country, new "colonial" homes sprout on five-acre sub-development plots, and older, gracious homesteads are turned into "gentleman's farms" with Jacuzzis in the master bedroom suites, and horse barns for thoroughbreds instead of plowhorses. They exist not to impress the locals -- that would be absurd – but to impress a new crop of visitors from the city or suburb, and to convince the owner that he or she has finally "arrived".

The disappearance of authenticity and its replacement by shallow, Disney-land theme-park imitations, no matter how expensive or detailed, makes me exhausted and sad. These concepts of "place" are dependent on the judgments of others: the visitor. They are something we can pursue if we read the right magazines, or acquire if we have enough money. They've become part of a marketed reality.

Maybe that's why I like my virtual place, my blog. Here I can be fat or skinny, pimply or beautiful, neat or slovenly, and you won't know or care. You *will* know, I think, if I'm telling the truth, if I'm speaking with integrity, if I'm revealing my heart. There is no authority that determines what my blog should look like, no design avant-garde to set artificial standards of chic-ness. You come here, or don't, based on the content and based on how coming here makes you feel. It's free, and pretty real: no games. I like that.

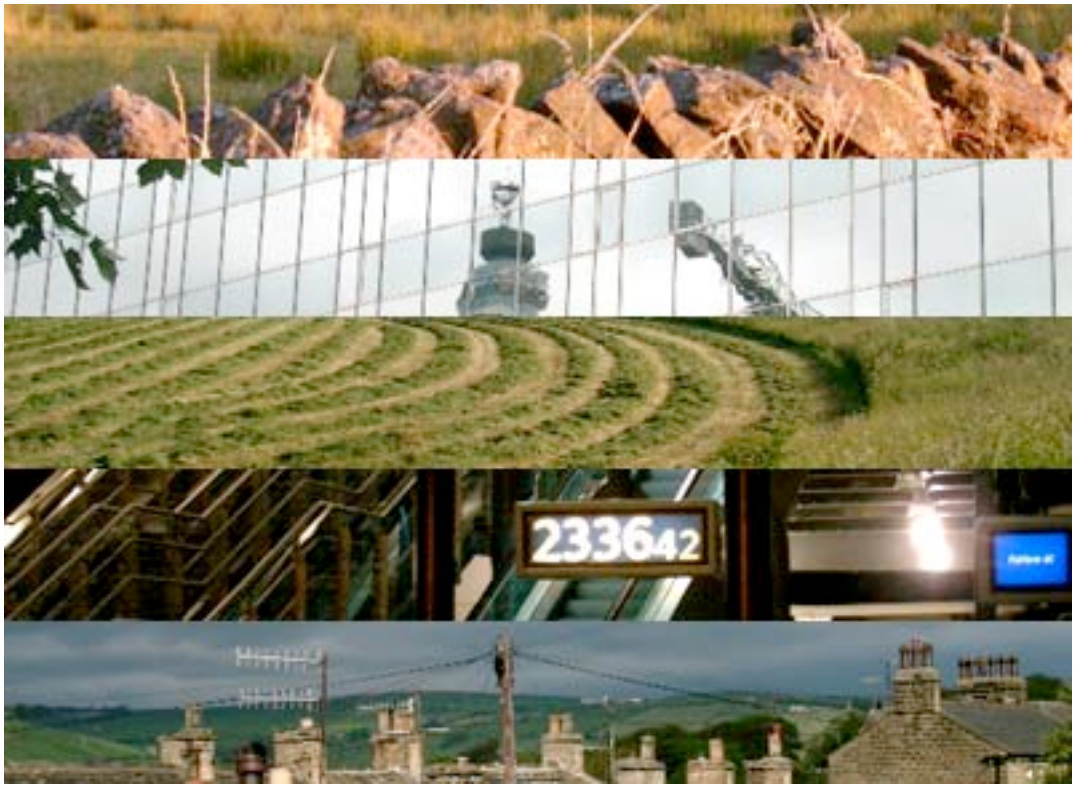
9:09 PM

Source:
http://cassandrapages.blogspot.com/2003_11_16_cassandrapages_archive.html#106920776620642154

How Visitors Affect One's View of Place

By London and the North

I have been thinking about how visitors affect my view of where I live as a result of this question having been posed by a member of the Ecotone wiki.



When walking around London with visitors, I tend to point out the less obvious things - a disused underground station, interesting old tiles, names of streets. Things that interest me. Stories nearly lost. Sights almost missed.

One of the better experiences of recent times was taking the kids into town and telling them about the old GLC and taking them to London's best kept secret of an art exhibit. Their incredulity was great to see.

Visitors to London are usually there to see London and seeing me is a smaller part of that. I'm quite happy to join in the viewing of the place. I have no patience for those in Yorkshire who speak of going to London with a disapproving shake of the head and grunt about the noise, movement and size and see it is the devil's territory. "Went there once.... Won't be going back." It's meant to be a joke and if you were truly a local person you would laugh with them agreeing. But as I go "there" every week, I am clearly from the other side.

Visitors to Yorkshire, on the other hand, are often here to see us or me and enjoy the surrounds as a secondary activity. Most now know to bring sensible footwear. Some leave a winter jacket here. Peri left a pair of fake leopard fur slippers here recently. But that seems to be an accident. I

sometimes think that our visitors and us talk so much on walks that they don't see as much as they might. I find myself interupting the conversation pointing out things I am seeing and this subsides after a while and I feel in two places at once - in the conversation and amongst the leaves or whirling mist.

I think what is meaningful for me is how visitors see me and Paris in our relatively new environment. Their eyes offer a continuity which is important for my identity. Their familiarity with me tells me I am still the same person who lived for twenty two (22) years in London. When they come to stay it's like a re-membering, a continuing conversation bringing together both of my worlds. After they leave I feel less dependent of how I am seen in this northern world.

Posted by Coup de Vent at 10:42 PM | Comments (0)

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20031204014426/http://www.airenet.co.uk/alife/2003_11.html

Protecting Place

Bi-weekly Topic for Dec. 1, 2003

Dec. 1, 2003

By Beth W. at http://longleaf.typepad.com/switched_at_birth/ Switched At Birth

My husband and I own one hundred acres of pine woods in Florida's panhandle. It's primarily an old growth longleaf pine forest, with some scrub oak, yaupon, wild blueberry, and a series of springs that make up into a meandering stream.

The unusual aspect of this is how close we are to the City of Pensacola. Our land is prime development acreage. Realtors call. We don't call back. Instead, we call Meeks Farms and order more longleaf pine to plant. About 13,000 went in the ground last spring; another 8,500 will be planted in 2004.

Simply put, we made a decision: keep the land intact. Forego the monetary enticements which might allow us to do what? Buy condos in Santa Fe, Reno and Hilton Head? Nope. We are planting slow growing, commercially non-viable longleaf pine trees and other native plants, nurturing the pitcher plant prairie, and digging out a fish pond.

We have grandchildren whose idea of wilderness is a mall without a floor plan guide. Who throw up their hands in frustration with visions of terminal boredom when the batteries quit on their game boys.

Grandchildren who take a walk on our soft dirt roads tentatively, the great outdoors being a little too open to be comfortable in their experience and say to one another, "Look! A pine cone. In nature."

When we die, this land will go into a family trust, protected for generations. During the rest of my life, my plan is to enhance it with plantings of more native plants, and to work with the grandkids so at least one among them develops a fire in the belly for this unique and beautiful place in the world, and seeks to preserve it when one of their cousins becomes a sharp lawyer and tries to bust the trust!

Place/Holders

By P.

I think that places are like children in one way: you protect them all you can, but you can't preserve them, outside of your memory. They will grow and change regardless.

And when you do try to save them you have to make choices. Which ones do you keep? Which must you let go, to build upon or rebuild -- for if you fight to save everything, you end up trampling the needs and rights of others and most likely are wasting your effort.

It helps a lot to be clear on what you're saving, and why, and for whom. It might be that only raw, bulk wilderness will do, as in the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge, or maybe it's enough to save a symbol, like the facade of the old Union Station in Columbus, Ohio.

For some people, the problem of saving places isn't really about the place, but about civilization and its discontents -- the clumsy work of tasteless designers, the burden of enduring thoughtless people, the whole lazy, wasteful lifestyle of suburban Americans, of whom I am, regrettably, one. Stopping such a tide is like trying to sweep out the sea. but the Dutch know you *can* wall off some sections of new land if you have dirt enough, and the energy.

I have lost a good many of the favorite places of my childhood. A creek gorge I loved to explore is fenced off, probably for liability reasons; the ancient factories I roamed are long gone, as fire hazards; a hill I often climbed is inaccessible and overgrown now, because of a highway. I miss them, but as an adult I wouldn't be welcome to roam places where a child could and, anyway, modern children seem to have other interests. I would have torn the factories down myself. You move on, to enjoy and learn in new places.

But mainly, I want to tell you here about one of the new places, the Shaker Lakes near my home. Surrounded by some of Shaker- and Cleveland Heights' best old houses, the lakes were part of a radical stretch in urban design a hundred and some years ago, and they remain for me to enjoy because of a knock-down, drag-out political fight in the 1960s.

Now, I can stand on what used to be the beach at Horseshoe Lake, fenced off from the polluted water, looking at the earth-and-stone dam and trying to imagine what it must have been like when the North Union Shaker colony built it in 1852, to power a woolen mill. It's hard to visualize, really. The beach sand is probably recent. The fence is new, and the wetlands plants at its foot must be still newer.

But the faceted stone bulwark and stone steps behind me may date to the original park days, perhaps to the late 19th century. The underbrush nearby, including cherry and apple trees and blueberry bushes, was clearly planted for the park. There may have been chestnuts and elms once, but now it's the oak trees' time to die, and the city has put out some fresh saplings, species unknown.

Most likely, a wood-burning community would cut most of the trees, and the mansions I now see beyond the lake would be standing on former plowland or pasture. The young trees I see filling the Doan Brook ravine screen a vista that probably once reached to the end of the lower, and older, Shaker Lake, where there was a grist mill.

The Shakers had a sense of beauty. They might have left some wood along the lakes -- certainly at the point, which would have been a lovely picnic spot near the beach where I like to stand. The point later became a wading pool shaped like an arrowhead, but now it's half-full of sand and surrounded by brush.

The Shaker colony lasted 36 years past the building of the second dam, and broke up in 1888. I imagine that the edges of the lakes had grown up in weeds and brush by the time the Shakers' 1,300 acres were sold to a group of investors, including John D. Rockefeller. It was Rockefeller who gave the lakes to the Cleveland parks commissioners six years later, and they became part of a park that followed Doan Brook clear to Lake Erie. It was the state of the art then, a park that followed the creek through its wild, romantic glen all the way down to the lake, with a pleasant road above the glen for riding back on. At the time, Cleveland Heights was attracting the cream of society in a booming industrial city, and, starting in 1905, the Van Sweringen brothers famously developed Shaker Heights along the lakes and to the south.

I can readily imagine long dresses swishing across the lawn under graceful young trees, and the days when they planted white oaks as a thin green line of monuments to World War I soldiers along the north and east sides of the lakes. There were canoists and swimmers then, but who knows whether they drank the water. I wonder if the relatively older money of Cleveland and Cleveland Heights disdained the newcomers on the Shaker Heights side.

The Depression would have changed things. It broke the Van Sweringens. Cleveland began its long slide after World War II, but the park was green and leafy in 1960, when the picture at top was taken.

That could have been the last green and leafy picture, because the county engineer, Albert Porter, soon proposed running two freeways up the Doan Brook ravine, then north and east to make connections within the highways circling the city. The Heights, still well educated and

reasonably well off, revolted. When the dust settled, federal law banned routinely routing Interstates through parks and Porter, famous for calling the lakes "two-bit duck ponds," was himself history. To this day, Horseshoe Lake is as far as you can get from an interstate highway and still be within the metro area. That adds half an hour to any trip, but most of us who live there think it's very cool. Cleveland itself now fights expanding freeways, but with limited success.

The struggles had only begun. Race and class became the issues as the lakes ceased to be the preserve of an elite -- you can find a better account of all the years of change in several books, most recently "Cleveland Heights: The Making of an Urban Suburb". In my time, the uproar of the hour was a project to dredge the lake and refurbish the dam, which killed the fish, discouraged the ducks and left a band of empty grass over there. People were, well, mad.

In the snow, I can forget about the politics, for the park is only peaceful. The quiet hiss of flakes on leaves and branches mutes the deep rumble that has been the city's voice for the past century; the white washes out the dam and the underbrush on the scruffy north shore, and sticky snow softens the lines of the utilitarian metal-pole pavilion and concrete-block restrooms, both idle for the winter. This is not the place the Shakers flooded, nor is it where Rockefeller strolled, nor yet is it even the place that Al Porter didn't understand. It isn't mine, either, but I can share it.

I like to think that unlike my old haunts, the lakes will remain to stir my daughter's memories two decades from now. Maybe she'll remember playing "Rapunzel" and "Billy Goats Gruff" on the playground climber. Maybe she'll remember tossing stones in the water and avoiding goose poop on the dock. Maybe she'll remember adventures she won't tell me about. I can't know, and I can't know what she'll find here then. I just hope she returns.

Source: http://my.core.com/%7Epzicari/text/Saving.htm

protecting place

By John

Which place are you protecting?
There are so many places,
and they are all right here,
in the same place.

***

write this from my house, from my second floor desk, at the front of the 1893 Italianate I have lived in for the past five years. Protecting my place has a different meaning tonight, as my car sits in its garage, at the back of the house, with a bullet hole through the garage door and through the front bumper and through the radiator and possibly beyond.

The neighborhood is an old one, immediately east of Columbus' downtown. Before the interstates tore through in an immense destruction of place (houses upon houses demolished; streets, connections, sidewalks severed; deep trenches filled with speed, noise, and exhaust ripped through the gaping void), it was part of the "Silk Stocking" district, home to the grand houses of the city's elite. Now, it is home to a very heavy concentration of dedicated Section 8 (low income, government-subsidized) housing, and pockmarked by properties small and large that can, by deed restriction, never be utilized for anything else. The participants in last night's shooting both emerged from an apartment in the Section 8 complex across the alley from my backyard.

Conservationists wish to protect the historic architecture, and the feel of a neighborhood with small commercial stores right up against the sidewalk where walking can accomplish more than just "exercise."

One of the principal streets, Bryden Road, is governed by a Historic District code; homeowners must request permission for nearly every alteration -- even to repaint in the exact same color.

Most of the rest of the area is ungoverned by any restrictions, and beautiful, unique structures are often lost to expediency and ugly, unremarkable replacements. Or vacant, neglected lots of weeds and overgrowth.

Not everyone is a conservationist. Other people, such as an African-American artist residing for many years on Bryden Road, don't accept the historic district code, believing that it is used not to protect, but to destroy their place, their neighborhood, and make it anew in someone else's vision.

White flight had left this a predominantly African-American neighborhood by the 1960s. Columbus has a German Village, an Italian Village and a Victorian Village, but there is no African Village; mandates focused on 1900 seem to debase, if not ignore, the history of the area under its later, African-American residents.

Some want to protect the diversity of the area, and worry that the continued renovation of historic homes will drive up property values and displace the poorer residents, college students, and artists. These people are renovating themselves, but were drawn to the area by the many divergent experiences it encompasses and wonder if it is possible to retain that breadth even as it seems that the barriers to entry, in the form of income and wealth, may rise and rise.

To anyone hit by crime and reminded of fear, as I was last night, that continued renovation seems less certain than before. (I attend Blockwatch meetings -- I know that there are problems and dangers and guns and vicious dogs nearby. They have never come so close.)

There is very little left to protect in terms of businesses. The Main Street Business Association has determined that in order to attract them back to its boarded up storefronts (there are not very many that aren't boarded up), the area must have more residents with incomes above the poverty

level; this assessment appears to be in line with U.S. Housing and Urban Development guidelines which discourage high concentrations of low income housing.

Should someone worry that so many factors conspire to keep so much Section 8 housing in this neighborhood that its viability to businesses is compromised? Should someone worry that these high concentrations might preclude a safe, economically viable community?

An active religious organization, BREAD, comprised by Christian, Muslim and Jewish congregations, wants to protect the availability of low income housing. BREAD is concerned by housing codes, including historic districts, which drive the cost of homes ever higher. Some Columbus suburbs mandate such large lot sizes and expensive siding materials that the working poor are excluded from residence by the cost of building within these cities. In historic districts, materials required for period accuracy (multi-paned windows, prohibition of chainlink fences) can add considerably to the cost of maintenance.

BREAD has also aggressively lobbied the city of Columbus to tear down vacant houses to prevent their use in drug crimes, leading to conflict with conservationists.

(Above) Police tape across the alley next to my house marks the area as a "rough" part of town.

love this neighborhood. I love the diversity. I love the very different people I can meet just by walking down the street -- a man from the homeless shelter around the corner to a university president to a local artist. I love the people who want to make it better. It has color and texture (right now (though not usually) it strikes me as a "rough" neighborhood; perhaps see the "Photographing Place" topic for this fortnight) and history, and has been shaped by so many amazing and individual people I can never know.

Each house on each street was one in birth, and has grown more individual through its age and the habitation of the people who have lived inside its walls.

The physical imminence of Columbus' history is worth protecting. Affordable housing is worth protecting. Interesting and individual architecture is worth protecting. A living neighborhood is worth protecting.

But tonight my thoughts of this individual place are shaped by:
Who wants a house with a bullet hole in the garage door?
Who wants to live in a house, fearful that the next bullet may tear through something living, something less easily dismissed than a garage door?

I am getting married next July. We will live in this house together. The room we have tentatively planned for her study is 10 feet above the bullet hole.

This neighborhood, this place, is worth protecting -- it is worth finding and working out compromises between the many different people who find it their home and their place and want to protect that sense.

But I will need a home that will protect us. Once that sense of security is breached, it can be very difficult to get back.

-- John.

Source: http://www.polyphony.org/jfsl/xyt2901.html

Enduring Places, Unaltered Spaces

By Fragments from Floyd

I don't know how the experts draw the distinction of meaning between space and place. But in my thinking, there would be only spaces if I did not exist, and you, and the countless billions who live and have lived and will live in these spaces. There would be no place if there were no names attached or values imposed on and lived within spaces. Places are spaces that have souls-- the linking principle between Spirit and matter. We give spaces ensoulment by belonging to them. As we find meaning, gather experience and lay up memory, we make raw spaces into places where life happens through time.

On this small plot of Earth-- our rough sheltered valley in the Blue Ridge of Virginia-- I am the steward, the temporary "owner". For a time, uncertain and finite, this place will be the tableau of my life. Decades from now, I'd like to imagine that my love for and intimacy with this place will live on-- not in the abstract but in the very particulars of the view out my window, in the same footsteps I tread in my day's walk. I have left a record of these days in what I have written to my children, and ultimately, to their children from and about this place-- a field guide of sorts to its natural history and to mine. If they in future years should care to know what our lives have been like here, they will need to know this place-- to sit where I have sat, see what I have seen. And so the importance of protecting place is a matter very close to home.

I have lived in the southern mountains all my life and loved them in a generic sort of way, but only known this homeplace for a short while. Many of my neighbors in rural Virginia have had family roots for generations in these green mountains, and so have ascribed immeasurable meaning to particular stretches of creek and to rock walls, to sheltered forests and gnarled trees

and high ridges-- and of course to old home places and barns that have heard the communion of human lives through an unbroken hymn of years.

But when the tax bills become greater than the modest income of those who go on trying to make a living from their farms, there are always others with no value in place and its associations with human histories, but only in the space--ready to come in with a different set of 'best use' ideas that risk turning places with souls into commodities sold to the highest bidder.

When our land is sold, the next owner would be under no obligation to feel for it what we have felt. Ownership of land confers the legal right to make decisions that have no regard for the associations and memories and values of those who came before. The next owner of this place could terrace the ridges on either side of Nameless Creek and dot the hillsides with Swiss A-frames painted in bright pastels. A trailer court would fit nicely in our pasture. Summer tourists in Airstreams could park side by side in the cool shade under the Rhododendrons at the back of our land in that most quiet place that has been our "Fortress of Solitude."

While all of us must seek ways to protect places on the larger scale from countless forms of misuse, one person alone may be able to do little on that scale, for instance, to protect the southern Appalachians from the ravages of woodchip mills or strip mining. Perhaps one person could do more to prevent their county from being overtaken by shopping malls and fast food franchises. But my wife and I can act locally in the near term and with predictable effect to protect one parcel -- our place-- for all generations to come. We are putting our land under conservation easement. And so are several of our nearest neighbors. It will be protected from a future use that does not suit its nature or its history.

A hundred years from now, should anyone chose to, they can read what I have written about these hills along the banks of Goose Creek; they can look at my pictures of the creek, the barn, the ridges above us as they are today. And they will be able to go to those same places, hear the same sounds, smell the spicebush and pennyroyal in these woods and find, perhaps, the very same peace and serenity that I found there in my walk this afternoon.

In this world where places of the heart too quickly disappear under the machinery of efficiency and speed, I will be able to grow old here in this place, pass it on, and know it will still proclaim what I have known, immutable through the decades. What few dollars we might leave to our children will quickly pass. This place protected is our true legacy.

The Ecotone topic for December 01 is "Protecting Place".

Posted by fred1st at 6:41 AM | Permalink | Comments (7)

Comments

I was reading this with much interest but have stopped to quibble about this: "Perhaps one person could do more to prevent their county from being overtaken by shopping malls ..." Not the content; it's grammar again.

"... one person ... their"? How can one person be a "they" or a "their"? But I see this use everywhere - even repeatedly by Pat Holt, who wrote the Ten Mistakes article you posted a while back!

Does anyone know whether "their" is now widely considered acceptable for use as a singular pronoun? Some argue that it's the answer for avoiding use of clunky "his or her" gender-inclusive language now that "his" is unacceptable. I discussed this a couple of years ago with Bill Walsh, chief copy editor at the Washington Post. He said: "their" is still plural, and the singular/plural mix is still NOT acceptable. But what's "correct" does change over time ...

Fred, you might enjoy a look at Walsh's Web site, http://www.theslot.com/ - he exposes embarrassing mistakes made by journalists.

Posted by: Lin B | December 1, 2003 8:51 AM

Zinsser deals with this in _On Writing Well_. The problem of gender is with us now. He suggests either putting it into the second person, you, or rephrasing the sentence. In this case, I can see that you want to repeat the "one person" for emphasis and contrast, but instead of the possessive pronoun, you could simply say "the county" or "the home county." Another thing I do is just alternate. One person, her county, one person his something else. Another possibility is to turn it into "we," as in Perhaps we could do more to protect our home county. In this case, though, you're trying for the problem of the lone activist in the face of the Forces of Ugliness and Destruction. So far, though, I agree that "one person" can't protect "their" county, unless you've elsewhere referred to a group of people. The folks in the county look with dismay at the changes, but one person can't protect their county (where the they refers to the others aforementioned.)

Posted by: trish | December 1, 2003 9:31 AM

I'm an editor. The use of "their" as a non-gender specific third person singular pronoun is not yet correct, but is a very common workaround for a bug in the English language. I tend to expunge it from formal writing when I edit, in favor of recasting the sentence or using the third person singular feminine if gender is indeterminate.

The thing is, the use of "their" in this sense fills a much-needed role in the language, and unless a better workaround is created, singular "their" will almost certainly become accepted in formal writing over the next century. I use it in informal writing without hesitation.

In fact, the only reason I expunge it from formal writing is due to the word's potential to distract those who read a piece primarily for correct grammar rather than meaning. Eventually, the point will come where I will decide such people aren't worth worrying about.

Posted by: Chris Clarke | December 1, 2003 12:00 PM

Um, nice entry.

Posted by: Trey | December 1, 2003 6:05 PM

"Places are spaces that have souls"

I love this phrase. It's as good a definition as any and better than most.

Posted by: Rana | December 1, 2003 7:53 PM

Keep on painting those word pictures Fred. Photographs are wonderful for allowing others to see what a place looked like in the past but a picture cannot tell another what the experience was like living there.

Posted by: Clarence | December 2, 2003 8:40 AM

Quite by accident I landed on your site "fragments~from Floyd" while searching for historic farmhouse paint colors but I stayed awhile and completely enjoyed myself. I've lived in Texas for the last dozen years so it was so awesome to see the snow scenes similar to the ones that I loved so well in the adjacent state of West Virginia. My fifth-greatgrandfather Soloman Washington possibly died there in 1878

Posted by: Sandra Burns | September 22, 2004 8:17 PM

Source:
http://www.fragmentsfromfloyd.com/fragments/2003/12/enduring_places_unaltered_spac.html

neighborhood story

By prairie point

You could easily think that there is nothing worth preserving about this neighborhood. It has no historic value. There are similar ones all around the city. It is just a unremarkable collection of small 60-year-old cottages originally built for working-class families that happens to be surrounded on three sides by big estates that cost twenty times as much or more. Still, a few years ago for a brief period a handful of people thought it was worth trying to keep it as it was.

For years the neighborhood changed slowly. When a house changed hands new owners would modernize the kitchen or add on a master bedroom suite or a family room. When we moved here ten years ago some of the houses were still in the hands of original owners. Most people knew their neighbors. They borrowed each others tools and looked out for each others kids. There was a small-town or country feel to the place even though it was in the city.

Then something gradually started to be different. New houses started to go up on the few remaining vacant lots and when they were filled up old houses started to get torn down to make way for new ones. These houses were much bigger. They filled their lots to such an extent there was scarcely room for a tree. Instead of a porch swing and rose bushes in front they presented a row of garage doors and a paved driveway.

At first we thought nobody would buy these houses and the developers would soon give up and go away. But that did not happen. A few people recognized that these changes would destroy the small-town feel of the place and decided to try to do something about it. They took over the moribund neighborhood association and tried to rally the neighborhood to their side. They began to publish a newsletter to advocate their point of view and to hold meetings. Legally there was nothing to be done since the neighborhood was developed piecemeal and had no restrictions other than regular city codes. But they believed that if everyone in the neighborhood shared their values and stuck together they could prevent the changes from taking over. They passed around petitions and presented them to builders.

From the beginning you could see that it was not going to work. There were a lot of people at the meetings but afterward they would shake their heads and say “Yes, it’s a shame, but everyone should have the right to do as they want with their own property.” Besides they might soon be able to sell out at a handsome profit and move on anyway.

Someone at least was threatened. There arose an alternative neighborhood newsletter, published anonymously, which satirized the association leaders and went so far as to name “tacky yard of the month” awards.

In the end of course they failed. All of the leaders have sold out and moved away. In a final act of bitterness they formally dissolved the neighborhood association and mailed the charter back to the state. One woman even sold her property to a developer. The house going up there now looks as if it may turn out to be one of the ugliest.

Posted by Bill Hopkins on December 2, 2003 10:58 AM

Comments

Sounds like my neighborhood...started out as a place for vacation cottages, then it became really upscale, then it transitioned into individual retirement homes, and THEN the developers found it and cookie cutter houses are popping up everywhere, cheap, tacky, and change hands every year!! Bummer!

Posted by: Mary Lou at December 2, 2003 12:14 PM

Much the same story that I saw unfold over the years in all the neighborhoods I lived in since we moved to suburbia in California.

Luckily, where we live right now it would be hard to build bigger houses given the forbidding slope of the hill and the friable nature of the rock that covers it. We don't have the prettiest backyards here, but at least we still have a bit of breathing space between houses.

Posted by: maria at December 3, 2003 03:15 PM

Source: http://www.prairiepoint.net/journal/archives/000228.html

Tuesday, December 02, 2003

By CassandraPages

ECOTONE post for December 1, 2003: “Preserving Place”

For many years I’ve puzzled over the fact that some of us seem to bond with certain places, almost as if a certain landscape, certain paths, certain moments we experience within a place become imprinted upon us forever. Like parents and children, some of us bond fast, and some not at all, and some of us bond to a particular place while others are more egalitarian, spreading their affection and care evenly over all of nature.

I care deeply about the entire natural world, especially the wilderness. But there is one place on earth that seems to have a special hold on me: the land of central New York State and the area around the lake where I grew up, and my parents still live. Driving into the region, there’s a point when I feel instinctively that I'm "home". It’s something about the geology, the particular glacial understructure of the land, combined with its agricultural history, that give rise to the openness of the fields and woods and pastures that roll over the low hills, and cause streams and rivers to

flow in the valleys. The lake itself is a small glacial lake of irregular shoreline. My grandfather, his business partner, and my father bought the lake and the surrounding land in the late 1950s and divided it into lots for development. Gradually houses and cabins were built on the lots, but the developers had the foresight to establish a Lake Association whose responsibility was preserving, as much as possible, the quality of the water and the character of the lake. Motorboats have never been allowed, and there are rules for what can and can't be built, and where, and what can happen on the shoreline or in the water itself. Over the years the lot owners, a mixed-income community of people who now mostly live there full-time, have been pretty consistent in preserving the quality of life and at least sections of natural habitat, despite the construction of homes.

I remember when there were almost no houses on the lake. I was very young, and we'd go up on weekends with a picnic and sit on the shore, fishing, or make a bonfire for warmth in the evening. My grandparents built a cabin, and next to it my father and mother built, with their own hands, the house where they live today. I carried rocks, spread tar on the concrete foundation walls, climbed on the roof, found fossils and just-hatched snapping turtles in the excavated earth. While the adults worked, I explored every inch of the land near the lake and across the road in the woods. I knew where the deepest blue hepaticas bloomed in early spring, and the respectful distance to keep between myself and the weasel's home so that he would come out, in his brown coat in summer and white in winter, to stare back curiously at this large fellow animal.

I've never owned a piece of land, except for the in-town lot where our house stands. In recent years, though, I've come to think more and more about the lake house and the woods I hope I'll someday inherit. During a recent visit back there, I asked my father to show me the map of the undeveloped lots across the road, and then we walked along the boundaries. There were two lots, inaccessible, that had been held by other people for a long time, and during the past few months my father was able to buy them. Now the property is contiguous. It's not large, but it is the longest stretch of undeveloped property near the lake, and it backs up on cultivated fields that are unlikely to ever be subdivided. My father told me that if I ever needed money in an emergency, there were now several excellent building lots. I'm grateful for that. But my real desire is to care for and preserve this land forever.

As I've thought about writing this piece, Thoreau's phrase "In wildness is the preservation of the world" kept coming back to me. This little spot on earth is barely wild, and it may only be special to me and a few other humans, but I know that I am meant to take care of it, and to take my turn in caring for the lake itself. "In wildness" is its preservation, but also mine. I know that a part of me – perhaps a far larger part than I even realize – would die if the woods turned to grass and human dwellings, or a new generation of lot owners voted to allow motorboats and chemical weed control.

The reason for this is that wildness does not only exist in nature, but in us. We are wild too, living in bodies made of stone and earth, star and water. Our souls remember the connections, even as our minds forget; we dream of water, and branches, and sky.

7:25 PM

Source: http://cassandrapages.blogspot.com/2003_11_09_cassandrapages_archive.html

Squatting Lightly On the Earth

By Laughing Knees

Oak tree standing beside the Maine coast, U.S.A., 1987.

This is the twelfth installment of the bi-weekly topics at Ecotone: Writing About Place. This week's topic is Protecting Place. Please have a look at other contributions to the topic, or join in the discussion yourself.

With Russia's official declaration earlier today that it would not ratify the Kyoto Treaty, because the treaty would limit its economic growth, a confirmation of the blindness and madness of the human world seems to have taken root and the shoots of the consequences will hereby officially make its first, introductory cough. The leaders (and, by association, the populace) are not taking the health of the planet seriously. You really have to question the sanity of people who fail to make the connection between the air they breathe and their own survival. This is the only place we have and yet we go on drunk, oblivious to all warnings. Nothing short of a super-hurricaned, multiple tornadoed, giant tsunamied, mass flooded, collapsing mountains, global food deprived catastrophe will seem to carry the clout needed to ring the bell in people's heads that we are not going to survive this assault on our world.

The knowledge to care for our home is there. We know what to do, if we would only wake up. People like Bush focus on utterly petty concerns like the conquering of Iraq, but completely ignore the evidence of one of the most climactically disastrous years in history. Mass flooding in the States. Unending rain in Japan. Record-breaking heat waves throughout Europe (more than 10,000 people died in France alone). Uncontrolled wild fires in Australia. A new, unprecedented and fearsome drought in northeastern Africa. Huge super typhoons and cyclones in Asia. Unexplained mass dying off of mackerel and sardines due to new oceanic fluctuations. The entire, enormous island of Madagascar on the verge of an environmental collapse. The first melting of the permafrost in Siberia since before the last Ice Age. The breakup of the Antarctic Ross Ice Shelf…

What are people waiting for? Why do we deny that a problem exists? It's like we have gotten caught up in a drunken party and are ignoring a great blaze burning right in our home, ready to bring the whole house down.

I was working for an architecture firm in Boston back in 1989 and one day was sent to measure and evaluate a site for a new holiday resort. I drove alone to the area, passing through wooded hills and New England style farmland. The hill where the resort was proposed stood overlooking a small lake and the surrounding countryside, with barely a break in the trees. I sat and ate lunch, sitting on a log and gazing at the clouds rolling by overhead. Birds twittered and sang in the tranquility, quiet enough to hear bees buzzing and grasshoppers zithering in the grass. As I sat there, the feeling that this place was perfect just the way it was crept up on me. More and more the prospect of walking around the site with a measuring tape and taking notes about the

attributes and problems of the site in terms of architectural needs seemed like a foolish and unnecessary exercise. I did the work as expected, but as I drove back to Boston I resolved then and there that I would not be one of those contributing to the further degradation of the world's already beleaguered natural places.

It's not that there is anything inherently wrong with architecture. Done the right way, architecture can help create extraordinary and integral human artifacts upon the land that exist almost as an extension of the land itself. Most traditional farming communities around the world have developed vernacular designs that work closely with the habitat they exist in, often enhancing the human presence within the landscape. One of the most ecologically balanced, human-altered landscapes in the world is Tuscany, in Italy, where a medium was reached, by which the natural world and the human world could co-exist without destroying one another. Traditional Japanese settlements worked much the same way, often with a buffer zone, a "commons" (zoki-bayashi or sato-yama), where wild animals dwelled and human interference was minimal. Such communities often continued for centuries with little or no deleterious effect on the land. Tokyo itself, when it was still named Edo, was once the largest city in the world, with over a million residents, hardly producing any waste, its water clean, its coastal fish the pride of the country, and nearly everything was reused.

These examples show that humans can create settlements and use local resources wisely, without destroying the delicate balance.

Ecologically efficient rural communities continued mainly because the amounts of resources they consumed and needed for upkeep were small compared to the ability of the landscape to provide, and also because they had time to become familiar with unique local issues of climate, terrain, feeding capacity, and so forth. With time many of these communities came up with unique solutions to problems that only experience could help recognize. The northern New England landscape was once plowed under to plant crops, but the poor soil and rocky conditions eventually caused many homesteaders to give up and move back to the cities, later to be replaced by livestock oriented farming.

Once human settlements began to grow, however, and the demand outstripped the resources, all the problems associated with modern development took over. The problems are so huge today that just attempting to figure out where to start to tackle the issues can leave one reeling.

Architecture itself has fallen into the trap of glamour and riches, often leading the drive into bigger and bigger projects, with less and and less thought given to the consequences. And yet there are architects who have thought deeply about how we might address the issues of huge populations, destruction of natural habitat, overrunning of space, and over-consumption of resources. During the 60's Christopher Alexander and a group of back-to-the-land thinkers at U.C. Berkeley developed the idea of "The Pattern Language", a kind of encyclopedia or almanac of typological precedents used throughout human history for dealing with local conditions or architectural needs. The book of the same name, "The Pattern Language" lists and diagrams hundreds of patterns and ideas that a modern day architect or settlement builder can browse and use within a design context. The genius of this idea is that it takes into account local differences and allows an individual to tailor a project according to individual needs. It is almost the opposite of the standard modular cookie-cutter designs that dominate most large scale development.

Another project that has been developing steadily since the sixties is the Arcosanti project, an ecological town in the middle of the Arizona desert. The brainchild of Italian architect Paolo Soleri, the town is being built by volunteers who develop solutions to onsite problems as they move along. Almost 40 years in the making, the project aims to house an entire town of 5,000 people, while using a minimum of resources and attempting to become an extension of the landscape itself. The idea of using a ecological town stems out of the premise that, if contained in a limited space, the population will cause minimum damage to the surrounding land, while providing all the needs for its inhabitants. Whether or not this idea will succeed remains to be seen.

Malcolm Wells, an architect living in Massachusetts, and with whom I was in contact for a number of years while I was still an architect, is one of the most influential architects promoting "green architecture" (See his book "Gentle Architecture"). He believed that it was important to build human settlements and buildings that put the environment first, so much so that he advocated building designs that actually incorporated the landscape as part of their construction. He proposed cities with forested roofs and subterranean streets to get cars out of the way. He is most famous for his underground houses which, when approached, look like gardens dripping with flowers, grass, and trees.

View of walkway to the dining room of the Hotel Fufu, designed by the Japanese architecture firm, Team Zoo. The area to the left, covered in grass and trees, actually covers an entire underground hall, complete with skylights and clerestories, vents and rafters. Above the Enzan Valley, Yamanashi Prefecture, Japan, 2002.

Shortly before I returned to Japan I had a conversation with Malcom Wells on the telephone. He had just finished apologizing for not being able to take me on as an apprentice, when I asked him what advice he could give me for getting started as an architect, especially in green design. He first replied that I should make sure to get a thorough background in all the essential fields of architecture, such as construction, drafting, structure, materials, typology, history, project management, drawing, and design. Then he said one last thing which has remained with me to this day, and which defines how I want to approach all the work that defines my commitment to the natural world:

He said (at least to this effect), "Forget the new sites and new developments. Forget trying to break new ground on pristine land. Instead, find the ugliest, most polluted, most badly damaged strip of earth you can and dedicate yourself to bringing it back to life. Find the beauty in it and revive it. Coax wild animals back to inhabit it. And when you're done, be able to say that you helped the place to grow more healthy and beautiful than it was before it was destroyed."

This is what the preservation of the world ought to be, I believe. We need to learn to be healers. If nothing else, we can start small, right here where we stand.

Posted by butuki at 03:49 AM in Nature and Place | Permalink | Comments (9)

Comments

This is a truly inspiring piece, written from the heart yet informed and informing. I love the way it ends on such a positive, constructive note. It is a real struggle to work out ways of going

forward in world which is run by uncaring, destructive forces. I have a need to find encouragement and guidance from others more and more these days. So thanks for yours and Malcolm's.

Posted by Coup de Vent at December 4, 2003 06:49 AM

I'm moved. You've packed so much into this post it's hard to know where to begin in responding. Two things that spoke to me in particular, coming from my own background and interest in such ideas, are your question of how people can ignore huge global alterations and your thoughts on finding a home *in* the environment instead of outside it.

A point I have been arguing for some time now is that many of the problems we face in terms of environmental degradation rest, ultimately, on a human conceit that they somehow take place in a world separate from that of human beings. I see the answer to this (well, a limited answer, anyway — the problem is centuries in the making!) is first, challenging the mental and cultural patterns that allow people to think this way easily and without much care, and second, doing things like you advocate here, namely getting people to understandin a gut-level, lived-daily way, the connections between the place they are and the larger world beyond them.

So hard to do, and so necessary. I take small — but real — hope in the fact that more people seem to be speaking of these things these days, even if their voices are not always easy to hear above the drone of the indifferent.

Posted by Rana at December 4, 2003 07:57 AM

This is a beautifully written and most compelling piece. Malcolm Wells' statement puts it exactly right. One of the saddest aspects of so much contemporary development is that it almost never re-uses prior structures or locations; thus we get sprawl and blight — much like the growth of a perennial that sends out shoots to the sides but dies in the center. My husband and I once considered buyin a beautiful piece fo land and buildin gon it, like so many of the people here do. But we opted to stay in our house in the village and try to improve it, and I'm glad. I dont' want to contribute to that overtaking of nature either, any more than I already do by being a consumer.

By the way, I loved "A Pattern Language" and have it on my shelf.

Posted by beth at December 4, 2003 02:51 PM

In college, I picked up a book titled *The Prodigious Builders*, about the structures people made when they didn't bother with plumb lines or squares. I got it mainly for the pictures, because the shapes were so interesting. There was some sections on cave dwellings, and on grass houses, and that sort of thing. Mostly focused on organic building, where people started with whatever was to hand and worked with that until they had a shelter (or whatever it was they wanted).

Posted by pericat at December 4, 2003 05:52 PM

A few weeks ago I wrote about my visit to Bamberger Ranch in the Texas Hill Country, whose owner David Bamberger claims he started out with the "absolute worse piece of land he could find." Actually I noticed a bit of a flair for dramatic effect so maybe it was not really the "absolute" worst.

Whether he knows of Malcolm Wells or not, and he probably does, he has followed his advice to the letter. Streams that were once dry have started to flow once again. He has opened his property to educational tours to show what can be done.

Posted by bill at December 4, 2003 11:12 PM

A great piece, Miguel.

This is a bit tangential, but about sticking with dwellings — yesterday I drove through a housing development that I loathed when it was first built twenty-five years ago. The place was transformed. The houses weren't all the same now: people had altered them & painted them odd colors, trees and shrubs had grown up, sheds had sprouted, fences had mutated and differentiated — all the horrible symmetry and dead, pretentious, abstract design had been overgrown with twenty-five years of human life, and the suburb, tho it may not have been inspiring, looked like quite a decent place to live. There was something very comforting about that.

Posted by Dale at December 4, 2003 11:32 PM

Coup de Vent- In spite of all the awful things going on in the world today, one of the things I do believe about human beings is their incredible ability to imagine. If we would all trust in our imaginations more and think of ways to overcome the problems (not necessarily technologically), we could really create a wonderful world. Who would have imagined something like blogging twenty years ago?

Rana- Europeans often speak of the great shift in human consciousness as the realization that the Earth was not the center of the universe (the Chinese and Indians and Arabs already knew this). I think the next great shift in human consciousness is the final acceptance of the truth that we *are* animals. We know this intellectually, but have yet to really take it to heart. Until we do we will never really understand ourselves and our limitations.

Beth- Ask any architect what buildings they enjoy the most and almost always the answer is an old structure with history and character. There is something compelling and alive about old houses and old places. Perhaps it is a recognition on our part of our own participation in the circle of life.

Pericat- Underground buildings are definitely not anything new. In China people have been living underground for thousands of years. In Cappadocia, Turkey, people have been living in limestone caves and underground for hundreds of years, in some of the most interesting and unusual dwellings ever devised by humans.

Bill- I fell in love with earth shelters the first time I saw them. Besides being very practical and efficient, there is also something inspiring and magical about a home where the garden is part of the structure. Another building philosophy is Baubiologie or Building Biology, an idea first developed in Germany by architect Helmut Ziehe. The philosophy works on the idea of buildings being seen as living organisms, and in its extreme form, being built from actual living things like trees and bamboo and such.

Dale- No matter how much we try to impose our limited systems upon the world, nature will always, in the end, have its way. Humans themselves are intimately natural in their very nature; and with time that will show. Even were we to destroy the entire human veneer, the planet itself would regrow. It is our own survival and our relationship to the natural world that worries me. If

we don't step lightly we will destroy ourselves. Ultimately the "husbandry of nature" is a selfish act… we are only hurting ourselves right now, I think.

Posted by butuki at December 5, 2003 12:43 AM

Underground buildings are definitely not anything new.

I didn't mean to suggest they were, or that this book was focusing on modern buildings; the first third (I've actually re-located it) is mostly pre-history, and is the part I remembered, since it was why I bought the book in the first place. :)

The author is Bernard Rudofsky, if that helps.

Posted by pericat at December 6, 2003 03:13 AM

Pericat… sorry if I sounded as if I were trying to correct you or second-guess you. I actually read Rudofsky's book while in college (I also own "Architecture Without Architects". Rudofsky was one of the people who got me interested in vernacular architecture, and in architecture without some special, cliquish status). I was trying to fit you into a general discussion with the others who made comments and to use your comment as a springboard reflecting my comments about a "new" type of architecture. Your comment contrasted well with what I was saying and I wanted to put my own post in perspective. Sorry for not wording it better (•j•)v

Posted by butuki at December 6, 2003 09:43 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20031217140744/http://www.butuki.com/archives/2003_12.html

Changing Landscape

By London and the North

It's a changing world out there. From hard crunch underfoot to soft sink-and-glide. Mirror-like, frozen and wind raised surfaces of our canal. Canopy and candelabra'd skylines.

Today I summoned up energy to write to the director who asks for but doesn't really want feedback. I'm struggling with being ethically consistent. The fact is I'm ethically knackered.

I think one of the reasons, a key reason, that I couldn't get it together to write about Protecting Place at Ecotone is that I feel like I'm aware of protection issues a lot of the time and often take one kind of action or another about those kind of things. Not terribly effective action. Not all that well thought out. But I often feel the need to do something.

This weekend, a neighbour made a bonfire on the common land opposite my house. We live in a conservation area. It's a shared space and has heathers, ferns, gorse and many wild flowers (not at this time of year) growing on it. We avoided eye contact when I walked past and pretended not to see each other. I walked around the moor preoccupied knowing my speaking outness is tired.

Which issues should one take up in life? Is there an answer to this anywhere? Surely someone has the answer. I am increasingly attracted to cliches these days. So any ideas welcome.

When I came back down from the moor, having rehearsed fourteen hundred variations between Excuse me, I-hope-you-don't mind-me-mentioning-it to For-G-d's-Sake-what-the.... Anyway, I went over and chose some words from the politer end of the spectrum and was told that 1) there had always been a fire on that spot (Ah that's okay then) and 2) they would have had to PAY if they'd taken it all to the tip (Ah yes I see). I pushed it a bit but the dog was barking madly so I flung her ball across the hill to keep her quiet. Unfortunately it landed in the worst bramble patch up there so I had to abandon the conversation and climb up to retrieve the bloody thing while she looked on saying how bad the brambles were. In my viillage such sympathy is usually reserved for what is perceived as 'offcumden' ignorance.

Posted by Coup de Vent at 10:26 PM | Comments (5) Comments: Changing Landscape

Not to be flippant, but perhaps your dog choosing that very moment to distract you was his way of being a friend? He made you look at precisely the right portion of the scene to remind you of what you feel is important... brambles no less! Wise dog!

Posted by butuki at December 9, 2003 04:48 AM

Totally profound and very funny!

Posted by Coup de Vent at December 9, 2003 08:15 AM

"...Which issues should one take up in life? Is there an answer to this anywhere? "

CdV, this is a question that has me by the neck and won't let go. The problem is that there is no one-size-fits-all answer. That would be too easy.
It should be stated as: "Which issues should *I* take up...." and that leaves 'one' staring in the mirror at 'one's' stubbornly silent and reproachful reflection.
The subject is preoccupying me too and I am about to try blogifying it.

Posted by Natalie at December 10, 2003 12:07 AM

Natalie, I look forward to reading your posts on The Way Forward with a certain keenness. I fear that I may be an impetuous and relatively haphazard taker upper of issues. Responding to things often allows any rage I feel to subside. Doing nothing drives me mad. And unfortunately doing something has quite unpredictable results.

Posted by Coup de Vent at December 10, 2003 07:43 PM

I just got finished spiking an indignant e-mail I was on the edge of firing off -- before I realized I would make a fool of myself. The older I get the more I realize I have to stick the the problems in my back yard and let those younger, with more energy, take up saving the world. Saving the commons from idiots strikes me as about my speed; your neighbor was cheerfully ignorant of the dioxins and other toxic chemicals she was putting into the air you were both breathing ... if I lived in the country, it would be in the hope of AVOIDING lung cancer, actually. A bit of frost from the chastisee is to be expected; it's a sign you got her attention.

Posted by P. at December 11, 2003 06:27 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040103120519/http://www.airenet.co.uk/alife/2003_12.html

Mythic Places

Bi-Weekly Topic for Dec. 15, 2003

Mythic Place

By Fragments from Floyd

Mythic Place: the topic for this biweekly Ecotone writing. The idea brings to mind stories-- grand, old stories-- that become associated with people and places and things that may or may not have existed in fact. Paul Bunyan and John Henry are mythic. BigFoot and maybe the mysterious but real Brown Mountain Lights in Burke County where we used to live-- are myths, or mythic realities-- associated with particular places.

While it not mythic, the story of Mary Draper Ingles is epic-- a larger-than-life heroic drama that pervades this region. This woman's experience in these very hills enters my thoughts often and comes to me as I contemplate "mythic place". In our comings and goings through Montgomery County each week, we unknowingly cross Mary Ingles footsteps with our humming wheels. It is a story that deserves a wider audience, and so I will simply offer her tale to you here. And another account here.

Posted by fred1st at 5:41 AM | Permalink

Source: http://www.fragmentsfromfloyd.com/fragments/2003/12/mythic_place.html

Mythic Place

By P.

I'm an idiot. On [Saturday] I thought out a contribution to Mythic Places that says I'm looking for great deeds and noble purposes of long ago and not finding them in shopworn Ohio, but on Sunday, I repent my shallowness -- even though I liked what I wrote.

For I have walked the Cleveland streets where Eliot Ness walked, on his long, sorry slide after busting gangs in Chicago; I have climbed the steps, now demolished, that Dr. Sam Sheppard climbed on his tragic quest to keep his innocence; I have walked the halls where America's first big-city black mayor walked (though ignobly on my part, in the mere pursuit of a birth certificate). Lincoln came to Cleveland, and Dr. King; and all manner of scoundrels; and hopeful, ordinary folk whose purposes were no less high because their powers were small.

I have seen the modest social hall where immigrants and visitors conceived and shaped one of the Balkans' few successes, Czechoslovakia. Often I have crossed Public Square, where thousands of women once rallied for the right to vote and thousands of men rallied again and again for the right to negotiate over the shape and value of their work. I have counted the coins on John D. Rockefeller's grave and pondered something that proletarian and plutocrat proved

together, before greed took over and rust devoured us: That in sharing wealth and space and ideas, and in tolerating, if not embracing, those we share with, we all prosper.

I think that maybe I mythed the point of the exercise, for that's a truth, not a legend. But it's a truth people are apt to forget in the morning, anyhow, so with your permission, I'll let both entries ride.

Myth/Placed

I must have mythed out when they were explaining "mythic places," because I can't make up my mind whether they're places of legend or legendary places.

The real world I live in is more abused than ancient, like an old porch railing that has been scraped and painted a dozen times but never stripped, so that a thick, irregular surface obscures the detail of the wood. Ohio has been cut-over, dug under, drained, plowed and paved for 200 years, and at this point, the rich lands that pioneers found when they went "beyond the Allegheny" are themselves the stuff of legend. For heroes, we have Ulysses Grant and James Garfield, and stolid regiments who went to fight at Chickamauga or Chattanooga.

Hardly "mythic," at least not yet. For mythic, I want great deeds, long enough gone to have lost their gory details and gained that extra dimension storytellers add, of moral significance and the sense that we are not alone on the surface of the Earth, that there is more to what I see than what I understand.

After 200 years, we're still strangers in this land. The Erie, the Wyandot, the folks whose ancestors lived and told stories here are gone, and the stories that scholars have collected aren't meaningful to me, child of a far different culture. I have stood and wondered at some of the earthworks a lost people built in the southern part of the state -- but myth? I wish I knew enough.

I climbed once to the top of the Cahokia Mound on the plains of Illinois opposite St. Louis. The earthwork stood at the center of a great city of 30,000 people until 1300 AD. What I saw was haze and the odd ranch house, but the archaeologists have reported lost dwellings everywhere, signs of a complex society, and courtyards possibly used for games. Surely over four or five centuries, that green place could boast of great deeds and higher meanings -- but when you come down to it, I know more about the Babylonians. Could it be one of the cities of Mormon teaching? More homework to do.

Maybe somewhere out there, there's a legend worth traveling to. You know, a myth is as good as a mile

Source: http://my.core.com/~pzicari/text/Myth.htm

Myth and Place

By Lorianne

I don't (yet!) publish a weblog, but I do enjoy yours. (Editorial note: several weeks after posting this, I did start a weblog, [Hoarded Ordinaries].) This is from my offline journal for Wed, Dec 17, 2003: in it's own roundabout way, it explores Mythic Place...

Just past 8:30 am as I sit here writing at the kitchen table. The refrigerator hums loudly; beside it, the dog slurps his breakfast. In the office Chris masters a CD of a local choir's Christmas concert: the usual mishmash of sounds that means home.

I just sent an email to Chris's dad. He'd responded to my latest [Pedestrian Thoughts], suggesting that the scant references to symbolic birds at the end were more effective than the isolated paragraphs on birding in the middle. And thus with one insightful comment, his keen lawyer's mind honed in on the cusp of the debate in nature writing today: to what extent should we focus on actual places peopled with real birds, and to what extent should we focus on spaces of the spirit, locales populated by symbolic creatures like Dickinson's [feathered hope]?

In my mind ,we should do both: Nature is, as Emerson argued, the symbol of spirit; at the same time, though, Beauty is its own excuse for being (as he argued [elsewhere]). And so this table at which I sit writing is at once a Platonic table, a representative of any table at which someone might sit and write; this dog, a symbol of any dog; and Chris, an emblem of any man, or husbands in general.

At the same time, though, it should certainly matter that this particular table was purchased in Nashua, NH, bought from a company that has no qualms, I'm sure, about selling mass-produced tables made from lumber harvested from rain forests or other shady sites; it should matter that this dog named Reggie is a chow-shepherd mix, 7 years old, rescued from a pound just outside Boston some 5 years ago. It should also matter that as I wrote that last sentence, Reggie was pacing about, haunted by squirrels either real or imagined, and at the end of that same sentence he plopped down noisily on the bedroom floor, sighing.

And the Chris who sits clicking at the computer, repeating the same recorded phrase over and over in an attempt to get a song ending just right, is not Everyman much less Every Husband: instead, he's Chris from Michigan; Chris who quit a corporate computer job (Chris the ex-VP) to play Renaissance lute for pure joy; Chris the son of a retired lawyer who reads stacks of books in a living-room in Michigan and who enjoys discussing them with his lit scholar daughter-in-law here in New Hampshire.

And so this Keene where we three--Chris, the dog, and I--as well as this America where Chris's dad also joins into the intellectual fray, connected via electronic impulses sped via modem and cable lines...this Keene and this America are simultaneously spiritual places as well as actual. It matters that Keene is home to some 20,000 actual souls, some of whom write, some of whom sing, and some of whom take their dogs on actual walks, treading trails that once were railroad beds, lines that took actual goods from actual factories (now abandoned) to deliver to actual people who wanted to buy things (including mass-produced tables) in the commercial heyday after the Civil War.

So is Keene an actual place or a mythic one? Is it merely my humble home, a place that still surprises me, a newcomer who moved here less than 6 months ago? Or is it a mythic place, a place representative of something larger and greater, a place where my struggle to get out of bed and *write* each morning is a universal battle of wills, Beowulf against Grendel?

When we first moved to New Hampshire, I was shocked to learn that 20 minutes up the road from our subdivision house in Hillsborough was the town of Nelson, NH: the place where May Sarton wrote her *Journal of a Solitude*. And not a half hour in the other direction from Hillsborough lies Warner, NH, the home of Maxine Kumin, whose *In Deep* essays I'd eagerly read in the suburbs of Randolph, MA the same spring that we adopted Reggie. Reading of Sarton's self-imposed solitudes in a quaint New England town and reading Kumin's musings on a neighbor's pregnant mare in rural New Hampshire, I'd imagined these places to be *wild*--distant and removed from my actual life of shopping lists and indifferent students.

The thought that art could be written in my backyard--the thought that a mythic house on a hill where people were actually creative, and wrote, did really exist within a comfortable drive from my home--was alarming. If Maxine Kumn is the type of person I could encounter at any moment shopping for groceries at the local store (and she is), then what was I doing with my life? Instead of longing for a mythic table at which an idealized writer could pen universal truths, the stuff of

tomorrow's myths, why wasn't I starting with the actual: this table, this pen, this writer in this place, this moment?

And so now the dog lies resting here in the kitchen, having moved from his spot in the bedroom. The kitchen faucet drops as it did yesterday and the day before that as Chris continues to click at the computer, having moved on to master the next song. Hark the Herald Angels Sing--another myth from another time and place--while here in Keene at 9:14 am on Wednesday, December 17, the rain falls from grey skies onto increasingly sodden, slowly melting snows. Is this place mythic, or is it real? Only the snows know.

Shri Marundeeswarar Temple

By under the fire star

I wrote this a year ago. It's meant to describe to an outsider like myself what it's like to visit a South Indian temple (I'm not a great photographer -- and I didn't take any pictures inside the walls of the temple. There's a much better picture of a typical South Indian temple gopuram than the one I took here*):*

Thiruvanmiyur used to be a small village on Chennai's southern outskirts. Now it is a suburb. Its only distinguishing features are Kalakshetra (where I was a student for two years, long ago) and a temple of Shiva in the form of Marundeeswarar, the Lord of Medicine.

The temple was built in the 11th c. AD. According to the temple history, the sage Agastya came to Shiva with a terrible stomach ache. Shiva cured him, and taught him medicine. He also cured the ailing sun and moon, as a result of which they both worship Shiva here every day. The doorway of the god's inner sanctum faces west, because the sun worships him at sunset. Most Shiva temples include shrines to the nine planets, including sun and moon. This temple does not, because the sun and moon themselves are worshippers. Valmiki, author of the epic *Ramayana*, prayed here for Shiva to appear before him. Shiva did so, and there is a shrine which marks the spot.

Outside the temple is a tank, a square artificial pond with stone steps leading down on all four sides. In the center is a square 'island', also reached by steps, just large enough for a stone pavilion. When I came here years ago, I watched women doing their laundry, boys playing, men bathing. Red lotuses floated on the surface of the water.

Now the tank was dry. Five or six goats ate scrubby grass at the bottom. People had thrown garbage there, amid which white plastic shopping bags gleamed. I parked in an open expanse of soft dust in front of the temple. A brown chicken ran in front of my car. There were more goats, and people resting in the shade of a few trees.

When you face the temple, the first thing you see is a tall gopuram, a roughly triangular tower five or six storeys high, covered with figures: gods, goddesses, terrifying protective deities, arranged in tiers like a wedding cake, all painted in vivid colours. Pigeons flutter in its nooks and crannies.

The gopuram rises over a tall green double door, studded with heavy bolts. This gateway is in the middle of a red-and-white striped wall around the temple compound. White-painted bulls sit on top of the wall. The bull, Nandi, is Shiva's vehicle and also his greatest devotee.

looking toward the gopuram over the east gate from the south.
Nandis sit on top of the wall

There is another dry tank in front of the temple, smaller, with broken, uneven steps. [Note: The two tanks have been renovated since I wrote this, partly in an attempt to recharge the water table, which has sunk dramatically because of overuse due to population increase.] At one end of the tank another Nandi faces a small shrine.

A man sold strings of marigolds and jasmine beside the main door. Worshippers kept their shoes under a rickety lean-to.

As I walked toward the temple I followed an elderly lady heading in the same direction. Her grey hair was pulled back in a tight bun. She wore a rose-coloured cotton sari with a yellow border, and a gold and diamond jewel on one nostril. She left her sandals in the lean-to and walked to the shrine beside the neglected tank. She faced the deity, joined her hands, prayed, circled the shrine clockwise. The deity was a lingam, the abstract phallic symbol which is the most common representation of Shiva. It was draped in white cloth. Tiny lamps -- mud cups filled with oil and cotton wicks -- burned in front of it.

the small tank to the left of the east gate,
with Nandi, under a stone canopy, facing a shrine

I also circled the shrine, and followed the lady to the main temple door. People were entering in a steady trickle, some of them touching the high stone threshold with their right hands, and raising their hands to their heads.

From outside, the gopurams (there were two, over the east and west gates) gave an impression of massiveness and height. But across the threshold was open space and human dimensions. A number of one-story stone buildings were set in a large dirt courtyard, covering about an acre. The principal buildings were: Shiva's shrine, divided in two parts for two different forms of the same god; two small shrines in front of the main one, for Shiva's two sons; and, on the right, a shrine for Shiva's consort. A number of minor shrines were scattered around the compound.

Of the two sons, Ganesh, the elephant-headed Remover of Obstacles and God of Beginnings, was the more popular. All the worshippers stopped to pray to him on their way to the main building. Many performed a gesture which is reserved for Ganesh: cross your arms over your chest; from there, reach your hands up to grasp your earlobes, so that your crossed arms represent elephant ears; bend your knees and bob up and down three times. A priest was stationed with a round brass tray which held an oil lamp, cow dung ash, and flowers. As the worshippers came up he waved the tray in front of the god, then held it out. Each person cupped both hands palm down over the flame, then moved their hands in the air over their faces and the tops of their heads. The priest gave each one some ash to put on their foreheads, and a flower petal.

The first chamber of the main temple was an open hall supported by thirty six pillars carved with deities. Wooden carriages for temple processions were stored there: fantastic birds, lions, lotus blossoms, all brightly painted; and a special swinging palanquin for Shiva's annual marriage ceremony. There was also an intriguing noise-making machine: two small kettle-drums with metal drumsticks poised, two bells, two cymbals, and a motor to set everything in motion.

At the end of this pillared hall was a shrine to Shiva as Tyagaraja Swami, in human form. This was the god which was taken outside the temple during festivals. The shrine was a building within the building, made so the devotees could circle it.

From Tyagaraja's hall I turned right and entered the shrine to the main deity, Shri Marundeeswarar. This was the largest room in the temple. It also contained a separate building inside for the god's sanctum. It was dim, lit by sunlight from the pillared hall, and by dozens of oil lamps. Shri Marundeeswarar was in the form of a black stone lingam, almost completely covered with jasmine garlands and surrounded by oil lamps. The worshippers stand behind railings and peer into the sanctum, lit only by the flickering lamps, so the god seems withdrawn and mysterious. This lingam is supposed to have risen from the earth. The Divine Cow Kamadhenu used to shower the lingam with milk, and there's a nick where a hoof grazed it. The priest goes inside, waves his brass tray in front of the god, brings it out along the railing to the worshippers.

I circled the sanctum, which was surrounded by a stone gutter. The priests bathed the gods every day, before dressing and decorating them, and the gutter was still wet from the morning bath. On special days there were elaborate baths. During Shiva's annual festival the lingam was bathed with water and shikakai (a pre-soap herbal cleanser), then with honey, milk, yoghurt and navamrta (nine fruits mixed together). Women could bring their gold jewellry to the temple, and the priests would put it on the lingam and bathe it along with the lingam. The bathed jewellry was 'good for health.' People sponsored special baths, and offered clothing to the gods.

I walked outside to continue my clockwise trip around the compound. Cows were tethered near the wall, to provide milk, ghee and cow dung for the rituals. An old priest and a young one sat side by side on the ground with a book. Both were bare-chested except for the Brahmin's sacred thread, and wore white dhotis. The old man chanted a Sanskrit verse, the young one repeated it.

I passed the west gate, surmounted by its gopuram. I could see the barred opening into the main shrine -- oil lamps and darkness -- for the setting sun to worship Shiva.

Further on, a platform surrounded the temple tree. It was ancient, its trunk partly hollowed but alive, fragrant, surrounded with naga stones, fertility deities. These were tombstone-shaped, carved with twining snakes. They were decorated with flowers, and smeared heavily with yellow turmeric and red sindoor. More oil lamps burned in front of them. A man stood praying to them, singing a hymn under his breath.

Finally I visited Shiva's consort, Tripurasundari, which means "Beautiful Woman of the Triple City (of the gods)." Her shrine followed the same pattern as the others: the goddess in her small chamber within a larger pavilion, almost hidden under a silk sari and flowers, the priest with his tray of oil lamp, ash, flowers. I sat cross-legged on the goddess's stone front porch for awhile, along with several other women, writing my notes.

In the years when I studied here the gods seemed so close, even though they weren't mine. People kept smaller versions at home, worshipped them, bathed and dressed them. The Southern classical music tradition consists entirely of hymns. Everyone knew the stories of gods' activities on earth. God appeared (in his complete form: the temple forms contain the divine, but the divine is larger than they are) on this very spot, right here, see? The Divine Cow's hoof grazed Shiva and left this mark, here! I still know intellectually that to some people the gods are immanent, available; sitting on the porch of Tripurasundari's shrine, I could feel for a moment how it must be.

by Nancy at 17.9.03 0 comments

Source: http://underthefirestar.blogspot.com/2003_09_01_archive.html

Mythic Place

By older and growing

Fred and Beth recently pointed me in the direction of the Ecotone wiki; writing about place. There's a bi-weekly topic, currently Mythic Place, so I thought I'd give it a go. Here's what resulted...

A child’s-eye-view of the world tends to build by a process of accretion. New knowledge

materialises in isolated chunks and is added into the picture where it seems to fit best, or sits on its own, uncertain of a place in the whole. Islands of knowledge form and grow as new pieces of the jigsaw puzzle are added; sometimes the islands join to create a new panorama of knowledge; sometimes also the ever-creative mind of a child fills in the gaps as best it can to create a self-consistent world-view.

I grew up in the outer suburbs of London; my view of the world centred on our own little corner of England. I knew our street, I knew the neighbouring streets where my friends lived and the park reached by a short-cut over our back fence. As I grew older I got to know the neighbouring suburbs as well. But knowledge of any real places much further afield had to be pieced together from fragments of largely second- or third-hand information – pictures in books, glimpses on black-and-white TV, descriptions in stories. I read a lot as a child and developed a particular fondness for two series of books whose stories took place against a backdrop of rural England. Thankfully they had few pictures, only a small number of line drawings, so visualising the landscape in which they were set was almost entirely down to my imagination.

So it was that, without only the sketchiest first-hand knowledge, I built myself a child's-eye-view of the English countryside. A mythical landscape; an archetype; an ideal; a mosaic assembled from all of those idealised portraits reflecting the countryside as those authors wished it to be. My mythical countryside was an adventurous schoolboy's dream – freely accessible woods to explore, trees to climb (with perfectly-spaced branches), fields to laze in; streams to wade through (just shallow enough not to come over the top of Wellington boots), traffic-free county lanes to stroll down, grassy hills to race up and roll down, all linked together by winding sandy tracks and pathways (no heavy, cloying mud here) with delights around every corner. Hedgerows with perfectly red berries; haystacks of soft, dry hay; a grass snake slithering into the undergrowth; a heron silhouetted motionless before a pond at evening.

Seasons in this land of make-believe were, of course, perfect. Snow came early in winter – before Christmas, naturally, and just the right consistency for perfectly-rounded snowballs - and stayed clinging to rooftops and trees until the spring, magically disappearing overnight without ever turning to dirty wet slush. Summer days were long, hot, carefree.

Occasionally now I'll come across a scene that's like a tile fallen out of my mythic mosaic and materialised in a hidden corner of the real world. A combination of light and colour, feature and form, creates a vista that triggers a recognition of that imagined land.

More often though, reality disappoints. Farmyards, for example, are paved in concrete, permanently awash with mud, littered with old chemical fertiliser bags. Farming is rarely a profitable business, and it shows – everything looks old, used, a little shabby, often with makeshift repairs. Farm outbuildings constructed in the cheapest, most functional materials – concrete blocks, corrugated sheeting. The peace of the countryside disturbed by the incessant drone of a diesel generator. Access blocked by rusting barbed wire.

My mythical countryside remains a dream, and always will. But perhaps the only thing really separating dream and reality are the cumulative and ever-present effects of our apparent need to dominate the landscape. It's still just possible to see past the artificiality and decay that modern

living imposes on the land, and to appreciate the natural beauty that inspired the myth.

// posted by andy @ 11:19 AM permalink

Comments

Nice treat to go to Ecotone today and see your contribution. I think I have struggled a bit between "mythic" places and "ideal" places or personal archetypes as you describe. I don't know what the person who proposed "mythic place" would say about this distinction, and it is not important. Still, it was a hard topic to get my teeth around, so I didn't struggle with it too long.
fredf | Homepage | 12.18.03 - 12:41 pm | #

Admittedly I may have interpreted the title in a slightly tangential way - but it was the first time I've tried "writing to order" so I was happy to grab hold of any idea that floated past!
Andy | Homepage | 12.18.03 - 12:44 pm | #

Andy, I was delighted to find your contribution at Ecotone! And an excellent one it is. (A friend in England just sent me one of those "perfect" English-countryside calendars.) I hope you'll keep responding to the topics. Which reminds me - I still haven't written mine...like Fred, I've found this one a little hard to pin down.
beth | Homepage | 12.19.03 - 7:42 pm | #

Source:
http://olderandgrowing.blogspot.com/2003_12_01_olderandgrowing_archive.html#107174635207030107

Mythic Place

By CassandraPages

Stonehenge. *Photo by J.*

ECOTONE TOPIC: MYTHIC PLACE

Driving out of London, the detached brick houses and backyard garden plots gradually give way to countryside. Sitting on the wrong side of the little rented car, I watched out the window while my husband, happy in the left-handed world of British motoring, drove west. Lulled by the rhythm of the rolling grassy land - undulating, calm, with hardly a tree -I suddenly sat up, astounded. There it was, in the distance, rising all alone from the Salisbury Plain. My skin contracted into gooseflesh.

This was more than twenty years ago. When we finally arrived at the site, we parked in a lot that had been cleverly designed to the left and below the highway, so that buses and cars would be largely out of sight when you were viewing the stones themselves. We also arrived in the days when you could walk right into the circle of stones. To our surprise and relief, there was no American-style souvenir shop, full of plastic monuments sealed in snow-globes, or reproduced as inflatable life-size replicas. You just walked up some steps, onto a gravel walkway set into the grass, and there you were.

It was a grey, misty English day: perfect for seeing this place that I had wanted to visit my entire life. I hadn't known what to expect; what the scale would feel like, or how the site was situated in real life, not just in pictures; whether it would have power once I actually stood there. And to this day, I can't really describe what I felt. I remember that the stones weren't as big as I had thought they might be, but feeling dwarfed by their massiveness as much as their height. I remember the

quiet, and the strangeness that emanated from the juxtaposition of the vast horizontal plain, and these sudden, standing stones, arranged in a way that felt both supremely human, and supernatural. I felt like a visitor in a place I didn't understand, but ought to, on some long-forgotten level. I remember wonder, awe, and mystery, and the sense of a tenuous line stretching from myself back into ancientness, beyond the power of any tools I could summon, beyond language, experience, or reason.

As we stood there and moved around the stones, we heard a low thumping in the earth, far away, and then the unmistakable rumbling of airplane engines. Low on the horizon and then quite near, flew a large military transport plane. We watched as this plane, and then another, and another, moved ponderously in the grey sky through the voids between the stones, while the deep thumps of test-bombing continued in the distance.

It was 1982, during the Falklands conflict, and Maggie Thatcher had the RAF at the ready. Strange. When my father had heard we were going to Salisbury, he told me about being stationed nearby on maneuvers before crossing the channel during the Normany invasion, and how he had once driven his tank through the cobblestone streets of the medieval city. I watched the planes, and thought about him.

We left the site and continued on to the city of Salisbury, where the spire of the cathedral also rises above the landscape. We walked up the same cobblestone streets my father remembered, crossed the cathedral grounds, and entered. The interior was cold, stony, dampâ€¦and lovely in the early afternoon light. We walked around quietly, reading about the site's Norman origins, and the cathedralâ€™s founding in 1220. There were ancient woolen banners above our heads - tattered and faded - and the sign beneath told us, incredibly, that they had been brought back from the Crusades. Nearby, the effigy of a Crusader knight lay above his tomb, and close to him, the body of a Saracen who had been brought back from the Middle East. So not much had changed. My husband and I looked at the tombs, and then at each other.

"My relative," I said.

"And mine," he replied.

Read other responses to "Mythic Place" at the Ecotone Wiki.

5:46 PM

Source: http://cassandrapages.blogspot.com/2003_12_14_cassandrapages_archive.html

And, Wendy, There are Mermaids

By The Geek Icon

If you know me, you know that when I was two my parents sold their house and bought a 38' cutter which they named Katherine (after my mom's middle name). We lived on the boat, which

tied up to a slip in Oxnard Harbor. On weekends we would often untie the lines from the dock and sail out to the Channel Islands which skirt the Santa Barbara channel just offshore from Southern California.

I was very young at that stage, but we lived aboard Katherine for five years, so a lot of my later memories from ages five, six and seven are pretty vivid. I indelibly love sailing and the water as a result.

When I knew my dad was coming to visit, I immediately booked a reservation with a sailing club for he and Adam and I to go sailing in Pittwater, just north of Sydney. I took a sailing class in college, but I was still surprised at how well I handled myself. I got a feeling for the wind ingrained into my mutable child's brain that couldn't be erased in the intervening years. We paid for the day's sail, but it wasn't just a boat charter -- we got to be part of the crew, pulling lines to tack and jibe, and we got a turn at the helm if we wanted. It was wonderful, it called up a part of my life I'll always deeply love and regret neglecting.

When I was little, we'd often sail to Santa Cruz Island, one of the nearest and largest in the Channel Islands. The north side of the island was inevitably either foggy or windy or both. We sometimes stayed a night or two in Little Scorpion, but often sailed around to the south side where the island shielded the weather and offered mellow, calm, warm anchorages. But before we scuttled off to sun ourselves at Coches Prietos we'd often make a visit to the Dragon Cave.

The Dragon Cave was a sea cave that wound back into the igneous rock of the island through a dark opening large enough only for a dinghy. If the tides weren't right you couldn't squeeze past the twists in the passage. Emanating from the cave was a deep, rhythmic rumbling, because somewhere hidden in the back a dragon was sleeping, snoring loudly. I would insist that choruses of "Puff the Magic Dragon" be sung while I gazed at the cave with a thrill running right through the middle of me.

We only went all the way into the cave a couple of times. As you pushed the dinghy through the darkness, bumping against the bubbled pumice of the cave walls, cool air would rush around you. Finally you alit on a small pebble beach at the back of the cave. A wave would surge in and pull back, rolling and tumbling over the pebbles which would clatter against each other. The clatter would multiply a thousand times over and echo against the rugged cave walls.

Last night we went to watch *Peter Pan* at the cinema. Mr Wiggins and I needed a veg out night, but I didn't really feel like sitting around at home, so this was our solution. The movie wasn't *great* but it was easily enjoyable. It captured the brightness, excitement and color that comes from imaginative and happy children. The screenplay diverged noticeably from the original story, but still captured the spirit of it well, and did include a lot of the good quotes (such as Mrs Darling's hidden kiss, in the right hand corner of her mouth). It was a good film, and it brought about a feeling that grabs a hold of my throat every time I see films of that sort. It squeezes my throat and burns my eyes and makes me think of the Dragon Cave.

I went to the back of the Dragon Cave and though I never saw the dragon, I always kept very quiet so as not to wake it up. I wandered to the very back of the pebble beach and saw the cave continued on back into the darkness, just a slim crack in the rock that you couldn't squeeze through. I saw the pebbles rolling over and over as the waves pushed in and fell back, making that rumbling noise so like a snore. I could understand that rocks were making the sound. But I also knew, with a belief that was fierce and firm in my head, that the dragon still slept there, snoring, back in the darkness.

Source: http://www.geekicon.net/index.shtml/article/582

New Zealand as Middle Earth

By Feathers of Hope (Pica)

This is a very belated entry to the Ecotone Wiki's *joint post on* Mythic Place.

I doubt whether J.R.R. Tolkien ever visited New Zealand but Peter Jackson has ensured that it is now on the global mythic map of the 21st century. It is said that Tolkien was disappointed that

England had no native myths, so he set about writing one--about an England that had long disappeared first into Enclosures and then into the Industrial Revolution. (The Arthurian legends are all of French origin.) *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* read like the Icelandic sagas that were the professor's day job.

Claude Lévi-Strauss insists that myths are a language because they only exist in language; that they must be retold. Jackson's retelling must count, in part because of the introduction of this landscape into the contemporary consciousness.

A quick rereading of parts of Tolkien has struck me in its almost obsessive avoidance of the latinate. Use an Anglo-Saxon word where there is one, he seems to say. Perhaps the latinate in English is less able to evoke myth than the language of Beowulf.

I wonder whether Maori New Zealand is as excited about the success of the films as everyone else seems to be. Ideas, anyone?

Posted by Pica at December 26, 2003 01:23 PM

Comments

I noticed every character in the Rings trilogy basically has a white skin ...

Posted by: P. at January 6, 2004 09:47 PM

Source:
http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2003/12/26/new_zealand_as_m.html

mythic place ... in fragments

By alembic

This post is my response to ecotone's (Deceber 15, 2003) biweekly topic: Mythic Place

For days now I have been trying to compose a post in response to one of ecotones old biweekly topics, myth and place. I started with a few quotes, mixing the essence of different ideas until I ended up with a fairly volatile notion of myth ... something to do with a place becoming mythical only in words.

I got this recipe from books, where else? And, since I went to the trouble of copying these quotes, let me post them here anyway:

Learned (and mostly white male) Europeans like to trot out the strongest in their arsenal of words when they go hunting for that elusive beast of myth that still haunts the landscapes of our consciousness, that realm from which the bright sun of science has all but banished the deep, dark shadows that used to inspire both awe and fear in us and drove us to make art or war out of our responses.

Elias Canetti wrote in The Agony of Flies that a myth is a tale that becomes fresher with every retelling. Robert Calasso, in his book The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony goes on for some 400 pages trying to capture the secret power of myth, that spell the soul casts on itself.

The more I tried to makes sense of my understanding of the spells we cast when we weave words into myths, the more I realized that the one place on this earth that made me feel the power of myth is the one place I can least describe. Not because I lack for words; its because the place is indescribable. Its so large that it doesnt fit into language, if you will.

...

The Sliammon people who once used to live on both sides of the northern part of the Strait of Georgia in British Columbia had settlements in what is now called Theodosia and which is a strip of land on the coast, north of Lund, in the shelter of one of the many inlets of Desolation Sound that break up the land and buffered by the range of massive mountains that rise straight up, seemingly from the water.

Back in the early 1980s I spent some time on that beach in Theodosia. I was involved with a man who had built a cabin on the land. He was a university professor, a man who made his living digging through the mud of words and the layers of syntax to bring up from the depths of confusion clean, tidy propositions capable of bearing truth -- the kind thats indisputable in logical terms.

When the descendants of what remains of the Sliammon people came digging for calms on this reasonable mans beach, he became irate and had gone to the trouble of having the land rezoned just so that he could keep the Sliammon away from his piece of paradise. With his new commercial license, he took the clams, to which he was deathly allergic, as he was to all shellfish, and became a boutique supplier to restaurants along the way of the long commute (miles of driving, two ferry rides and a boat ride) between Theodosia and Vancouver. But thats another story....

The more this man of ideas wrested order and structure out of the land around him, the more I saw the wild and improbable beauty in it. At one point, long after I knew we had no future, I still

accompanied him to Theodosia because, by that time, I was deeply in love with the landscape. There was something in its cold, silent inhumanity that warmed me, comforted me beyond words.

Understand when I say all this that I am not being romantic or crafty with words about this beauty. In this context, when I say beauty, I might be closer to saying truth. I am not talking aesthetics here.

One winters night we boarded the small boat my -- oh what should I call him? Boyfriend? He was hardly that -- anyway we boarded the boat he kept in one of the marinas at Okeover Inlet. Half way across the inlet, in the black silence of the night we discovered that the boat had sprung a leak. We kept bailing out the water from the boat, our fingers were almost frozen, and my icy breath that much colder from fear. I talked of dying, be he was not paying any attention to me. Then I fell silent, too. I saw, for a moment, a death incomprehensible in human terms, for had our boat capsized, we would have perished, slipped under the black water with no witness, human or animal, to mark it.

We made it to the shore, of course.... In the morning, I felt the urge for some ritual, a penance or offering to waters of the inlet and the sentinel of trees along the shore. I wanted to thank some ancient spirit. But there was nothing but silence all around me ... a beautiful, awe-inspiring silence in a landscape in which the skies have descended on the beach to cover everything, except a sliver of water, with snow:

On the beach in Theodosia, the mythical for me was an experience beyond words....

Posted by maria at January 05, 2004 12:10 AM

Comments

Oh yes, silence is the Myth that Places itself in heart not on lips. Those chilling waters felt rather close to my fingers too, thank you for sharing.

Posted by: Daisy-Winifred on January 5, 2004 02:59 PM

What a beautiful, evocative story, Maria... I can't help but think that it was a combination of the place *with* the two opposing human elements in it (the Sliammon and the Boyfriend) and their opposing views on how the land belongs to people that brought it into such a clear focus for you. Perhaps the land temporarily tossed you into space, into another dimension, from which you could see with a mythic perspective the claims put on land and sea by people as various and essentially at odds as the Boyfriend on the one hand and the First Nations people on the other.

Well, I have to put this on my list for spring/summer: find a way to visit/ travel a bit more around here. In 5 years of teenagehood in Victoria and 5 years of mid-20s-hood in Vancouver, I have never managed to get to any of the Gulf Islands, much less Desolation Sound or -- heaven forbid -- the gargantuan journey to the Queen Charlotte's. At least I've seen Tofino and Botanical Beach, but I haven't even been to the Walbran Forest yet. Should visit before our corporatist neo-liberal government makes sure that every tree is striplogged off the land....

PS: glad you made it back alive!

Posted by: Yule Heibel on January 6, 2004 09:48 PM

Yule, had it not been for the Boyfriend, I probably would have never seen that part of B.C. in the first place ... and I can just imagine how different it might look today (20 years later!)

Already, when I was there for the last time, there was talk of buidling a facility for processing the clams on the Boyfriend's lot, and across from him, over at Portage Cove, the eccentric American artist and his wife, who had lived off the land for years (including canning their own bear stew) had sold their land to some wealthy guy who had dreams of making something out of that place....

It would be interesting to see it again, though, now that you got me heading down memory lane again!

I have never been the Queen Charlotte islands ... but sure would like to go!

Posted by: maria on January 7, 2004 04:05 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040719203417/http://www.ashladle.org/archives/000272.html

Cemeteries and Place

By-weekly topic for Jan. 1, 2004

Cemeteries

By Write Out Loud

I've always loved them because they're all about stories. In any cemetery, you've got stories all around you: names, and dates of birth and death (plus places if you're lucky). How much can you figure out about a person if you just know a name and when they were born and when they died? Quite a lot, actually. You can think about their lives; you can "remember" something you don't really know.

Examples:
--in a small, rural town in Oregon, formerly a lumber boomtoom, a woman born there in 1885 died there in 1950. Her name was--I'm not kidding, here--you can't make stuff like this up--Lulu Sophie Detroit. Lulu? ***Lulu***? Not Lucille Sophia--Lulu Sophie! And Detroit! What do you suppose our Lulu did for a living? No husband, no children buried nearby. Just Lulu, everybody's gal.

--in a neglected country burial ground in southern New Hampshire, a woman who died in 1870 is identified as the "consort" of the man buried next to her, who died eight years later, both of them in their 60s when they passed. What's the story *there*, I have to wonder? Were they living in sin? Why didn't they marry? Was she his housekeeper? He seems to have had several children but no wife--was she their mother? What's with "consort"?

--a man who was born in Boston in 1835 and died there in 1895 only lived to be 60 years old (actually, a pretty good age for that time), but he also lived through the Civil War. If he fought in it, his rank and unit will usually be engraved on his headstone. Was he an officer or an enlisted man? Cavalry or infantry? Are his wife and children buried around him? Yup, there they are. Oh, look--they lost *four* babies, three of them during the war--in 1862, 1864 and 1865. If he fought, was he away in the war when his children died? What must his wife have gone through? One of the markers is an tiny, empty stone cradle, with a little dent in the pillow where the child's head lay. Not morbid, but so sad, I get a lump in my throat.

I'm hardly ever sad in cemeteries, though. Quite often, I'm laughing. My passion for cemeteries, always lively, really kicked in when Pica introduced me to the granddaddy of them all, Mt. Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge. Along with a compulsion to let the dead tell us their stories, P. and I have shared some hearty yuks in that enormous, lovely place where there was, and is, always something new to discover. One day we absolutely fell over laughing when we found Curtis Burt buried next to his wife, Bertha, and I said, "Oh, look--there's Curt Burt and Bertha Burt!" Say it yourself, real fast; see if you can *not* laugh. I dare you. Or maybe you had to be there. I'm so glad I was.

Or the simple, solemn, imposing stone monolith, at least 8 feet tall, that draws you to it all along the little path marked by my favorite Japanese maple. "Must be somebody Important," we said

the first time, for there are many Important People buried in Mt. Auburn. This one rates the big rock because he is "BARNABAS BATES FATHER OF CHEAP POSTAGE." *with* the little period at the end; so droll. When we quit laughing, I took several photos which I later used as postcards.

And Emerson's gravestone in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, in Concord, Mass.: everybody else in Author's Row has tasteful, modest grey stones with their dates and names--Louisa May Alcott, Bronson Alcott, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau. And then you get to the end of the Row and off by itself, up higher on the hillside, with its nose in the air, is this enormous uncut, unpolished chunk of pink granite--*pink*--with just a brass plate that declaims, in enormous yet solemn capitals, "EMERSON." I distinctly remember standing there with Pica, shaking our heads and snorting our disdain: "Well, THERE's Waldo, huh?" "It just *figures*, doesn't it? I mean, he *would*, wouldn't he?" "Eugh, it's *vulgar*." I guess you can tell we're Not fans, enough Not to stand there and sneer at the gravestone Waldo probably had nothing to do with, but was probably carefully selected by his adoring fans. And we were into it enough to get all worked up.

We got worked up in other ways about other Important People. Robert Gould Shaw's memorial sent us on a rampage, reading his published letters, seeing *Glory* again, studying the memorial on Boston Common that appears behind the closing credits in the film. We wondered at the teddybear cult centered on John Wilkes Booth's brother's grave. Nearby, we commiserated with Senator Charles Sumner, featured speaker at the dedication of Gettysburg Cemetery; he spoke for two hours, but it's Lincoln's words we remember. We were all but hypnotized by a collection of life-sized books, worked in bronze, scattered around atop the tomb of a 19th-century school superintendent who must have been quite a guy, in his day.

Occasionally, we were into it enough to make complete fools of ourselves, as for instance the time we blundered into a tomb whose gate stood invitingly open, only to blunder right back out again because although there was nobody (alive) inside, there were gravediggers' implements scattered around, and one of the crypts gaped at us; it was being prepared for imminent occupancy.

And then there was the very early morning when Pica was birding, I lumbering along behind her, dutifully squinting wherever she pointed but seeing not much more than rustling leaves. We trudged up the road to the entirely authentic Gothic Revival funeral chapel swathed in mist, with its tall grey stone towers disappearing into the trees, total D-Minor Fugue atmosphere. As we arrived, so did a hearse. The driver got out and opened the back. Like morons, we both wondered What could be in there? and scampered right over to have a look. What-was-in-there: a plain--*very* plain--cardboard box, with a loose lid just set on there, about the size of a refrigera . . . oh. Yikes. We spun on our heels and were outta there, pronto, having fetched up against more reality than we'd bargained for.

And then, of course, there was the time we were standing by the pond, revering Isabel Stewart Gardner's handsome green marble tomb with the tasteful Art Nouveau detail. Suddenly, some machinery (pond filter? cryptic airconditioning?) started up right behind us, *whoosh*VROOM! Scared us so bad, we shrieked aloud, nearly stepped on a goose in her nest, and burst out laughing, silly geese that we were.

So that's how I feel in cemeteries--alive, and listening. And laughing.

December 30, 2003 in Travel | Permalink

Comments

Barnabas BATES is the father of cheap postage, dear Doc; how could you forget?

Waldo's pink granite, on the other hand, I'd forgotten about, so am happy to be reminded.

Posted by: Pica | December 31, 2003 at 09:36 AM

Where's Waldo. Don't you just knock yourself out some time? You goonies.

Posted by: fredf | January 01, 2004 at 12:17 PM

The story of the tiny grave markers reminded me of this - when we were visiting the little family graveyard next to my grandparents house one time I asked what the little stones off to the edge of the graveyard were for - my uncle told me they were markers for my paternal grandparents children who had died of an infuenza outbreak. The story finally came out - my father's parents had lost three children at this time - then they started over and had four more - my father and his siblings. By the time I found this out, both my grandparents were dead. They just never talked about it and I often wondered how they had coped and carried on.

Posted by: wendy | January 11, 2004 at 04:15 PM

Cemeteries are very provocative story books, aren't they, but with most of the pages missing! I also wonder what the story was behind a configuration of family deaths and names. And the nameless graves..... Enjoyed the post.

Posted by: Coup de Vent | January 13, 2004 at 10:38 AM

I too find cemeteries places of entertainment. I've very relieved to know I'm not the only one.

Posted by: Trey | February 14, 2004 08:22 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20051222025150/writeoutloud.typepad.com/writeoutloud/2003/12/cemeteries.html

Virtual Cemeteries

By Feathers of Hope (Numenius)

This is an entry for the Ecotone Wiki's *joint blogging topic on* Cemeteries and Place.

Not far from where we live, down the road past fields and out to the east, is the Tremont Street Cemetery, an idyllic little rural cemetery with the interments starting from the 1870s. It's a good destination for a short bicycle ride from here. None of our ancestors are buried there. In idle moments, we entertain the thought of transcribing the gravestones there so that genealogists from elsewhere might be able to look up information about deceased relatives online.

We dabble in genealogy and too have benefited from online cemetery transcription projects. In virtual explorations of my ancestral roots in Lorain County, Ohio, I came across this page of

Lorain County cemetery transcriptions, and found maybe a dozen relatives listed in the publication. It's not as gratifying as making a gravestone rubbing, but visiting an ancestor's virtual cemetery is still a form of homage.

Posted by Numenius at December 31, 2003 10:04 PM | TrackBack

Comments

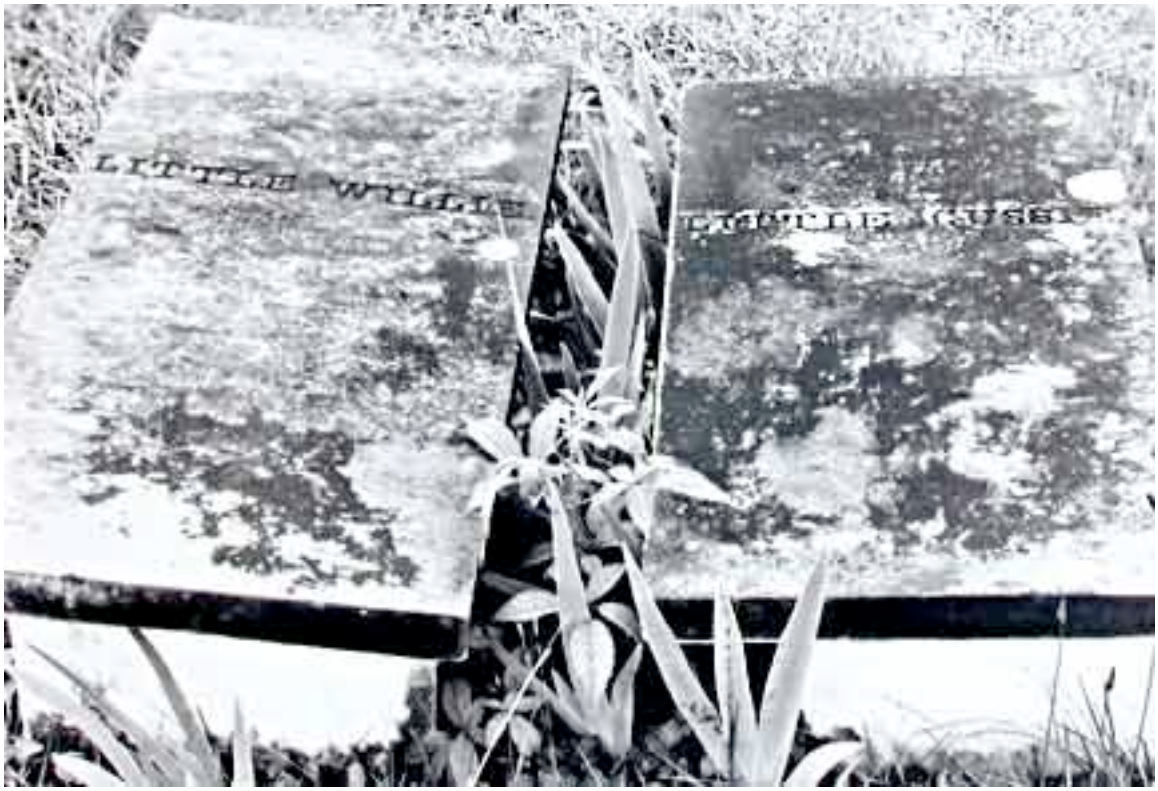
The title makes me think that it's just a matter of time before we buy virtual burial grounds. Or at least before someone tries to *sell* us a virtual burial ground.

Posted by: Coup de Vent at January 13, 2004 10:42 AM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2003/12/31/virtual_cemeteri.html

Cemeteries: Between Epitaph and Epilogue

By Fragments from Floyd



"If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." C. S. Lewis

Some things are incomprehensible to me. The expanding edge of the universe. The particles within particles that are not matter but energy that make up this paradoxically immaterial world. Some of those particles have become sentient and clever and occasionally wise in a state we call

conscious life. This is incomprehensible and the odds are overwhelmingly in favor that such a thing should never have happened at all.

But the two most incomprehensible facts of all are 1) I know I am going to die, and 2) for all our knowing we can know nothing more of this state just after the moment of death than we do of the instant before the Big Bang. Our minds cannot go there behind the veil. While this is true, the vast majority of the most enlightened ones who have lived on this planet through time have told us that death is a transition between states. It is not the empty end of all things that it appears to be from the perspective of the living-- that instant when a person takes his very last breath and the heart beats its last beat. Death seems alien and wrong like a terrible cosmic mistake, and we feel in our deepest selves that death of the body is not the end.

To ponder the incomprehensibility that I am here at all, alive, conscious and corporeal, I go to a cemetery. There, under the polished rocks and plastic flowers and cold sod lie those who have passed to the other side of this greatest of mysteries and know what I cannot know standing there with my hat in my hand. But I will someday know. Cemeteries are the green and flowered surface dedicated to the memory of the dead who disintegrate below, a faint tribute to their lives and gesture of hope for their eternal spirits, elsewhere. No other place on earth can bring me closer to the reality of my own finitude than a cemetery. All cemeteries regardless of their aesthetics or geography bring me to the day of my own death. But not all have had the impact on me as that one beautiful and horrible cemetery from years ago. It was just the other side of my garden fence.

Our first country home shared a border with church yard and its cemetery. We were assimilated into that little church as members, even though most of the congregation consisted of four or five extended families living in the area for generations. Over time, we came to recognize the family names on the grave stones and connect them with living church members. In a few more years, we knew the person that had been buried under the fresh dirt over by the maple tree; we had sat behind them in church the week before and watched from our barn while the back hoe made a place for their bones. Some stones bore names and birth dates only. The granite surface was ominously smooth where the date of death would some day be chiseled in the standing stone. One day I was out in my vegetable garden bent over hoeing potatoes, and looked up. A person I recognized was in the cemetery, silhouetted against the sky, standing at the foot of their own grave. I knew that they were pondering the polished rock, wondering what date would appear there some day to mark the day of their death. It could be tomorrow. Just like that.

Our son's favorite climbing tree was on the edge of the graveyard. For hours I watched him play happily above the dead. This cemetery, like most, was a still and very quiet place. On that rounded knoll by the little brick church I once guessed that the view took in more than three hundred square miles. The scene spread in all directions, out and down. Below and far away, the angular shapes of church steeples and silos accented the smooth smear of clearings; wooded ridges brooded over pastures dotted with black and white cows. Ridge after ridge receded in paler shades of blue and gray into the distance to the horizon, and in the lowlands ragged mists often rose from countless creeks, lifting like prayers, carried off slowly by soft winds. In winter and summer, snow and storm, I watched the world from that high place.

From that ridge pricked by stony markers of known and anonymous lives, I shouted for joy with raised arms for the glory of the good earth at sunset. And from that same ridge in a cold rain I wailed into the wind and shook my fist at God in the deepest agony I have ever known, grieving

and in pain from unjust or self-inflicted wounds that would not heal. It was as if the presence of death all around me made every countenance of life more poignant and more real in that place of death. It was as if the story came together-- the comedy or the tragedy-- when the last chapter was known and so very near, under my feet. All this suffering, and I will die. All this beauty, and then still I will surely die. There among the dead-- not the abstract dead but the dead with faces-- a person is forced to confront the last chapter of the story and consider what can be made of those precious lines to be written between the now and that certain end.

I had thought then that I wanted to be buried in that graveyard just up the hill from our first country place on that windswept hill of tears and joy, of endless vistas and impenetrable fog. Now, I am not so sure. I haven't given much attention to the matter of the disposal of my body or my ashes. The 'where' will be no matter to my spirit that will be occupied after death elsewhere with higher things. Still, for the sake of those who might visit some simple marker (my only wish is that it NOT be polished but rough so as to be a ready surface for lichens) I want the final resting place of my borrowed matter to be a beautiful place for them. The soft humus below a certain rock outcrop at the end of our valley will be my cemetery-- a moss-covered rock comfortable to sit on, a place under arching basswoods and tulip poplars near enough to Nameless Creek that they can hear in its waters my voice and laughter. There they may reflect back on the joy and peace I knew among those hills. It was a remarkable and beautiful world, but it was only the beginning.

The biweekly topic at Ecotone is Cemeteries and Place. New entries will trickle in over the next week, I'm thinking.

Posted by fred1st on January 1, 2004 12:38 PM | Permalink

Comments

Beautiful. How wonderful to begin the New Year with a awed, not-at-all-morbid Memento Mori. That little churchyard sounds like a blessed place to find rest: I wonder if it was chosen as a cemetery because of this quality or if it acquired this quality after lending solace to the souls who found their way there?

Happy New Year, and thanks for the wonderful writing.

Posted by: Lorianne | January 1, 2004 2:02 PM

Like you I have more curiousity about death and what lies beyond than fear, of course that may change when faced with the fact. I've always found cemeteries to be interesting, compelling, peaceful places...especially very old or pioneer cemeteries.

A marker near Gran's always makes me smile: "She was our mother and she wasn't slow".

Posted by: feste | January 1, 2004 3:26 PM

You continuously interchange beginnings and endings, yet still leave a trail of malleable permanence. Delectable resonance.

I long to have known such a place, yet here I am - still among those within the borrowed time - so perhaps I shall still see such a place and known it as my own. Alternatively, I may find myself fortunate enough to follow the path of those who know, and share their vision. Either way, I

revere this place. I look down and embrace the lives of those that came before, and welcome the lives of those yet to be lived. I see myself hovering somewhere between the beginning and the end, or more appropriately, within site of the end that marks my beginning.

But does the end truly signify our beginning? Or are we so damaged by endings that we must convince ourselves otherwise? Either way, your glimpse is a truly appropriate way to enter into a new year. Thrust forward ... always forward.

Posted by: ntexas99 | January 1, 2004 3:35 PM

Happy New Year.
It's an opportune time to look forward.

What you wrote has great validity for some people:
"we feel in our deepest selves that death of the body is not the end."

Can you imagine how different life becomes as one gains certainty on that point?

Thanks for the good thoughts to begin another year.

Posted by: David | January 1, 2004 5:21 PM

A wonderful, beautifully-written, deeply-felt and hopeful post, Fred, that I'm grateful to read on this first day of the year. Thanks.

Posted by: beth | January 1, 2004 6:06 PM

Howdy,
I just wanted to let you know that I've been reading your blog for a couple of weeks now and I think it's great! As a matter of fact, I'm adding it to my 1% list-- meaning 99% of all blogs are crap, but yours is of the 1% that stand head and shoulders above the rest.

By the way, I've visited Floyd many times and know several people up there. If you see Amy at Floyd County Dry Goods, tell her that Billy Jones, author of CARROT ON A STICK said howdy. Who knows, maybe I'll run into you at Oddfellas or the Pine sometime, maybe kick back on a glass of Black Dog or something from Willis Winery?
-Billy Jones--Billy The Blogging Poet 'tm', Publisher IdleHandsMag.com, 'cause there's nothin' better to do...

Posted by: Billy Jones | January 2, 2004 12:01 AM

From Wendell Berry's "A Native Hill," in "The Art of the Commonplace," a wonderful Christmas present:
Every man is followed by a shadow which is his death - dark, featureless, and mute. And for every man there is a place where his shadow is clarified and is made his reflection, where his face is mirrored in the ground. He sees his source and his destiny, and they are acceptable to him. He becomes the follower of what pursued him. What hounded his track becomes his companion.

Posted by: Lin B | January 2, 2004 4:51 PM

I long to feel connected with a particular space in which I could predict my dead future! My mother has booked her plot. I enjoyed reading your piece. It was suitably provocative around a

subject that I probably do want to think about some more. In particular I enjoyed the description of your son 'playing happily above the dead'. I'm so sure that's how it should be....

Posted by: Coup de Vent | January 13, 2004 1:48 PM

Source:http://www.fragmentsfromfloyd.com/fragments/2004/01/cemeteries_between_epitaph_and.html

Sermon in Stone

By P.

I can't think of a better topic for the first week of a new year. A cemetery is a reminder that there's a full stop on all of our sentences -- but looking through the inscriptions or just absorbing the environment, you can also feel that it's not really the end that matters as much as the infinite variety of clauses and phrases you've already written, and the equally rich text that is yet to come.

Some time before President Kennedy was elected, the route to my second-grade classroom took me through the Episcopal church cemetery in my hometown. Of course, I have walked through it hundreds of other times, but that must have been the first time I walked that way regularly, by myself.

I certainly wasn't afraid of it, with its casual rows of old stones lounging informally among the trees. It had a long wrought-iron fence with sharp-pointed pickets on three sides. The fourth was open to what must have been fields 150 years ago, when the fence was built. Later, the fields became a ball diamond, and the dead lost their solitude. We all gained something, though -- even though there were attempts from time to time to chain the gate at the east end.

There are dark pines -- I never walk over there -- and some ordinary hardwoods, and a couple of arbor vitae trees in the middle. The thin, papery stripes of their bark never fail to catch my eye. Over on my right there once were a couple of elm trees at least as tall as the church itself, but they are long gone, and the church has built a columbarium in the corner they shaded.

I recognize some of the names on the stones along my path as those of my hometown's founders, and I always wonder a little about what it must have been like to have lived so long ago, long enough to have died in the 1830s. Probably the stones woke my abiding interest in history, for I could see they had stories to tell that I simply wasn't learning about in school.

Everyone I know seems to love the old pioneer cemeteries. They're easy to love, with their quaint stones and picturesque locations on the tops of hills or under the wings of old churches. New ones aren't.

Grief still hangs on over the places of the more recent dead -- near my mother-in-law's grave in upstate New York there is a stone dedicated to a little girl whose relatives have left a set of sad little plastic shelves crowded with tiny, weathered gifts; small toys and decorations, plastic flowers, rain-splashed messages. Even though I don't know the names or the circumstance, the pitiable scene never fails to bring a lump to my throat.

There doesn't seem to be a place for that sort of thing is most cemeteries. In fact, many are quite specific about not permitting it. The great fields of dead I drive past around Cleveland often restrict themselves to flat plates in the ground: Labels, like the fronts of filing cabinets -- pull at this drawer and you have Isaac; pull here for Amy.

The flat stones create a parklike look, the brochures say. It's true -- and it's also much easier and cheaper to mow the grass. Such a place is too sterile and formal and controlled for raw sorrow, though, and that may be why departments of transportation tear their hair over the growing practice of placing memorials to the dead at the scenes of accidents, or, in the city, whereever an innocent has been killed.

Myself, I'd rather be cremated than filed away in a park. My personal preference would be to create some mischief, perhaps by having my ashes dropped from 2,000 feet to a spot just outside Jacobs Field in Cleveland, about 5 p.m. on a summer weekday. Someone who intended merely to be scattered over a California ballpark came down all at once like that in 2001, setting off a full-fledged terrorist-attack scramble that gave everyone some exercise even if it wasn't rush hour or a game day. It would be something to look forward to.

Out of respect for my kin, I will most likely niche out in a columbarium in some quiet spot someday. To be sure, they're even more like file cabinets than memorial parks -- well, maybe I can swing making a contribution to a sunny garden somewhere.

It's not an issue I spend a lot of time with. There is so much else outside the gates, after all.

Source: http://my.core.com/~pzicari/text/cemeteries.html

Sweet Auburn

By Feathers of Hope (Pica)

Another joint blogging entry for the Ecotone Wiki *on* Cemeteries and Place.

DocRock has written about the fun involved in wandering around cemeteries, mostly in connection with the stories that are told--and made--in these places. My own passion for

cemeteries originated in a passion for birds, which are often found in profusion in cemeteries, where there are often trees and water, just the thing for a 2-ounce warbler exhausted by the northward migration. Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge is full to bursting with birders in May, but since they mostly arrive at 6:00 am and leave to go to work by 8:00, they don't get in the way too much of mourners.

Hanging around gravestones for this long was bound to have an effect on me, though, and like it or not, the stories started coming. Here's one I haven't finished telling, yet. Lizzie died in 1869. Her stone bears the inscription "Lizzie." (period at the end) with a garland of flowers. On the back of the stone is more information: Lizzie died a few days after giving birth to a son, Matthew; he died a month later and is buried with her. Her husband and parents lie nearby; also Lizzie's sisters, and her husband's new wife.

So my made-up add-on to this rather sad tale (her father's memoirs are in the Law Library here at Davis, he being a Somewhat Important Person, yet he never mentions her at all) is that, in fact, she didn't really love the man she married; she was torn between two brothers, who are buried up the hill where I saw my first ever Cape May warbler, and who both got killed (really, not fictionally) in the Civil War. At left is a drawing of the effigy of their dog, a sculpture encased in glass. The dog has no name; the inscription simply reads "Their favorite." Period. It's hard from three thousand miles away, but someday I mean to finish this novel.

For now, though, the verb "to Lizzie" means to wander around a cemetery, usually Mount Auburn, where the focus is NOT birds. (I peek anyway.)

Posted by Pica at January 1, 2004 07:54 PM | TrackBack

Comments

STILL nothing moves me like Lizzie's stone. I'm so glad I can see it in my mind. I do that a lot.

Posted by: Doc Rock at January 1, 2004 09:28 PM

Mount Auburn is one of my favorite cemeteries (yes, I have several!) I have many fond memories of riding my bike from Central Square to go on Brookline Bird Club walks, then stopping at the Greenhouse Cafe in Harvard Square for breakfast on the way home.

I remember the dog sculpture but never knew any of this family's story. Thanks for evoking fond memories & for adding new ones.

Posted by: Lorianne at January 2, 2004 03:26 AM

I enjoyed that story and those images. We are very spolied with cemetaries in the (dis-)UK. It's one place where the landscape speaks its age in vaguely worn out ways. But I too love the wildlife in cemeteries. The old and 'new' Highgate Cemeteries in North London are awash with greenery and the secrecy of paths long since lost to humans but known to critters.

Are you serious about this story linking to a novel you have in mind? Your passion comes across.

Posted by: Coup de Vent at January 13, 2004 10:10 AM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/01/01/sweet_auburn.html

buried in memory

By alembic

This post is my response to ecotone's (January 1, 2004) biweekly topic: Cemeteries And Place

This may sound odd, but some of my happiest childhood memories have grave connotations -- that is, they come from time spent by gravesides. I grew up in Transylvania, you see, best known in the world for its glamorous expat vampires making a killing on celluloid in the sunny movie world of California.

I dont know how it goes now, but back then when I was a child, in Transylvania, like in many other Eastern European regions, the dead rarely relinquished their power, and the past, like that warm and capable hand the dying Keats holds out to his lover, gripped the living in the icy silence of the tomb, compelling them to always look backward (yes, like Benjamins angel of history to pile on the literary allusions.)

As a child, though, I knew nothing of Hollywoods vampires or Keats or the icy grip -- that frozen bitterness -- of the past. The fact was that the towns cemetery was a stones throw from my school. In the afternoons, after school let out, many of us headed there to ditch the constant heat of authority breathing down our necks. The dead didnt tell us to sit up straight, nor did they care about our grades.

The cemetery, that city of the dead within the city, had a lot of its own neighborhoods. In this, it was much like any city of the living. Death did not abolish history here; nor did it blur class lines. If anything, the cemetery in our town safeguarded the records of bitter and bloody division,

and like an adept tutor, it teased us with its secrets, promising us powers we could hold over each other. So, in a way, yes, you could say that the dead here were vampires, feeding off the bitterness of the living ... but I knew nothing of this back then. The cemetery was just a quiet place to go to after school.

Small subdivisions of simple graves lined the grid of paths connected to the wider, chestnut tree-lined avenues of the cemetery at the bottom, by the entry way. Up along the hill, among the fir trees where my friends and I usually headed for the secret rituals of preteen girls, the stone angels and cherubs perched on increasingly grander headstones gave way, here and there, to gothic and baroque crypts that kept generations together and, in the end, dissolved all their petty differences in the dark dense loam underneath.

Somewhere in the maze of paths on the cemetery hill was the Jewish section, overrun with weeds, stones tilted, some sunken deep into the ground. When I wanted to be completely alone -- to read, write or brood -- this is where I went. I knew little about our family history in those early years of the 1960s, so the exotic arabesque of the Hebrew letters meant nothing to me then, nor did I care about why no one came to care for this patch of ground.

The last time I set foot in the cemetery of my childhood town was with my father sometime in the late 1960s. I was already living in Budapest with my mother then, though I was still ignorant of our family history and the true chemistry in the fresh brass on the few crosses we possessed in our household, including that on my grandparents grave. On this occasion, when I went to the cemetery with my father, there was something new on the headstone of our family grave. Engraved in gold and under the names of his parents, there it was, his own name with the date of his birth, a dash, and the first two digits, 19 with the last two left to be chiseled in after his death, which he knew was near.

I duly posed for a picture for him to snap. My face, I believe, was appropriately somber. Then, obviously one of us decided that it was my fathers turn -- I imagine he must have suggested this. Shrunken by his illness -- the year of tuberculosis and the countless operations -- he still tried to stand tall, gripping the headstone casually.

He knew that I was on my way halfway across the world, which meant that come All Souls Day, I would not be in the throngs of people arriving to the cemetery at sunset with white chrysanthemums and candles, a ritual that brought the town together every year and kept the gates of the cemetery flung open late into the night.

For as long as I could remember, we all went -- my parents, who bickered a lot, but never on these outings, and I. Along the way to the cemetery and inside on the paths, we joined people we knew. There were children everywhere, dressed in their Sunday best, too.

My friends and I used to beg for money to buy the enormous gingerbread men from vendors strategically hawking their spicy wares along the road. For as far as you could see, there were candles burning on graves of every size, dotting the hillside with light. To this day whenever I smell gingerbread I also catch a whiff of chrysanthemums and I find myself flushed with an odd sense of happiness.

If the skies were clear on the night of All Souls Day, after paying respects to our dead and gossiping with the living, we made a detour on our way home, heading up the hill across the

cemetery for a last look. And there it would be, the horizon ablaze with light where the gleaming flames of candles met the distant flicker of stars.

NOTES:

In my search of facts about the Jewish cemetery in Cluj, Romania, I came across this web site of photos from the Cluj cemetery.

I did write a poem about this some years ago, but I cant post it just now, as I have submitted it for a competition a few months ago -- and who knows, this might be the one time that I would win something ... then would have to relinquish the prize because the poem is suddenly previously published!

Posted by maria at January 02, 2004 12:37 PM | TrackBack

Comments

Oh, Maria, this is a wonderful post. The picture and description of your father, the trip to the graveyard, and the enormous gingerbread men brought tears to my eyes. Thank you for this remembrance and its controlled but very effective tone. (And good luck with the poem!)

Posted by: beth on January 2, 2004 07:25 PM

Wonderful, wonderful. Your prose evokes vivid imagery that the photo of your father then deepens. I love the "layering" of awareness as you re-interpret as a literary adult the pure innocent experience of your youth. Thank you!

Posted by: Lorianne on January 3, 2004 04:40 AM

I love that you found Benjamin's wonderful "angel of history" online, Maria. It is such an incredible image, and hair-raising in its almost Russian "making strange."

And I can really understand your love of cemeteries. Even in the rinky-dink German village of Immendorf near the Dutch border, where I lived from age 3 to 8, there was a beautiful (imo) cemetery that left an indelible mark on me, even though I never went to church. But ooh, those Nov.1 candle-lighting rituals: magic, and truly thought-provoking. As you said, it brought everyone out: some to gossip, some to commune, some to parade. As a kid, the claustrophobia of the religion didn't hit my imagination, mainly because I wasn't participating in it. Just the candles, the night, the mystery.

Victoria has a pretty good "old cemetery" (Ross Bay), but while the various Christian sects have managed to accomodate themselves on this choice bit of oceanfront real estate, the Chinese and the Jewish cemetery are delegated to more obscure locales (the Chinese though is on the ocean; the Jewish is more inland). However, no one here has candle-lighting rituals. The only remotely mystical thing going on are the reverberating echoes of "Michelle Remembers" (or is it "Remembered"?), a psycho-babble book about Ritual Satanic Abuse (RSA) that supposedly (in the fertile imagination of the authors) took place at Ross Bay Cemetery. Hey ho.

For real abuse (historical lessons, illustrations of same) and concommitant soul-shock, a trip to Berlin's Jewish cemetery is in order. I've only gone once, but it's astonishing, on the order of Cluj, I would guess. See http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~sampras/friedhof1/ for more information.

Anyway, good luck with the poem and the press and all that, and thanks for this entry! And let's hear it for the power of the cemetery.

Posted by: Yule Heibel on January 3, 2004 08:32 PM

Yule, thanks for that great photo link in your comments. There certainly was quite a lot of warmth ... and a lot of life ... in those candles burning festivities on November 1. I assume that the Mexican Los Dias de Muertos would be its best (and somewhat extended) version of it here.

As a footnote, and in response to your comment, I was also remembering another cemetery that left quite an impression on me. This one was in Umbria, on a hillside dotted with olive trees outside the small town (or village, really) of Trevi. The area next to it -- obviously once the cemetery (the graves I seen in Italy never seem to be older than 100 years or so) -- had these big signs about truffle hunting.... Made me stop in my tracks, wondering about what it is that gives truffles that distinct taste which is infused with hints of another world....

Posted by: maria on January 4, 2004 10:21 AM

Laugh out loud!! Truffles, oh that's wicked! So, let's correlate some data: Japan, mostly cremations, no? Do they have a thriving truffle industry? Hmmm?? I think you're on to something...

Posted by: Yule Heibel on January 4, 2004 11:04 AM

Wonderful... thank you. I particularly liked the dissolution of differences in the dark sense loam.

Your truffle thought has brought to mind a Kenyan friend who used as a child to steal mangos from a tree which grew in the Muslim cemetary in the village in which he grew up.

He said they are still the best mangoes he's ever tasted, and he wondered if this was because of the lack of coffins which meant the fertilizer was rich, ready and plentiful.

He said he was beaten terribly if he was caught, but the threat of punishment only made him quicker, stealthier and more agile!

Posted by: qB on January 4, 2004 02:38 PM

Thanks, Maria, for this wonderful post. A very engaging piece of writing. I loved the stories about what you did as a child in the different parts of the cemeteries. I was moved reading about your dad too....

Posted by: Coup de Vent on January 13, 2004 10:18 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040516033656/http://www.ashladle.org/archives/000271.html

A memory from 23 years ago...

By older and growing

's for the Ecotone bi-weekly topic of Cemetaries and Place

I have an old photo in front of me; the date on the back is June 1981. It's not a particularly good quality photo, rather the reverse in fact, that's why it has sat for the intervening 23 years in a box of miscellaneous prints. They're not good enough to do anything with, yet have some attachment that binds them to me still and prevents me throwing them away.

The photo is taken from the top of a hill, not high but steep, on the island of Bressay, just off the East coast of Shetland, to the North of Scotland where the North Sea and the Norwegian Sea meet the Atlantic Ocean. The hill looks out over the straight that separates Bressay from the "mainland" of Shetland; the sea is grey, a jagged white line marks the breakers at the foot of low cliffs on the far shore, surmounted by pastures that on a clear day would be lush green, but on that day, as on so many, a thin grey mist lies over everything giving the view a sombre, monochrome appearance.

At the foot of the hill, at the seaward edge of a relatively level patch of green between the rough slopes of the hill and the low cliffs bordering the sea, is a small graveyard. Just a stone perimeter, the ruins of a small stone chapel and maybe two dozen headstones.

It's a wild spot; anything less than a thirty mile-an-hour wind here is considered calm. A few people still live on the island, mostly gaining their livelihood from the tourist trade. There's a small harbour where the ferry from Lerwick docks, one hotel and several cottages, mostly on the coastal fringes. But there's little to indicate the community to which the graveyard was once attached. It stands almost alone on the inhospitable clifftop, looking out to sea, just a couple of ruined cottages marking the spot where once a little community existed.

I doubt that their life was much more than an existence. I'd guess most of their livelihood came from the sea; the land surely could not have supported many crops, only provided peat for the fires in those simple homes. Most of the food cooked over those fires would have come from the sea, and I imagine that is why the graveyard is located in that spot. Shetland may be politically part of Scotland, but the ancestry of its people traces directly back to the Vikings. The sea would have been in their blood; they may have made their homes on the land but it would have been on the sea where they made their living; the sea that was the source of tales told round the smoky peat fires on cold winter nights; and so it was natural that they would be buried at this border of land and sea where their souls might still gaze out over the waters where they had lived so much of their lives.

Now the graveyard is all that is left. The land has little value for anything else; no-one lives near this spot, few come here, just the occasional tourist. The stones may yet stand for many hundreds of years, lashed by horizontal rain and salt spray, undisturbed except for the crying of the gulls that ride the wild winds and waves.

// posted by andy @ 10:31 PM permalink

Comments

Beatiful post, Andy. It seems appropriate that weather-worn souls would find rest in a weather-worn spot. Aren't we all, spiritually speaking, caught "at this border border of land and sea," frozen in time between this difficult & beautiful world and the sea of eternity which is our home? Thanks for transporting me for a time to a peaceful if not "hospitable" place.
Lorianne | Homepage | 01.04.04 - 10:34 am | #

Thanks Lorianne. I wasn't expecting such positive feedback. Am I allowed to comment on my own post? I confess I wrote that as an exercise, almost like class homework; I'm still getting to grips with this idea of "being" a writer and the discipline of writing to someone else's theme seemed like a good test. But the experience was 23 years ago and I felt rather rather dissociated from it...

But that apart, the rest of your comment resonates strongly with me. Some wise soul once said "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience, we are spiritual beings having a human experience" or something like that. It may have Teilhard de Chardin? Whoever, your words capture that feeling beautifully.
Andy | Homepage | 01.04.04 - 11:56 am | #

Andy,

Neat article. Found you via Jack R.'s Gassho. Your post here sounds a lot like an experience I had in Pecs, Hungary in 1993. I posted a short article about it, which provides a picture link to Pecs.

Here is the link: http://www.conscious- living.blog...09_14_conscious living_archive.html#106404394116409176

While most of us are busy living in the past or dreaming about the future, it's very satisfying to look back upon our life experiences. It's good to remember and rediscover the experiences that shape us.

All the best in 2004!

Don
Don Iannone | Homepage | 01.04.04 - 2:16 pm | #

Thanks Don. I tried following the link but it can't be found. Anything missing from the url?
Andy | Homepage | 01.04.04 - 2:35 pm | #

Yes, you are allowed to comment on your own blog. It takes us one step further. Your blog - your rules!

Isn't it exciting to find out that even when "exercising" you manage to produce something that resonates? All writers will be asked to write about things that may not particularly move them in any significant way ... but the point is, did you move the reader?

Yes, you did. I wanted to be huddled just to the left of the picture, observing the expanse, yet feeling the salty wind in my hair. To touch the stones, if only to leave the memory of my touch for hundreds more years to come.

Whether you acknowledge it or not, you already "are" a writer. We're the proof -- we're your readers!
ntexas99 | Homepage | 01.04.04 - 6:50 pm | #

I agree with ntexas99. I also felt like I wanted to be there, looking over your shoulder or some such.

And I don't care what your cv says.
Andy - your gift is clear.

Get a coach, get an agent, whatever - IMO, you go get writing, and waste as little time as possible (actually, none of my business - just wanting to cheer you on). Unless you believe in reincarnation and think that the experience, if held in your consciousness, will improve your writing, your time to write is .... now?
Jon Husband | Homepage | 01.05.04 - 12:27 am | #

Source:
http://olderandgrowing.blogspot.com/2004_01_01_olderandgrowing_archive.html#107316908846385844

Sandgate Cemetery, Newcastle

By Mulubinba Moments (Geoff)

Ecotone topic: Cemeteries And Place

The earliest inhabitants of what is now Newcastle buried their dead in a burial ground which is now under the CBD shopping mall. The arrival of European culture brought Christian burial customs and church-ground cemeteries. Until 1881 Anglicans were buried in the grounds of Christ Church (now the cathedral) beautifully situated on the hill above the city. This site has magnificent views across the Hunter Estuary, to Nobby's Island and of the Pacific Ocean. However it was not a wise choice for a cemetery as many local people obtained their drinking water from wells in the lower lying areas beneath the hill. After several outbreaks of disease it was realised that the drinking water was being contaminated by groundwater seeping through the graveyard. A search was made for a more suitable site and Sandgate was chosen. Newcastle Council declared that no burials should take place within the city, so there was no alternative to the new Sandgate Cemetery. A rail link was established and each religious grouping was allocated a segregated area. The expanding population of Newcastle and the lack of alternatives (a crematorium was established in 1937) meant the Cemetery had to be extended in the early 1900s. Areas that had been set aside for landscaping were reallocated and many groves of mature trees were removed to make room for more grave sites. The result is a barren lifeless landscape. Too hot in summer, too cold in winter, desolate all year round.

Yet a cemetery is more than just a place to dispose of corpses, it is a place where lives can be remembered and celebrated, where histories are recorded:

"Every grave stone has a story to tell, and each would be a vignette of this region's history. Many themes of society's activities are represented in the cemetery: the world of home life, the spiritual, the world of work, the city's industries, public life, the mines, the entrepreneurs, the professions, war, sport, music, conflict ....."

from Sandgate Cemetery,'The History and the Restoration'

Nevertheless, I'd prefer to avoid Sandgate Cemetery. You can scatter my ashes in a place that lifts the spirit. The grounds of Newcastle Christ Church Cathedral will do nicely.

January 04, 2004 in Geoff's posts, Newcastle

Source: http://mulubinba.typepad.com/mulubinba_moments/2004/01/sandgate_cemete.html

Park Street Cemetery

By under the firestar

Ecotone's current blogging topic is Cemeteries. Here's my contribution:

Park Street Cemetery was inaugurated in 1767, the oldest cemetery in Calcutta. Inside the gate the maintenance staff, three or four men, sat idly on a charpoy. The mausoleum nearest the exit was being lived in. It was furnished with a cot, a plastic water pot, a few pieces of cloth.

Mausolea shaped like houses were crowded together amid tall crotons and palms. It was like coming upon ancient ruins in a jungle. There was a skyline of domes and flat roofs and towers, all the same brown cement with chunks fallen away to show the red brick structure, built for the most part along wide paths. Everything was green and damp. The tops of monuments, urns and such, were broken off and lying on the grass. Shouting boys played cricket among the graves. There were cawing crows, and intermittent sounds of traffic from Park Street.

One of the biggest tombs - pyramid above pediment - contained the body of "Elizabeth Jane Barwell - 'the celebrated Miss Sanderson' aged about 23."

The most elaborate tomb belonged to Rose Aylmer, who died in 1800 aged 20. The poet Walter Savage Landor wrote a poem to her, which was inscribed on her tomb:

Ah, what avails the sceptred race!

Ah, what the form divine!

What every virtue every grace,

Rose Aylmer, all were thine...

Mrs. Martha Goodland, 21 March, 1785, aged 23:

If ever Tears deservedly were Shed

If ever Grief was due to Virtue Dead

Thy Merit Martha and thy Spotless Ways

Claim Tears from all, for all allowed them praise

Thy Strength of Mind we scarce shall meet again

Shewn through a long, most agonising Pain

Thy warm affection as a Wife or Friend

Make all who knew you weep your cruel End

Cruel Alas - but this one thing were sure

Those Virtues that in life you held so pure

Will be repaid - This Thought and this alone

Your friends have left to mitigate their Moan

Whose Heart is torn is wretched while he lives

And only prays one day to reach that shore

To meet his Martha and to part no more.

I liked the home-made verses - they made me feel that real people had written them and grieved. As in all British cemeteries in India, there were too many graves of young wives, and very young children.

When I left, a gang of young boys was half in and half out of the gate, shouting and laughing. An old Anglo-Indian man drove them out and said to me, "They won't listen! They're animals!"

by Nancy at 6.1.04

Source:
http://underthefirestar.blogspot.com/2004_01_01_underthefirestar_archive.html#107336651440661656

Discussion

To those who worried about topics attracting enough interest, I think it's worth mentioning that the last couple of ideas have attracted some very nice writing! -- P.

Coming and Going

By-Weekly Topic for Jan. 15, 2004

Coming and Going

By The Cassandra Pages

Orion.

For today's ECOTONE topic, "Place: Coming and Going", I decided to post this excerpt from a journal I wrote during a trip to London in 1998. There are fifty pages of journal in-between the sections headed "Going" and "Coming", and, as it turned out, I didn't make it to my planned destination of Canterbury at all. However, the project envisioned back then continues in other forms, including writing about "Place" for the Ecotone.

GOING

December 14, 1998. In the air.
Water. Below me, the world has become nothing but water, clear blue stretching to the horizon, where it is met by sky. White clouds, water in another form, ridged like mountains, float above

the surface of the Atlantic. The coast of New England curves away in the distance, all details of human habitation lost in the atmospheric perspective which fades everything to a uniform pale blue.

We've never taken the morning flight to Heathrow before. It is a spacious and comfortable 777, perhaps two-thirds full. As we climb to cruising altitude, the BBC World Service news plays on the flat, individual video screen mounted on the seat in front of me. We watch President and Mrs. Clinton disembark in the Middle East to make his historic visit to Palestine; in Washington, the House is beginning its impeachment debate, with a vote expected on the floor on Thursday. Clinton looks grim; like us, he is escaping.

--

The alarm rang at 3:15 a.m. I woke to find J. turning the electronic clock in his hands like a pro-hominid discovering a transistor radio for the first time. "How do I make it stop?" he moaned, still asleep, before realizing the sound wasn't coming from the clock at all, but from the tiny travel alarm on the nightstand.

We left at 4:00, the cold air on my face removing the last traces of sleepiness. As we drove away, the only light in the village was a small pine tree at the end of our street, completely encrusted with white Christmas lights.

In the blackness, devoid of stars or moon, I found myself noticing glowing things: reflective bands on the village fire hydrants, the white dividing lines on the highway curling off in the east, and the gleaming guardrail-markers, long strings of pearls for the sleeping giantess whose dark curves define this rising, falling landscape of mountain foothills.

As we left what I think of as home territory -- the outermost towns where people known to me, from work or church, lay sleeping -- a tiny reclining crescent moon appeared through a break in the clouds. Ten miles later, the clouds had disappeared and the sky was alight with stars in winter constellations: the Big Dipper, upside down to the left of the moon; on the right, Orion's foot balanced on the horizon, his bow pointed skyward. For miles at a time, not a sign of human dwelling, just the deep, dark Hansel-and-Gretel woods on either side of the road. We watched carefully for moose. Suddenly, I saw a shooting star, and then another. While I looked out the side window, J. saw two more. In the hour between 4:00 and 5:00, we counted ten, finally spotting them simultaneously. The last one fell all the way from the zenith, blazing a hot trail across the black sky.

Tonight the stars remarked to me, matter-of-factly, "We're here all the time, you know." I realized how I never imagined them being there during my waking hours: obscured by daylight, but shining behind the sky all the same. Somehow, I imagined the stars disappearing and rising like the moon. Why is it that so often we must travel away from the familiar to discover, with a jolt, truths that have been with us all along?

Near the Massachusetts border we left the dark wild landscape for good. As always, I found myself recoiling at the bright toll-plaza lamps, the tall signs for petroleum companies, the

billboards, the sprawling malls, franchise motels, fast food establishments. I tried to imagine living in these faceless communities, and could not. "Well, what are you doing?" I asked myself. "You're leaving to spend two weeks in one of the largest cities in the world." But it's not the city I despise; there, at least sometimes, building has been concentrated into one plot of earth, and, in the city-center, planned for centuries. In London, great visual beauty, vigor, and individuality co-exist with the garish and vulgar, and generally win out. But in the suburbs of southern Massachusetts and Connecticut, what I feel most is the waste -- beautiful land chopped up as if it were an inexhaustible commodity. The natural landscape is often obliterated; you literally cannot see the forest for the signs. What does this do to people? Still north of the Massachusetts border at 5:15 a.m., traffic was already greatly increased and the driving aggressive. My sense of being a special traveler through a dark night of shooting stars disappeared with the dawn; we became simply one of a thousand cars hurtling toward their destinations.

6:00 p.m., London time. The sun has just set, the gold light fading from the wings of the jet and the pink that rimmed the horizon now a deep blue. I'm waiting to see my stars again -- for the second time in eight hours.

Across the aisle, a British mother who preceded us at check-in tries to sleep. Her little son, with his perfect, round, serious face, has clutched a floppy-eared bunny ever since I spotted him, seated on a pile of luggage, near the baggage counter. His was the first British accent I heard today, his clear little voice piping up to say, *"Oy cahn cahdee moy rahbeet eento de plane moyself, cahn't oy?"* Another mother, in a white sweater with a fanny pack worn frontways (who invented those awful things?) just walked down the aisle with her child on a leash. The first little boy, rabbit in his arms, watches them pass with silent solemnity, but I detect shock in his eyes.

Most of the passengers are watching in-flight movies; some work on laptops; some sleep or read. I'm willing to bet, however, that I'm the only one with her nose in Chaucer.

Part of my plan this trip, if possible, is to go to Canterbury. So the other night, at home, I pulled my volume of Chaucer's tales off the shelf and read the first page of the Prologue:

And specially, from every shire's end
In England, down to Canterbury they wend
To seek the holy blissful martyr, quick
In giving help to them when they were sick.

Chaucer's pilgrimage began in Southwark, a very old section of London across the Thames from the Tower, at an inn called the Tabard. He began writing the Canterbury Tales in 1386; it was still unfinished at his death in 1400. At that time, Richard II was King. When Chaucer died, just one year short of 600 years ago, he was buried in Westminster Abbey, the first of the great writers to lie in what became known as the Poet's Corner.

Our last visit to London ended in Southwark; this year's plans are not so much a religious pilgrimage to Canterbury, but an acknowledgement of these yearly visits as a personal pilgrimage, or, perhaps more accurately, a quest whereby I am gradually piecing together bits of myself. I told J., my first-generation, Armenian/Arab husband, that whenever I approach

England I feel that I am coming home. "I know you do," he said, smiling at me. It took me two trips to realize this, two more to begin to see and write the outlines of a story which began centuries ago.

My earliest immigrant ancestors sailed for America from England almost exactly one century after Chaucer's death. For five hundred years, except for my father's service in the Second World War, no one returned across the Atlantic. Yet when I step off the plane, enter the crowded train from Heathrow to London, and set foot on the city streets, I am conscious of entering a familiar gene pool and a common heritage of manner, custom, interest and sensibility, almost too subtle to describe, that has somehow been kept alive in my family through generations lived out in "New" England and "New" York. It strikes me as incredible that this should be, so much so that I feel bound, by the great privilege which has fallen to me, to search and decipher, contemplate and record.

I try to bring to this task all my accumulated experiences, but am continually conscious of beginning again at the beginning. How, for example, has it taken forty-six years of my life to read Chaucer? Last night, back home, I was laughing out loud as I read his descriptions of his fellow-pilgrims in the Prologue. Yes, there were terms I didn't know. What was a Pardoner, a Summoner, a Reeve? But the footnotes explained what was unfamiliar. Far more astonishing is Chaucer's voice, which rolls effortlessly out of the fourteenth century to meet my twentieth-century ears with humor and immediacy. I am cheating by reading the Penguin edition, a modern translation of the original Middle English, but it's probably the only way I would read the work; so far, on the plane, I've devoured eighty pages and am captivated.

COMING

1:30 am. In the air.
Somewhere below is the coast of Greenland and the city of Godthab, near its tip. I'm listening to Haydn's Harmony Mass on the in-flight radio and sipping a paper cupful of extremely strong tea I procured from the flight attendant in the rear galley. "If you don't like this I'll make you a new pot," he said, and it is pretty strong stuff. J. is trying to sleep and that's good, he has 2 1/2 hours of driving after we land in Boston.

Mrs. Marazzi interrupted her late lunch this afternoon at the hotel to say goodbye to us. We kissed on both cheeks; I complimented her on the staff, and told her my only wish was that the sitting room had a piano, that I couldn't wait to get back home to mine. "We used to have one, a big one," she said, "but we had to get rid of it because the guests complained." I'm sure they did -- a piano would carry loudly through the hotel's pressed-tin ceilings and thin walls. Unlike last year, when I couldn't bear the thought of going home, today I felt a little sad but basically contented. We know, now, that we'll be back. But more important, London comes with us; I've figured out how to assimilate what happens to me here and allow it to remain in me back home.

I'm gradually learning how to live the hours of my everyday life as a journey, even though, from the outside, the days and their pattern may appear routine. Each time I sit down at the piano or in front of a blank sheet of paper, I walk into that world-between-worlds, the tunnel that leads from the departure terminal into the aircraft with the ability to fly wherever it wants. It has taken a

long time for me to see this. Living in this way, each day becomes an adventure within the self, accompanied by the sum of all of one's previous experiences and whatever guides we ask along: Chaucer or Calvino, Bach or Bob Dylan.

But this journey also exists alongside the paradoxical, parallel realization that no journey is necessary -- that we have already arrived at the only destination worth approaching, that all one needs is contained in each particular moment -- moments that, ironically, often appear to us when we are traveling.

4:38 PM

Source: http://cassandrapages.blogspot.com/2004_01_11_cassandrapages_archive.html#107420268933050159

January 15, 2004

By Bowen Island Journal

I'm back to blogging with the Ecotone community who are looking at Coming And Going this week.

Our regular ferry, the Queen of Capilano has gone for her annual refit, and in her place we have the smaller and much older Bowen Queen. The Bowen Queen was first pressed into service with BC Ferries in 1965 and she mostly fills in as a replacement vessel these days on the islands. Unlike the "Cap," the Bowen Queen is a much more utilitarian looking vessel. Walking on the car deck is hazardous, as there are pipes and spigots sticking out all over the place and the headroom means ducking and weaving between cars to get the passenger lounges. There are two lounges on either side of the first level and one lounge up top. When the blinds are down over the windows in the early morning or in the evening, it feels a little like the inside of a box car.

She's actually a faster boat, but because she is smaller, there are often overloads and delays and

the schedule can get pretty messed up. Inconvenience aside, I like her because it feels much more like we live on an island when we sail on the Bowen Queen. The Cap is a luxury liner in comparison, and it's easy to take that boat for granted.

Coming and going gets more challenging this week, but also demands that we become more mindful of the act of getting to and from the continent and that's never a bad thing.

Think of the Bowen Queen as our annual dharma teacher.

Source: http://www.chriscorrigan.com/miscellany/bijournal/2004_01_01_archive.html

Coming and Going

By Switched At Birth

Today's Ecotone: Writing About Place topic is "Coming and Going." I can't imagine a more timely one in view of my own personal journey.

For the past seven years, I have been coming and going between the pine woods of Florida and the mountains of western North Carolina, roughly six months in one and six in the other. It has been a remarkable time in our lives and, I think, responsible for major personal growth, both individually and in our relationship that might well have never occurred had we not taken this bold step.

Buck and I retired from working for others or having employees in mid-1997. He was 59. I was 46. He gave notice of his decision to retire, I sold my television news clipping service, we sold several other small businesses, bought a piece of land in the mountains near Asheville and started to build.

The mountain place became a "relationship" house -- a great place for family and friends to gather. It also gave us an opportunity to hike the mountains, and live at 4,000 above sea level in a setting of blinding beauty. Most of the time we were there alone, the nurturing silence broken only by the cries of juvenile hawks as their parents tutored them in the hawkly art of fierce screaming, the mournful spiralling calls of screech owls, or me at the piano playing a Chopin Nocturne or another composition written by some other genius.

We eventually sold our larger home near Pensacola and built a one-bedroom "cabin in the woods" there on a piece of forested land we've owned for many years.

And so, in late Spring, when the "hot flats" begin to sizzle a bit, we pack up the car and the truck and head for higher ground near Asheville. I forward the mail, stop things in one place, start them in another, and try to stuff the houseplants in somewhere, along with zippered bags of herbs and spices, a canvas bag full of books and music, and whatever else I can't live without in either place.

Then in mid-November, when all the leaves have fallen and our neighbors houses down the mountain have become visible, we repeat the process in reverse, and return to Florida.

We wanted to create two wondrous places to be at home together, so good that we would always feel longing for the one and nostalgia for the other. That's exactly what happened. I feel a pang each time we close and lock the gate to leave the flatlands, and another stab each time we winterize the North Carolina home and head down, down, down the mountain.

I can almost sympathize with the bigamist who, truly in love, marries persons in different states.

Something I have noticed is that folks who have known us in Pensacola believe we have moved away. And to our North Carolina neighbors, we will always be "that nice Florida couple." Presuming myself to be quite insular, I didn't think that mattered. And for a long time it didn't.

But now, the love of one place, that love of one's true home, the place where I want to be digging in the dirt and growing flowers and trees when I am a very old lady, and the place where we both want to nurture the forest and provide a place of sanctuary for our family, has won out.

And so, since we cannot live parallel lives, but must make choices which take us down a particular path, Buck and I have made another bold decision -- both painful and joyous: we have put our North Carolina home up for sale, and have set about dreaming a new dream in this place of deepening roots.

04:58 PM in Ecotone Biweekly Essays on Place | Permalink | Comments (7) | TrackBack

Comments

Sounds like a wise choice to live in a place where you will not always be a stranger.
There is a freedom that comes with living in an area where "immigrants" are accepted and valued.

Tidy little villages with tidy little minds keep track of those who arrived first and rank all others based upon the length of their stay. However nice and sweet they are, in their innermost thoughts, they don't want to invest time in getting to know you.

I hope you find people like yourselves, loving, yet emancipated from the tyranny of place and history.

You bring your world with you. You need to find others who pride themselves on what they do, not who they or their forebears have been.

Posted by: David at January 15, 2004 06:13 PM

Well heck. I imagined our paths crossing, you in your NC nest being close to my daughter's in-laws in Cullowhee and near our former home of Morganton. Haven't been to the panhandle of Fla since our two day- one night honeymoon in Ft. Walton back in the Pleistocene. Congrats on making your decision and hope it will bring you much happiness.

Posted by: fredf at January 15, 2004 06:34 PM

Well this is big news. I, like Fred, liked the fact that you were nearby, relatively speaking. I imagined a hike one day in Shining Rock. Oh well.

I'm torn sometimes between the need for roots and the need for new adventures. I hope your roots now grow as deep as you want and need them to.

Posted by: Trey at January 16, 2004 06:55 AM

Oh, Beth, how well we know how agonizing these decisions are. David and I had hoped to meet you in person at last as we have two children living in NC. Being closer to them was one of the factors that determined that we should leave California. And, the decision was the right one...we've never looked back.

I am happy for you and Buck and know you will florish in the Panhandle, close to your extended family. All our best wishes.

Posted by: Gretchen at January 16, 2004 07:09 AM

Wow Beth, what an adventure you're starting on. What an wonderful thing it is to have found the place you're really meant to be!

Posted by: Ana at January 16, 2004 06:54 PM

Greetings Beth,
I found your wonderfully thoughtful site via a comment you left on mine. Lo and behold, I live in Asheville and the community here is so close knit, I wouldn't doubt it if our paths have crossed. Best of luck to you as your destiny and dream become ever more clear.
Many blessings,
jaybird

Posted by: jaybird at January 19, 2004 08:50 AM

Lovely post - thank you for sharing this with us.

Posted by: Jenny at January 19, 2004 12:52 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040301052436/longleaf.typepad.com/switched_at_birth/2004/01/coming_and_goin.html#comments

Of going and coming

By P.

If what makes a place worth writing about is our relationship to it, then entering and leaving ought to have a special place in our thoughts. Here are a couple of anecdotes that might be more about the relationship than the place.

This is a tale of two movements, of going out and of going in, of losing and of a small moment of grace.

Some years ago, my uncle sold his Adirondack cottage, in a pretty colony of private summer homes on the remote shore of one of the lakes. Already in Cleveland, I made the long drive there to fetch an old canoe that lived beneath the cottage and manhandle it away to safety.

For years, our family had gone on visits there, and I can fairly say I loved the place even though I could claim no rights in it. It was a sad trip, because I knew it was unlikely I would go back.

After I lifted the heavy red boat onto the top of my truck, I walked down to the dock, to take a last look at the lake. In the deep quiet of a weekday afternoon after Labor Day, I stood at the shore and tried to fix the scene in my memory -- gray clouds, gently rippling water, steep green hills just beginning to change color; islands; and the tiny chuckle of waves poking under the dock. It was calm and open, the sort of place to relax the eyes and let you give up ordinary cares and even the prospect of hours of driving. I didn't want to turn away.

Then someone came up behind me. "Excuse me -- this is private property. " he said. It was the colony's resident busybody -- almost every small community seems to have one, and well-off, closed places always seem to. I suppose now that I should have more respect for him, for it takes some courage to accost strangers dressed for work in an unpeopled spot more than an hour from the nearest police station. If I had acted on my first impulse, what would he have done?

But I didn't strangle him, of course, and I suppose he knew I wouldn't.

Instead, I mildly told him who I was and why I was there, and explained, "I just came to take a look at the lake. I will never be back here again."

Not a total clod, he was silent for a minute. "That's sad," was all he said, and he walked away.

But my reverie was gone, and a moment later, so was I.

The canoe I still have. The last time I tried to float it, it sank. I have some refinishing to do.

Of coming in, I have a more modern story. My heart was beating hard when I walked into the city library just after the new year. My first piece of mail for the year was a notice that several dozen books had been charged out on my card and not returned, and I realized that my identity had effectively been stolen, for the card was gone from my wallet. There was well over $1,000

worth of stuff gone, just from the list in my pocket. One of the books was a Bible; another, a Torah.

I was terrified that I could lose my library privileges and have to pay some huge, unaffordable sum for the lost books, since the card had clearly said I was responsible.

Now, I have an irrational attachment to libraries. I've been in and out of them since before I was old enough to read, and my old, paneled hometown library, tiny as it was, is one of the treasured places in my memory, while the big city one I use now is an almost inexhaustible treasure trove of entertainment, if not serious research. I conducted my first grown-up transactions with librarians; the idea that I had let them down by losing my card and having it misappropriated was devastating far beyond its actual impact on my finances.

So I pushed into the gold-carpeted Modernist building with what I can only call dread. I really had been having nightmares of a nasty interview with some wizened circulation-department chief or, worse, with the library's overwhelming director himself.

Of course, the circulation director turned out to be a short woman my own age in a new-looking Christmas sweater (in modest librarian fashion, mostly black). No, she would not hold me responsible for the theft. I could even have a new card, without so much as a snotty reminder to take care of it.

What's more, my theory that a student hanging around the last day I had the card could not be correct, she said, for they usually take CDs and DVDs -- the popular stuff. My tormentor had taken how-to books and references (the titles were obscure on the list I had), and those over two weeks, which is unusual in book-thievery, she said. They might even come back someday.

I formed a vision of an immigrant, perhaps undocumented, who didn't dare make an official connection but wanted to learn, to take advantage of what the library has to offer at its best.

That the books apparently would be put to good use was a relief. That I would not be penalized was encouraging. That this matter-of-fact representative of library officialdom didn't seem to be mad at me was grace.

The sense of relief I had was overwhelming. I had not felt that way since my daughter was born healthy and strong, with her mother well and happy.

So far, I have been right about not being able to return to the central Adirondacks. Happily, I can keep returning to libraries.

Source: http://my.core.com/%7Epzicari/text/InandOut.html

Coming and Going

By Feathers of Hope (Pica)

There is a Hebrew blessing for everything, just about, and there is certainly one for entering and leaving your house. I've seen several translations of this but the one I like best is "blessed are you in your comings and goings." For a culture that has spent much of its history on the move, at least mythologically, it's a good blessing, focusing on the present and the inevitable but bringing

"home" into it. It's packed with resonance yet wholesome. Blessed are you in your comings and goings.

I come and go all the time; I've lived in four countries. USA-Spain-UK-France-UK-USA. The years I spent in Boston I moved seven or eight times in as many years. You keep your pack light; you get restless; you move on. (Sometimes you are made to move on because of circumstances outside your control, but part of me believes there's more control available here than I'd like to think.)

I'd like a blessing, instead, for staying put, something I seem to find almost impossible. Blessed are you in your sitting down. Blessed are you in your emptying your head of shopping lists. Blessed are you in your quiet time, in the quiet time you seem to shove aside as though you feared it.

Blessed are you in the fog and the moonlight and the breath you take to enfold them. Blessed are you in your breathing. Blessed are you--in your place.

(Ecotone Wiki joint post on Coming and Going)

Posted by Pica at January 15, 2004 09:26 PM | TrackBack

Comments

That's a lovely post.

Posted by: Coup de Vent at January 16, 2004 05:39 AM

A wonderful post, Pica. I didn't know where you were going with it so the request for a staying-put blessing came as a surprise, and it really touched me.

Posted by: beth at January 16, 2004 05:47 AM

I like the word "dwell." In this context it would remain grammatically ambiguous: "Blessed are you in your dwelling." Can we KJV it? *Blessed art thou in thy dwelling.*

Just my 2 cents. You said it best!

Posted by: Dave at January 16, 2004 08:28 AM

Dave: I like the word "dwell" too. I was thinking to enlarge the notion of "dwelling" to the chosen place of one's abode, not just the physical house, but "dwell" can do that.

The Irish language doesn't strictly have a concept for a noun of occupation, so "I am a teacher" becomes "I am (literally, I stand) in my teacherness." I just love this. I think I want to say "blessed art thou in thy dwellingness."

Posted by: Pica at January 16, 2004 09:29 AM

This lovely post echoes Psalm 121 which is one of my favourites. "May the Lord preserve your coming in and your going out" , Pica.

Posted by: Jenny at January 16, 2004 01:29 PM

this was a wonderfully woven post. I've only recently (today) discovered ecotone, and look forward to exploring the many themed writings there.

your post was so artfully simple ... and I do wish you blessings in your staying put. Within your soul, your dwelling, your quiet time.

Posted by: ntexas99 at January 17, 2004 05:46 PM

What a lovely piece, dense like a poem, and just as difficult to paraphrase. “Lovely” is perhaps not the right word here. A deceptively simple piece that crosses far and wide not only place but also time.... Thanks for this post, Pica.

Posted by: maria at January 18, 2004 05:30 PM

Having recently realized that a place has claimed me and I am staying put in it made your post all the sweeter. I feel blessed.

Posted by: Beth W. at January 19, 2004 05:10 AM

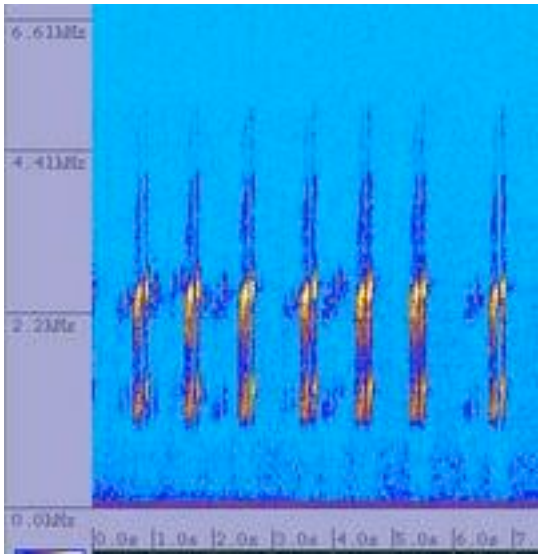
Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/01/15/coming_and_going.html

Waves Coming and Going

By Feathers of Hope (Numenius)

An entry for the Ecotone topic on Coming and Going

It's been a week of playing with sound. On the laptop that is, where it's easy to take a recording from a CD (the sound sampled at 44,100 times per second) and open the file in a sound editor and look at the waveforms. If you zoom down far enough, to ever shorter and shorter periods of time, you see the individual sample points, approximating the continuous sound wave. (Dogs must find CD recordings dreadfully lo-fi, being unable to render the upper octaves of their hearing.) That we perceive these pressure waves coming and going as sounds of different frequencies is a marvel.



Outside, a Pacific tree frog, by far the commonly encountered frog around here, is going 'crickle, crickle'. This is their time in the cycle of the year -- plenty of water around to keep them happy and able to wander about freely. At left there is a plot of the sound spectrogram of their call (time is on the x-axis, frequency is the y-axis). Their call pattern is strikingly periodic: a two-part 'crickle' every second or so.

It's cloudy, and I don't know what the phase of the moon is. But I do know that 29.5306 days from now, it will be at the same phase. Such is the periodicity of this universe.

Posted by Numenius at January 16, 2004 11:07 PM | TrackBack

Source:
http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/01/16/waves_coming_and.html

Winged

By Laughing~Knees

Pressure ice upon the Charles River, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A., 1989.

This is the fifteenth installment of the ongoing Ecotone essay series. This week's topic is Coming and Going. Please stop by and read the other essays or feel free to contribute your own words.

Downy feathers of snowflakes are falling like lost children from the sky this evening. It is the first snowfall this year. More than likely it is but a whim and the morning will find the earth as bare and dry as weeks gone by. But a lone Tree Sparrow (Passer montanus) sits alone upon a bare branch of the False Acacia outside my window, awaiting the passage of light, hunched into her puff of feathers, her tiny head bare to snowflakes. I sit still, so as not to alarm her, and watch.

It seems the moments together are filled with counting, all the way until she flicks her wings and flits away. The branch is left quivering in her sudden absence. And I find myself poised on the edge of my chair, alone in the gathering darkness, the air aswirl with children laughing.

So it is with birds, they come and go. If any creature could embody the movement of wanderlust, or the great rotation of the seasons, it must be birds. It seems that in the Beginning of Time, when some Speaker of Identities was handing out instructions on form and content, birds chose the way of airiness and elegance. To not be grounded, but to solve problems by carving away the extraneous, instead of throwing on more clay. The result was a marriage with the wind and a vision of distances, the planet beneath acting as springboard.

Earthbound that I am, I venture from my dwelling in the last dusting of winter, swiveling my head in lookout for the songs that had left with the dying of last year's leaves. The voices come back in twos, catching the tops of the trees as buds form, and still tinkling with merriment from the warmer climes, like lovers newly returned from a honeymoon. Three, four, five, the old familiar faces are back, some directly to the memories of a summer gone. For those birds who remained behind, the ones that always shout louder than the others and shoulder through the delicate crowds, the return of the travelers shakes down the house of winter silence, and for a time the air quavers with indignation.

It is the return of the Barn Swallows, though, that barks, for me, of Spring fully arrived. Like liquid thought they barrel down the streets in fierce pleasure of, and concentration upon, clutching past arrival. Close-up their world seems to take on the rush at the terrible edge of a jet plane's wing. Step back and Swallows love the open air, their wings scything the invisible. Even their eyes seem formed to look into the hard light and further, into the future, where their eggs lie.

Though I can't understand a word of their language, the fluting and burbling and chittering of Swallow song always seems to speak of adventures and far off fields. It seems to beckon to my heart, just like the bugling of migrating geese, laughing and urging me to get out of this chair and lift my arms…

The brief summer harbors their laughter, has me on my tiptoes after the spell, sniffing out the salt sea or the undiscovered meadow. I would go with them, my mind seems to say, and it is time to prepare my travel bag. But that is the mistake right there. Swallows… all birds actually… have long done away with baggage. Their minds have been gleaned from aestheticism, from a total devotion to the task of flight. True travelers, believing in the brief encounter with all their hearts.

And come the chilly days of autumn I am again left behind, my legs feeling as leaden as tree trunks. The days commute to slumber, losing colors, bearing old grievances.

But my heart does beat more slowly than a bird's. If I have wing beats, they echo in my footsteps. I may take longer to cross mountains, but the keening is there, to be off. Off and singing.

Posted by butuki at 06:05 PM in Nature and Place | Permalink | Comments (6) | TrackBack (0)
Comments: Winged

Miguel, I have a feeling I am not alone in this - when I read your posts, I am overcome by the textures. So much so, that I barely know what to comment. Not wanting to break the spell.

Today I was a winged bird upon the cold crisp air of winter. I felt brittle breeze lift me, warming my heart as I soared above the snowy expance. Thank you.

Posted by ntexas99 at January 18, 2004 08:04 AM

Thoreau would envy this. I certainly did. You dropped me into a reverie about nighthawks, which swoop among tall city buildings in the summertime, harvesting insects from around the streetlights and squawking from time to time, perhaps to help orient themselves, as bats do, or to warn off other diners, or perhaps complaining that they don't really LIKE insects, why can't they have some nice millet? Best wishes!

Posted by Peter at January 18, 2004 08:07 AM

"So it is with birds, they come and go.." When I read this paragraph, something inside welled up and I was filled by an overwhelming sense of sadness. This is not a bad thing, it is a credit to the delicacy and beauty of your writing. The words seemed to encapsulate much about life and the intransience of many things. But your essay was of new beginnings and it gave me hope and a new sense of clarity. For that I am extremely grateful. Thank you.

Posted by RR at January 18, 2004 11:20 PM

I am saturated with the abundance of your images… Envious, too, of your grace and exquisite choice of words. Thank you!

Posted by nobbog at January 19, 2004 03:56 AM

Just beautiful. Really. Made me want to read it aloud.

Posted by Trey at January 20, 2004 07:26 AM

You wield the language with delicacy and expertise, again. Thanks.

If there is a balance to be had between the joy we feel in the encounter (like the birds, done away with baggage) and the sorrow we feel at their faithless flightiness, I want to err in the direction of joy.

So that when they fly off (birds, people, whatever), it is not against the current of my wanting.

Thanks again for the meditation.

Posted by commonbeauty at January 20, 2004 09:54 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040401171626/http://www.butuki.com/archives/2004_01.html

"Hither and Thither"

By bird on the moon

One of the blessings of my childhood was my mother's trust that I could somehow safely manage to come and go as I please. I did that in great measure... after school, no matter the time of year, I could be found ruminating and looking for stones by the creek, throwing stones off the railroad

trestle, building lean-tos in the woods, or on the bike with tunes in my ears. I took full advantage of that permission and that trust. Thinking back, no planning was involved. I went because I went, and that was that. Add a decade or two into that equation and the result is markedly different.

I yearn to go, constantly, my mind is always fixated on a wandering star that beckons me to chase it through skies distant and far, fabled lands whose enchantment I glean only through a fingertip pressed to a map. The rules have changed, it seems; in order to 'go,' much more time is taken up planning the exit than the journey itself. One must navigate many gauntlets and sever a bond or two in order to plow through to freedom.

Indeed there are many transits I undertake daily; the threshold of my home counts continual passage from here to there, but mostly I'm abiding a schedule, little flags planted on the clock that flap in the winds of obligation. I've leaned, however, to see the goodness in even my errands. I navigate a route, that no matter the mundane circumstances, never ceases to bestow little jewels of wonder. I course through winter mountains, sleeping, concealing their resilient greens under a cloak of quiet that is slowly being tugged by a toddler sun. There's a road where someone new is always walking in the margins, an immigrant, themselves hoping to open a path to destiny through their asphalt footfalls. There's a patch of interstate above which the sunset falls, never a disappointing ray or light. Has there ever been?

I think the difference between childhood wandering and adult commerce with place is that, when we're young and mining for what's mine, hoping to strike a lode of identity, we're out there for the freedom of it all. We were in the emotion of going, the slackening of the tether to the nest. I've long since flown the coop of my birth, and now the prospect of going is more about the place, and whatever tinglings of freedom generated by the pursuit of awe are received joyously. When young, I could be just as free and wild in a parking lot, doing wheelies and looking cool in a favorite jacket. Now, parking lots are anonymous, trodden, and melancholy places; I would not go there to feel free. I require more thrust and direction to get away, and in getting away, to relate to new vistas by letting go.

Thinking about this helps to remind me that going and coming, our engagement with the hither and the thither is a ritual that we often do without noticing it. The trappings of the mundane mislead us into a haze of ordinary and passive observation. A journey to buy bread becomes removed from our circle of magic because it's common, and simple. So when I leave home, I'm debating the merits of wheat or natural grain rather than noticing the flocks of birds that alight from pole to pole or the quality of light as it lands on the abandoned farmhouse on my road.

Nudge myself into paying attention and it's no longer a trip to buy bread but rather a moment of deep connection to the space around us, a spatial play of wonder, a *widening of the magic circle* to include myself, right now, the errand I have to do, and the parking lot where I find myself laughing quietly, remembering the innocent pleasure of popping a wheelie. The spell that's come upon me is easily broken if I wish it, and perhaps that spell is the same as it was in my youth but has survived in a different context. What it requires to slacken is to actively speed off in a direction because I want to, rather than by the dictates of need. It will eventually snap, if but for a while, but long enough for the world to seep in and teach and tell me something new in it's infinite language of beauty, even in the commonplace, even in seeing the tree-line through a supermarket window.

That direction could be a loaf of bread or a waterfall, a friend and a bottle of wine, the pursuit of an egret or the dancefloor downtown. It could be miles or inches away. It could be among the marketplaces of beloved Haiti or along the spine of a lover. Having a choice is a side effect of living in the now, and whether we're fumbling for our collective keys by a darkened door, or watching the stars from some distant spot on the map that a fingertip once pressed longingly, we can be fooled into remembering that it's all a journey, all a choice, all a pilgrim's path through a sacred landscape full of surprise and little jewels. Each time we pull that door tight behind us, and our feet hit the floor or home or the dirt of far afield, we could be pioneering the widening arc of our magic circle, pushing the boundaries of here and there, coming and going.

If I could, I'd pick up that curly haired kid in his favorite denim jacket whose name and history I share. We'd ride the road, and he'd learn all about the wilds the thrive beyond the horizon, the exotic and quixotic nature of travel, and he'd teach me about freedom, and the peaceful solitude of a creek and her stones. And we might, just might, come home when called for dinner, but we'd have to stop and watch the lightening bugs along the way.

This entry has been written to add to the dialog of Ecotone Wiki's current topic of Coming and Going.

Comments

Just read your wonderful words of life. Thanks, Jay.

Posted by Beth W. at January 19, 2004 07:56 AM

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20040202021559/birdonthemoon.com/cgi-bin/mt-comments.cgi?entry_id=1277

Sleeping with Strangers

By Hoarded Ordinaries

The following is my belated response to the Ecotone topic, "Coming and Going."

I've had the words of Walt Whitman ringing in my head ever since we went to Manhattan this weekend. There's a bus that connects Keene and New York, so we spent a good portion of the weekend wending our way through snow-blanched fields and anonymous brick facades. And although we were on a bus, not a boat, the lines of Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" kept echoing in my mind:

- Flood-tide below me! I see you face to face!
- Clouds of the west--sun there half an hour high--I see you also face to face.
- Crowds of men and women attired in the usual constumes, how curious you are to me!
- On the ferry-boats the hundreds and hundreds that cross, returning home, are more curious to me than you suppose.

- And you that shall cross from shore to shore years hence are more to me, and more in my meditations, than you might suppose.

Whitman, of course, never rode a bus. Although he was a native New Yorker, he lived in the era of stage-coaches and trains, not buses. Had he been born somewhat later, though, Whitman would have loved buses. He would have loved the scenery streaming by at 55 miles an hour; he would have loved the trucks and cars you see from above as you pass. And he would have especially loved the stream of anonymous faces: at each stop, new faces embark and old faces disappear, never to be seen again.

Buses, like cars, inevitably put me to sleep. When we lived in Randolph, Massachusetts, I regularly took a city bus to and from Boston. This bus traveled the urban streets of Roxbury, and I was typically the only white face onboard. And I always, inevitably fell asleep on that bus even though my mother's voice warned me that inner city Boston was a dangerous place and that anything could happen to me as I slept defenseless on a bus with strangers. But nothing ever happened on that bus to Boston; I simply slept.

And so this weekend on a bus to New York I similarly slept, and so did Chris, the two of us nodding as faces black and white slept around us. And in a dream I imagined our souls floating above our sleeping bodies, the souls of rich folk and poor folk, white folk and black. Above our bodies, these souls mixed and mingled, dancing in a delicate swirl as landscape and clouds streamed past our windows like the inevitable march of time. For while we rested, time rolled on ever wakeful, gradually and invariably taking us toward our intended end.

Manhattan is a marvelous city not primarily because of its museums, music venues, and fancy restaurants, although Chris and I sampled all of these. Instead, Manhattan is marvelous because it is home and host to a diverse crowd of humans, a pedestrians dream. Walking the streets of Manhattan, you see people everywhere, endlessly walking: women in designer furs, homeless men with cardboard signs, suited businessmen with cell phones, puffy-jacketed youths selling imitation handbags. Eavesdropping on the streets of New York, youll hear the tongues of the world: Italian, Russian, Spanish, Arabic, German, French, Hebrew.

On our walk home from the Metropolitan Museum, Chris and I stopped to watch the skaters at Rockefeller Center. Everywhere stereotypes were shattered as urban youths skated alongside suburban mothers alongside gay men in tailored slacks. All those faces simply flowed fluidly around the rink as teenagers joked and jostled, lovers held hands, and children clung tenuously to the hands of parents and grandparents. In the hypnotic swirl of faces circling singly, Whitmans words again resonated in my head:

- Whatever it is, it avails notdistance avails not, and place avails not,
- I too lived, Brooklyn of ample hills was mine,
- I too walkd the streets of Manhattan island, and bathed in the waters around it,
- I too felt the curious abrupt questionings stir within me,
- In the day among crowds of people sometimes they came upon me,

- In my walks home late at night or as I lay in my bed they came upon me,
- I too had been struck from the float forever held in solution,
- I too had receivd identity in my body,
- That I was I knew was of my body, and what I should be I knew should be of my body.

The faces of New York City, emanating with infinite variety, transcend both space and time: visiting Manhattan is like traveling across the world or across the centuries. The faces you pass on the street might be the same faces Whitman studied; the gray-bearded homeless man brushing his teeth in Central Park, thinly hidden from a young woman tossing snowballs to her dog, might be Whitman himself. Maybe hes a Zen Master, Chris said of the homeless man; maybe we all are, I thought.

This weekend in New York a woman died while walking her dogs in the East Village: she stepped on a poorly insulated electrical plate, fell to the sidewalk, and was electrocuted. Her dogs were injured but survived, one with burnt paws and the other with a bitten nose; the woman who died was only thirty years old. Just like that, she came to the end of the road, and her ferry crossed to some other shore. Shed been walking, not sleeping, but even the wakefulness of city streets couldnt save her from fates sudden unforeseen turn.

We all are coming and going, even those of us who never leave our hometown or house. All of us are wending inevitably toward some end which weve not chosen nor do we know. In the interim, we skate and sleep with strangers, if we dare; we walk our dogs and brush our teeth as if were fated to live forever. Were not, but we forget; in our slumber, it doesnt feel like the bus is moving. And yet it floats, gradually and inevitably, toward a sunlit shore weve never seen and cant begin to imagine; around us is an infinite band of other travelers, nameless faces, whose souls mingle with ours across the aisles.

Posted by lorianne at January 21, 2004 05:08 AM | TrackBack

Comments

Lorianne, this is just a stunning piece of writing. Thank you. I'm off to reread it now.

Posted by: Pica at January 21, 2004 09:51 AM

Lorraine, this is truly beautiful, and such a skillful interweaving of themes and people traveling not only between destinations but past and future. Thank you so much.

Posted by: beth at January 21, 2004 07:13 PM

Nice tribute to jolly old St. Walt. Thanks!

Posted by: Dave at January 21, 2004 08:16 PM

Glad to hear you enjoyed it. And Dave, it's great to hear there are other Whitman fans out there... :-)

Posted by: Lorianne at January 22, 2004 05:32 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040312202309/http://www.schaub.com/lori/blog/archives/000055.html

worldly words

By alembic

This post is my response to ecotone's (January 15, 2004) biweekly topic: Coming And Going

La velocit la forma di estasi che la rivoluzione tecnologica ha regalato alluomo, (Speed is the form of rapture the technological revolution has bequeathed to humanity) is what I am reading in an Italian translation of a book written in French by a writer who used to write in Czech. The book in question is called La lentezza, and it was written by Milan Kundera.

I used to think that learning languages was like taking trips -- or better yet, taking up temporary residence full citizenship rights in another world. For example, *the beach* was a much different place than *la spiaggia* or *a tengerpart*, though all three had much the same sand and waves teasing its shores ... but all of them equally capable of leaving me with a nasty case of metaphysical sunburn.

Growing up under communist rule, with our every move controlled and documented in booklets filled with the quilt of hieroglyphic stamps, we dreamt of travel the way Odysseus dreamt of going home. Though our borders were closed and we were shipwrecked, the world was still wide open to us in words.

The sirens -- dictionaries, primers, novels -- perched on the shelves of our small bookcase, sang and lilted of enchanted sunny islands in the subjunctive of French, echoed of the cobblestoned meandering paths of German compound nouns, and spoke in clipped tones of the bright, jagged cliffs of English verbs that stood like wardens holding off the invasion of maudlin latinates.

Our passage through these worlds of words was slow and required a great deal of effort, though we traveled light and weather was never an issue. But, back then, we had time and we had plenty of energy -- for we had few possessions to care for, and the exercise of effort seemed the only right to free speech left to us.

So we ventured, back and forth, between the languages, whispering words from one or the other to crack open the doors to a bit of fresh air and to another view, as the stuffy discourse -- the official language of some situation or another -- threatened to suffocate or blind us.

All the while our feet were bound to walk the same distances within the gates of our city, we managed to cover large continents, always in transit, like pilgrims hoping to witness a miracle at the end of the journey. Our destination, then, was never place, but the promise of transformation. Dispossessed of speech in our native tongue, we went looking for the manna we hoped to find in the rubble of Babel.

Of course, all this was a long time ago now. To speak of it requires another language, another crossing of sorts.

Now we have the Web. We have blogs. We come and go, hop from connection to connection, all the while sitting in a room, caf, street corner, or what have you. It takes so little effort to come and go, to reach a startling new landscape, be it one of vision or words.

The worldscape -- that extended one we inhabit through language -- seems open and familiar now, so our comings and goings hold no surprises, only annoyances when our browsers dont load fast enough or spam litters the roadsides.

Years ago, I went searching for the familiar in foreign languages ... nowadays, I am hoping to discover something foreign in all this familiar speech.

Perhaps, this desire for the strangeness of the familiar that had me marching into the tortured recesses of poetry when I wrote the following:

A Dish of Peaches in Cluj
--*After Wallace Stevens*

A peach is sweeter than any other
If its taste is the sun of years, the idea
Of a peach, extravagant and plump
Staked to the tongue--

The peach was on a branch, the branch was
From a tree, and the tree grew
In a town that had a name
In three languages.

A peach is the sun in the faience of sky,
One noon in the bowl of hunger;
One boat on a sea without
The allure of tides--

The peach was enormous. It sat on the sill.
The window was one of many, the town
Was one. It was the only one,
The one I left behind.

A peach is a word, and a word is the path
That wind around the appetite
Like a tourniquet. *Piersică, Barack, Pfirsich*,
Which one is my one and only peach?

The peach is a fruit I ate yesterday.
It came form Chile or Peru, full of sun --
I did not know any peach could ripen
Into the sole peach of the tree in Cluj.

* *Edited -- Thanks to* language hat *for the astute editorial eye.*

Posted by maria at January 23, 2004 11:21 AM | TrackBack

Comments

One of the things about living within a multicultural world is the passage from one language to the next that I constantly must go through. I turn to one side and speak in English, another, I speak in Japanese, yet another, in German, and sometimes in Portuguese, French, Spanish. And though my words trip from my tongue in the required sounds, my mind always lags, still catching up to the language before. So when I step onto a train and am suddenly faced with a non-Japanese who does the uncharacteristic thing of smiling and saying hello, I am left tongue-tied and twisted into a linguistic pretzel. It's like sloshing the wine around in the glass faster than the liquid can react, creating an internal muddle. I always wonder what those friendly people on the trains think: "god, this guy sure is reticent!" But I'm not, really! I'm just temporarily dumb, going down on the Babel elevator...

Posted by: butuki on January 23, 2004 05:32 PM

"Down on the Babel elevator" is a wonderful image for what you are describing, butuki. I thought that you might appreciate what I had to talk about in this post, as you, yourself, have gone through it ... and many times, too!

Posted by: maria on January 23, 2004 08:33 PM

Wonderful: both the post & the poem are delicious (in any language). Thank you.

Posted by: Lorianne on January 24, 2004 04:16 AM

I love both the post and the poem. I hope you will forgive an editor's pedantry: the Rumanian word is piersică (ie for e, si for is), and the Hungarian is barack (one r). The Hungarian, by the way, is borrowed from some South Slavic form which in turn was borrowed from German which came from Latin malum persicum 'Persian apple.' Peaches get around!

Posted by: language hat on January 24, 2004 05:55 AM

language hat, thanks so much for the editorial pedantry! I do appreciate it ... and must hang my head in shame (as my older son used to say) because it is astounding that I should make these mistakes, if I want to be taken seriously, that is.

Hungarian is -- or should I now say, was -- my native tongue. Rumanian (though the preference in Romania in the early Ceausescu days was Romanian) was a close second there...

Thanks again ... and anytime you see something like this again, please let me know.

Posted by: maria on January 24, 2004 10:36 AM

How lovely. There's a quality to fresh fruit sometimes that is ecstatic. I can remember eating some volunteer melons one lazy summer day as a young teen and being as happy as possible. Thanks for evoking the memory.

Posted by: jim on January 24, 2004 01:54 PM

Have you read David Mas Masumoto's Epitaph for a Peach? It describes the quest to grow the perfect peach, but one that is doomed to almost certain failure by an industry (and therefore a

culture) that values transportability over taste. He's a Japanese American farmer in Stanislaus county. A lot of his book was about being from another culture; his farm workers are mostly Mexican, and the peach musings triggered some very interesting musings that were not about peaches at all.

I can't think of a better fruit to launch such a splendid discussion. Biting into a good peach is a way to travel that short-circuits language, foreign or native. Thanks for this, Maria.

Posted by: Pica on January 25, 2004 07:24 AM

maria, I'm stunned into silence once again by the beauty of your writing. thank you for this thought-provoking and original post and for the gift of a peach to me on a day when all i can sense, persephone-like, is deepest winter.

Posted by: beth on January 26, 2004 05:30 PM

Source:http://web.archive.org/web/20040201234504/http://www.ashladle.org/archives/000282.html

Food and Place

Bi-Weekly topic for February 1, 2004

Not For Vegetarians...

By Feathers of Hope (Pica)

This entry is part of the Ecotone Wiki's joint post on Food and Place

Travelling back to Spain in early December made me realize just how much pork the Spanish eat. Even things that are ostensibly "vegetables"--peas, artichoke hearts, green beans--have bits of ham in them. Not chicken, or beef, but ham. Ham legs, cured in the Spanish manner (jamón serrano), hang in every bar, along with various cured sausages, ready for cutting into tapas or sandwiches or for omelettes or for the peas and artichokes.

There's nothing about Spanish geography that makes the pig a more likely farm animal than, say, a goat, which is certainly eaten in other Mediterranean countries. But there's plenty in Spanish history that has given pork such a prominent place in the cuisine. For one thing, it was outlawed for about six centuries under Moorish occupation. The forbidden food took on the aura of a battle standard.

Food is never just food, is it? The prominence of pork in Spain recalls an earlier, darker time, following the explusion of Jews and Muslims in the fifteenth century, when it was a test. Are you really one of us? Or does your refusal to eat this forbidden meat reveal you as a convert in name only? The Inquisition lurks around the tables in taverns, watching, watching.

Posted by Pica at January 31, 2004 09:07 PM

Comments

Well I seem to remember that it was only in 1992 that the legislation for it to be ilegal to be Jewish in Spain was finally abolished! But ham-in-everything may well continue! It's obviously loaded with significance.

Posted by: Coup de Vent at February 2, 2004 12:03 AM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/01/31/not_for_vegetari.html

The Trail: Angels, Demons and the Cafe Beuf

By Fragments from Floyd

Did you ever get sick of the sound of your own voice? Blahblahblahblah Fragments blahblahblah Tsuga... So, I'm gonna let our son, Nathan, tell you a tale that involves Food and Place, the February 01 topic at Ecotone.

As we join the story, Nate is several weeks south of Bar Harbour, making southern progress in his Quixotic Qwest to find America on the back roads between Maine and Goose Creek. He has picked up the Appalachian Trail (at my insistence) through the NY-NJ portion, to keep him away from the congestion. But of course, he has to jerk us around just a little (us, being the parental "units"). So. Here is a segment snatched from his (unpublished) book that I thought of when the topic turned to Food and Place. Hope you enjoy.

At one point, butt considerably frozen, I crossed a road with signs for a payphone nearby, and used the phone to courtesy-call the Units, who hadn't heard from me in three or four days. Dad picked up and we said our hellos, and then I realized how busy the road must've sounded over the phone. I had to yell when eighteen wheelers splash-roared by.

"Been a change of plans, Dad." I paused to let a pair of muffler-impaired low-riders drag by. "I met this guy, Marty, who knows the streets of New York like the back of his hand, and he told me about a route I could take through the city that was relatively safe, so I got off the trail a couple of days ago. I guess I'm officially in the Bronx now, but it's hard to tell. It's not really that busy anymore…"

"Mmmm," came in from my receiver.

"I'm fine, Dad. And I think this is basically even legal. I mean, there've been a couple of signs that said 'no pedestrians,' but I've seen a coupla others out here, too, and cops have just flown right by us. We're small potatoes, Dad. Don't worry. They don't have time to mess with somebody just for walking on a busy road in NYC…"

"Not happy." I heard him say, and then repeat, and then repeat. I knew I'd better give up the gig before he really started worrying.

"Just kidding, Pop. I'm thirty miles from New Jersey. Still on the trail. Everything's wondaful. Jus' wan' to say hi."

After getting called, rightfully, a jerk, and laughing at my good friend and father, I told him I'd call again in a few days and hung up the phone. I was still freezing, especially after not walking for a few minutes, but now I barreled on with a smile. Dads are good for some things.

That night I made it to the shelter to find an old section-hiker already there who introduced himself as "Pops." Pops quickly addressed what was on both of our minds. "You ready to freeze your ass off tonight?" Pops had yet to officially surrender to the moisture. He had been conquered but he continued to fight.

Pops had been in his sleeping bag since five o clock, stuffed inside it with some of his wet and clammy gear. He was trying to dry his clothes out with his own body heat so that by morning they would be fine again for the trail. I admired his bravery. He was already shaking and it was hardly even twilight.

My own clothes I hung up in the shelter. Some were dripping and all were in some way trading moisture with the wet night air. With our hanging clothes and gear combined, our shelter soon looked like a slummy yardsale aftermath. We used every hook possible and when there weren't any we invented some.

Out of everything in my possession, my one remaining dry article was my ugliest pair of algodon underwear. Finding them gave me hope, and they suddenly served as the symbol for my will to fight and live. That lone pair of dry, atrocious boxers was to me like the olive branch carried back by Noah's post-flood Dove. Inspired by the boxers and Pops' perseverance I, although conquered, would also continue to struggle on. I repacked these boxers in a ziploc bag, sucked out the air and zipped it tight. I rolled the bag, rubber-banded the bag, placed the bag in another bag, repeated the process, and then put this plastic-and-algodon trophy into my final grocery bag and tied it off in double knots.

Hope! I had hope: Whatever happened throughout the night, however frozen my butt actually became, I would put on dry underwear at sunrise. If I ever awoke, I knew I would surely awake in a dry-girthed sort of paradise.

In the meantime Pops and I both cooked long noodley meals over small stoves, debating even over how much water to add. The more heated water, the more free warmth to drink in with the noodles. But, alas, the more we drank the more often we'd have to creep out of whatever paltry warmth we'd mustered, only to brave the elements in returning some of ours to the soil.

"I don't know about you but I'm peeing right off the deck," Pops said.

"I'm tempted to just stay in my bag," I admitted. "Can you imagine how nice that first warm minute would be?" We laughed – the kind of laughing where our bodies automatically did the shaking and all we had to do was add voice to our breath. We laughed at how absurdly reduced to the elements we'd become, and this when it really, comparatively speaking, was not that unspeakably cold!

"If it just wasn't so dagblamed wet!" Pops shiverlaughed, shaking. We both agreed that snow would've been much better than this relentless rain. Snow could perch rather politely on your shoulder and you'd never even notice it was there. Snow could convince you that it wasn't really made from water at all. The same amount of rain would hit your shoulder like a cold raw egg and then rip through your clothes in a baneful search for your underwear. It would find its way to soak you, freeze you, kill you if it could.

Night had come in and we hoped for snow. We braced for the long haul. I boiled a pot of water and poured it back into my Nalgene, wrapped it in a shirt and huddled around it in my thin little bivy, sometimes putting it down with my frozen feet for a while. Sometimes we tried to talk ourselves and each other into distraction. Other times one of us would say goodnight and plunge in, hoping that we were fully ready for sleep and the morning would come quickly. In the morning, once we could get moving again, we'd be fine.

Never much beyond the lip of sleep, a crashing down the trail startled us from our own chattering little worlds. Flashlights flung out across wet trees along the ridge.

"Who in the hell could that be?" said Pops in disbelief. "What time is it, anyway?"

I looked at my watch. "Eight thirty." Pops let out a cross between a whimper and a moan. "I've been in this shelter since noon today. Been in my sleeping bag since five…" He mumbled off. "…damn thought it was at least one o clock." We whistled to the oncoming hikers to let them know they'd found the place. They whooped back. One was singing.

"Sweet mother of Mary," Pops quietly growled.

Rich and Ed unpacked their things and the four of us got acquainted. They were middle-aged boy-scout troop leaders who went to the same church in a nearby town. They hadn't expected to find anybody else in the shelter on a night like this.

"Too early in the year for thru-hikers to be this far north" Rich said, "and nobody in their right minds would come out in weather like this just for the weekend."

"Hmm." Pops said.

Rich and Ed laughed. Rich, by far the larger of the two, was quickly becoming the spokesman. "Well, we're boy-scout leaders. We enjoy this sort of thing."

Never in a million years. Never in a million years would I have guessed what happened next. Ed lugged a ten-pound propane grill from his pack and began to set up its stand in the midst of a light drizzle.

"Itellya, Ed, I am starving." Rich looked at the two of us. "What about you boys? Up for a coupla ribeyes?"

Trail Magic: trayl-ma-jik. n. A common term used by hikers of the Appalachian Trail to signify a moment of sheer, overwhelming fortune at the time of greatest need.

Shoot now and ask questions later. Real, plump, juicy man-sized fresh-grilled ribeye steaks. Sautéed mushrooms and onions. Mountains of scalloped potatoes in a homemade cheesy white sauce. Suddenly, somehow, two wet bedraggled rats, one minute shivering alone in the wilderness and trying against all odds to sleep their way into oblivion, are the next minute served steaming ribeye steaks on paper plates by singing strangers under light of a lantern in a New Jersey wood. "You're good men," Pops said with his mouth full. "Yep. Good. You're good, good, good men. Wow. You're—you believe this?" Pops looked up at me and laughed with his mouth full, and laughed and laughed and laughed.

While we all ate, Rich and Ed explained that they'd been planning on coming out with two more campers. The two in their troop who had earned the most patches were going to get to come on this trip as a reward. Then, at the last minute, neither of the boys wanted to go. "They don't make scouts like they used to," Rich said. "Tell'em they'll be hiking six miles in the dark, cold, and rain and they all of a sudden get a chip on their shoulder." He speared a potato sliver from his plate and held it up like a trophy. "More for us, right? You eat all you want, boys. We don't want to carry this out in the morning."

So now, along with my algodon underwear, I had secure and warm in my belly one and a half ribeye steaks, sautéed mushrooms and onions, and various hills of scalloped potatoes in a delectable cheesy white sauce and pepper. Hope.

Regardless, Pops and I still "froze our asses off." The scout leaders pulled on their long underwear tops and bottoms; good thick dry socks; warm hats; and climbed into their nice thick cozy warm dry delicious sleeping bags while Pops and I curled in or little wet balls and looked on. Pops had on long underwear but it was wet, a thirty-degree sleeping bag but it wasn't enough. The temperature was down in the thirties now, and I couldn't convince Pops to take the clammy things out of his bag. The thought of putting on frosty-wet clothes in the morning was enough to keep him with them all night.

Moron that I was, I had already mailed home all of my winter clothes. By then my long underwear, my hat, my wool sweater and my gloves were all snuggled, soft, quiet, and dry in a box in Virginia. Every article of clothing I now had – other than my algodon underwear – was wet. My fleece liner was small, damp, and thin. Even cooking another water bottle was not enough to put any life back into my deadnumbed frozen feet. I reminded myself that my shaking was a good sign – it meant that I was still in only the early stages of hypothermia. I drifted off.

I have never – never in my life – heard anything like the snoring that came from our old friend Rich. And may I never again. Ed snored too, but I have several times heard something like the snoring that came from Ed. Ed's snoring was just irritating. Rich's snoring was something paramount. Something that everyone should experience once.

Pops and I, both too cold to sleep, experienced that foghorn wail for seven good hours with seldom a break. Comrades are made quickly in the trenches, and Pops and I were fast becoming friends that needed little speech between us. We pounded the walls, coughed, shouted, laughed hysterically, nudged, poked, kicked and cursed our way through the snoring of the evening. I know it is not his fault. I know that sleep apnea is a horrible condition that cannot easily be helped and should not cast unfavorable light on the snorer. But, still, even with the steaks in our bellies and the knowledge that he was a friend, if we had not kept our sense of humor that night we may very well have killed our good pal Rich.

Pops got up while the sky was still dark gray. He looked and sounded out of sorts. "I'm hiking to the closest road and then hitching a ride to my car. I've had enough of this." He rolled up his ground pad and strapped it sloppily to his pack. He didn't even bother to put his trash-bag raincover over his pack. "Good luck to ya. See you around." He looked up at the spattering trees, cursed, and made his way down to the trial.

I listened to him crash away and then tended to myself. I wasn't looking too good either. Everything about me—my mood, my body, my thoughts, my breathing—was a clammy and deadbody blue. My shaking didn't seem like such a good sign anymore. I needed heat. I grabbed for my waterbottle and found it in a thin pool around my head. I remembered, now, that I had left it open and Rich had bumped it over. My bivy was waterproof, thank goodness, so I wasn't any wetter for the wear. But now I'd have to go out to the creek.
I crawled out of the sack and into the drizzle in nothing but my boots and clammy underwear. "God," I thought, half a prayer and half an expletive. It was the first time I really started fearing for myself. I was shaking so violently that I could only see around me in flashes, like looking at an amateur collection of flip-book pictures.

By the time I had cooked a hot water bottle the boy scouts were up and rummaging around. "Well. You're up bright and early." Rich said.

"Yeah." I was wrapped around the bottle in the tightest ball I could make. "Pops got the jump on me. He left fifteen twenty minutes ago."

"Too bad," Ed spoke up. "He'll miss breakfast."

Hot damn skippy. Breakfast was more steak and potatoes. The three of us ate our fill and there was still more left over for the boys to take home. If it weren't for the heat I got from those two meals – the carbos and energy churning in my gut – I don't know how I would've made it through the night. I thanked them, and ate, and thanked them, and thanked them. I extended—

and still extend—Pops's eloquent speech: Rich and Ed, wherever you are, "you're good men. You're good, good men."

Posted by fred1st at 04:57 AM | Comments (5)

Comments

Wonderful: absolutely wonderful. The acorn doesn't fall far from the tree. (Not to imply that anyone's 'nuts,' of course...) ;-)

Posted by: Lorianne | February 1, 2004 7:13 AM

Wow - another fine writer in the family! I've read a lot of accounts of hiking (have edited a slew of outdoor books) but through-hiking the AT never seemed any realer than this.

Posted by: Lin B | February 1, 2004 7:29 AM

I do believe Nate has inherited your muse, old buddy.

Posted by: ronbailey | February 1, 2004 8:38 AM

that was a great story, told well. I was shivering and grateful for the meal. Good stuff. Good writing. Delicious warmth.

Posted by: ntexas99 | February 1, 2004 11:45 AM

You and Nate have very similar "voices", Fred. Fabulous piece!

Posted by: Cop Car | February 1, 2004 8:55 PM

Source:
http://www.fragmentsfromfloyd.com/fragments/2004/02/the_trail_angels_demons_and_th.html

A taste of summer

By Hoarded Ordinaries

The following is my contribution to the Ecotone topic, Food and Place.

On Friday I made a pot of spinach-lentil soup. Its easy, one of the first recipes I ever attempted. Just bring some green lentils to a boil then leave them to simmer while you prepare the other ingredients: chopped onions sauted with garlic in olive oil, diced potatoes with spinach, coriander, and lemon juice. Being lazy, I use frozen spinach, which I leave to thaw in a red bowl on the counter until the lentils are soft. The trick to making spinach-lentil soup is to take your time: not only do the lentils need to simmer, but the potatoes need to reach just the right mushy, stewed-with-flavor consistency. Its easy, but it cant be rushed.

The Arabic name for this soup is *Addas bi hamoud*: sour lentil soup, or lentils with lemon. Im not Middle Eastern, but I went to college in Toledo, Ohio, a town with a large Lebanese and Arabic population. On campus, we ate gyros at the Med Room, where they simmered a savory hunk of ground lamb all day and served it on soft grilled pita bread. Down the street from our dorm, a tiny restaurant whose name Ive forgotten served the best chicken schawarma in town: when I

first became a vegetarian, my friend Kristi and I agreed that Schawarma is a Vegetable, as are gyros. While living in the dorms, I stocked my refrigerator with store-bought tubs of baba ghanouj and tabouli; after I married, Chris and I would make regular pilgrimages to the Tiger Bakery, where you could buy still-warm loaves of pita bread and honey-soaked semolina cakes from soft-spoken men who quietly displayed their Koran-recitation trophies.

It was only natural, then, that when I saw a Middle Eastern cookbook on the remainders table at Thackerays, the independent bookstore about a mile from campus, Id snatch it up even if I my dorm room didnt have a kitchen. Our trips to Thackerays were themselves legendary. "Promise that you won't let me buy anything," I'd whisper to Kristi as we walked down tree-lined suburban streets to the local strip-mall; she'd promise, and so would I, but we never remained true to our word. Inevitably there would be some favorite forgotten book on the remainders table, or an interesting new-found friend. I bought my first copy of Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker's Creek* on Thackeray's remainder table, an old paperback edition that now is literally falling to pieces. And equally tattered is my copy of Virginia T. Habeeb's Pita the Great, a cookbook I've kept all these years because of one oft-enjoyed recipe.

You see, I've not made most of the recipes in this book, just one over and over again. When I first bought the book, I didn't bake my own pita bread or make my own *hummus bi tahini* for lack of a kitchen. Now that I have a kitchen, I have too other responsibilities: it's easier and faster to buy pita and hummus at the store. And although the recipes for Wholemeal Honey Pita, Hummus Guacamole, and Marinated Artichokes with Peppers sound easy enough and make my mouth water just to read them, I am at last a creature of habit, no longer as ready as I was in college to try something new. Then I had leisure but no kitchen; now, I have a kitchen but am hurried and harried by time.

On Friday when I made this latest batch of spinach-lentil soup, I didn't need to open the cookbook: the relevant page fell out, spattered with the remnants of past encounters. I chop onions and potatoes much more quickly these days, so I sat poring over recipes, distractedly munching raw potato slices, while the lentils simmered. Here on the same page as this lentil soup recipe is a menu for a "Picnic Pita Party," an assortment that has beckoned over the years with its image of summer splendor, consumed in leisure:

Spinach and Lentil Soup with Wholemeal Sesame Pitas
Grilled Kefta Kebabas in Sesame Pitas
Spicy Bulgur Salad
Feta Cheese and Cucumber Salad
Glazed Pita Puffs
Hearty Burgundy
Lots of Hot Coffee

Years ago I read this menu and dreamed of summers to come when I'd whip together these recipes, grab a book and a friend and head for a grassy, sun-drenched field. I've never made spicy bulgur salad, I no longer eat the lamb that goes in kefta, and I don't like coffee. But the litany of this meal tempts me still with the allure of far-off, sunny places. Maybe it's Toledo, maybe it's Lebanon, or maybe it's just a dream, this sun-drenched field I imagine. But there I know that it's always summer, there's always time, and the taste of lemon on the tongue is tart and begging to be savored.

Posted by lorianne at February 1, 2004 07:25 AM

Comments

I have to try this lentil soup, Lorianne! It sounds just wonderful. Very nice piece, too. I love the tone, reflective and passionate.

Posted by: trish at February 1, 2004 10:08 AM

Lorianne: you're so funny. I have more cookbooks than I care to list from which I've tried one, or two, recipes. Two or three cookbooks from which I've cooked extensively (Joy of Cooking, mostly during vacations from college, and Madhur Jaffrey's Eastern Vegetarian Cooking, which I think doesn't exist as such in an American edition and for which a scale, rather than a cup measure, is the essential tool; this cookbook invariably takes me to Paris everytime I open it because it's where I learned to cook Indian food).

There's something so appealing about a new (or second-hand: new to us) cookbook. Glimpses of culinary possibility. Maybe this is why people subscribe to cooking magazines: you don't feel so guilty if you only try one or two of the recipes!

Posted by: Pica at February 1, 2004 10:40 AM

I really enjoyed reading this and felt re-engaged with exploring the cookery books on the shelves at home. Will definitely try the soup. Good wintry one. I love Eastern European and North African foods any do understand breads so well. Didn't Beth come back with a carload of bread from Montreal a while ago? Can't find the post...

Posted by: Coup de Vent at February 1, 2004 11:43 AM

Good to hear I'm not the only one who likes to READ cookbooks as much as COOK with them. There's something magical about just paging through a cookbook & imagining the tastes, smells, and textures.

I actually don't like cooking magazines: the bright, glossy pictures ruin it for me. The food in cooking magazines looks too perfect to my eye. I prefer the evocative quality of words alone, or perhaps some simple line drawings and/or art to illustrate the "mood" of each dish (like the illustrations in the various Moosewood cookbooks).

Posted by: Lorianne at February 2, 2004 06:18 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040304061630/http://www.schaub.com/lori/blog/archives/000069.html

Food and Place

By London and the North

The Ecotone wiki is today writing about Food and Place. Join in if you feel like writing something. It stimulates the appetite though.

When I emigrated to Yorkshire six years ago, after a million years in London, one of the first things I noticed was the change in cuisine. We tried to adapt and experiment - some of which paid off and some of which did not.

In London, we ate a lot of Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot food. The Erenler Ockabasi on Green Lanes was our favourite and we had many quiet and noisy meals there. One the corner of the street where we lived in Stamford Hill/South Tottenham was a Carribean takeaway. I've eaten a lot of Jamaican food in London over the years - home cook and takeaway. The fact is you can know where you are and probably who you are by what and where you eat in London. Eating patterns are geographical and cultural co-ordinates.

I watched the demise of local Jewish bakeries over the years so that the streets became a map known only to me and other north London Jews of where this one and that one had been. Biting into a piece of cheesecake would be like making a mark upon the landscape of what was and what is. Cheesecake can always be uniquley identified with its maker - some of whom are no more. Are you still alive and well Mr Rogg? Thank you for all the cheesecake, fishballs and delicious New Green (pickles) over the years.

Up here, we made brave attempts at Fish and Chips. Nearly gagged on the lard. Call me a snob I don't give a shit. It was awful. Tongue stuck to roof of mouth. Saw a mega articulated truck delivering it once to the rated (!) Bizzy Lizzy in Skipton. Horrible sight. What are people doing consuming that stuff? Eventually we discovered that you could get Fish and Chips fried in sunflower oil in Ilkley but by then I think this particular local delicacy had lost its appeal.

But Yorkshire definitely has its culinary delights. Mumtaz is perhaps top of the list of fabulous eateries. It's a large, and I mean successfully expanding, Kashmiri restaurant in Bradford. The food there is too wonderful - fresh, authentic, very tasty. All sections of the community eat there. It's in the heart of Bradford so you sit and enjoy a meal and watch on occasion Pakistani youth being harassed by police out the window. Hmm. Oh I think I need another visit soon. Often to be coupled with a movie at Pictureville. Great combo.

We are mapped eating wise up here too. North of Skipton is The Angel at Hetton - white table cloths and expensive wines - something Paris and I like to do for a special occasion. The early bird menu is very good value and a delish treat in all courses. West of Skipton is the Tempest Arms - an old pub with a good menu of fresh foods. A nice relaxed evening. There's the Cavendish Pavillion at Bolton Abbey where we had breakfast this morning. The dog got a sausage. As she does.

There are lots of other places we have discovered over the years now up and down the dales, in uptown Ilkley and downtown Keighley. So we are doing fine. And of course, I have my days in London too so I participate in the bigger culture of city eating out and takeaways - stocking up on missed homefoods at mealtimes.

The other thing that has happened since relocating further north is that we eat much more at home. Paris is a great and happy cook. She also encourages rituals of meals at the table. Breakfast, for example and evening meals. It's to be recommended and makes home feel much more homely.

Posted by Coup de Vent at 04:21 PM | Comments (4)

Comments

When I was last in Edinburgh--summer of 2000--we were introduced to the concept (if not the actual) fried Mars bar from the chippie. You may be interested to know that what passes for a fish and chip shop here in Davis, California, now serves deep fried Snickers (Marathon) bars.

I didn't know anyone ever did fish and chips in lard... ick.

Posted by Pica at February 2, 2004 02:09 AM

One thing that really surprised me about Great Britain as I travelled through it, after hearing all the horror stories about how bad the cooking is, was the number of really great supermarkets and grocery stores. After Sweden and Norway, where we very often had to make do with the single, shriveled tomato or undersized carrot left on the shelves, Britain's supermarkets were a cornucopia of foods from around the world, especially India. It was sheer joy to pick out a Patel's jar of curry paste, go back to our campsite, and mix it with lentils and rice for dinner. In our six months bicycling around, Birtain had the best and greatest variety of food.

Posted by butuki at February 2, 2004 04:27 PM

Yes Britain's supermarkets are good and getting better with increased supplies of eco-sensitive foods and other goods. But I am reminded by your story of my aunt who, age 65, came over from East Berlin for the first time (1978), way before the wall came down, and stood in a London supermarket and just cried with shock and anger at the contrast in the range and quality of goods. Having said that, there were many good things about the DDR which are now lost.

Posted by Coup de Vent at February 2, 2004 05:09 PM

The DDR. All my life, until the Wall came down, East Germany was this place that movies had told me could only ever be painted in black and white. I had never understood the sadness on my grandfather's face whenever we walked along the border. Until 1995 when my wife and I were invited to a wedding on the north coast. It was like entering a dream... I just couldn't believe there was sunlight there and *colors>! It was so beautiful!*

I had a long conversation with the old man who ran the pension we were staying at. He told me of life in East Germany and what he both missed and was glad had been repaced. One thing he really missed... he said it again and again... people around him were nicer before the wall came down. He found the world views and assumptions of West Germans to be very harsh and far too removed from human interaction.

Talking to him and walking around those unspoiled rural lanes brought me almost into the memories my mother told me of from her childhood. And my view of what East German was changed forever.

Posted by butuki at February 3, 2004 02:38 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040412170103/http://www.airenet.co.uk/alife/2004_02.html

Food and Place

By Switched At Birth

First of all, thanks to Fred First, I learned about Acme Labelmaker, a nifty, fun service. Thanks to them, I can play with making banners to occasionally brighten up a post.

Next, a brief explanation about Ecotone. What on earth is it? Simply put, Ecotone is a collaboration of writers whose blogs are primarily about "place." I am a newcomer, not one of the creative folks who thought this up, and so, in their own words,

An ecotone is a term from the field of ecology. It is a place where landscapes meet -- like field with forest, or grassland with desert. The ecotone is an area of increased richness and diversity where the two communities commingle. Here too are creatures unique to the ecotone... the so-called 'edge effect'. Here in our online version of an ecotone, we hope to create an edge effect, bringing distinct and different places and communities together to enrich our world.

Ecotone's biweekly topics explore a variety of subjects. Some recent ones included Trees and Place, Islands and Place, Coffee Shops as Place, Protecting Place and Mythic Place. Some intriguing topics upcoming include Time and Place, Imaginary Places and Secret Places. Click here to check it out for yourself.

Here's my shot at the current topic.

"Deceptively simple." I think I finally know what that phrase means. Writing about Food and Place should be a piece of cake for me. I write about food all the time over at Mary Beth's Kitchen.

But as I focused on the minute details of food and place in my own life experiences, the more global my thoughts became, wondering how fellow bloggers in China, Australia, Virginia, Boston, South Carolina, Texas, Tennessee, Canada, Wales, Iraq and elsewhere nourish and nurture their physical bodies and spiritual selves, and under what conditions.

The foods we eat depend in large measure upon our geography, culture, philosophy or religion, and economic circumstance. Do we have the freedom to choose what we eat each day or is our menu controlled by others? The locus of our emotional state determines "where we're at." To a depressed person, even the most exquisite meal tastes brown, dusty, and hard to swallow, while one basking in emotional sunshine may savor an apple and a hunk of cheese with fullfilled delight.

To a practicing alcoholic, the beer, cigarette and chocolate chip cookie meal may be a daily reality.

To an ill person in the hospital, the blue liquid nutrient delivered through a feeding tube may keep them alive and hydrated with daily requirements for survival, but it can hardly be called food. Or to someone chronically ill with nausea and pain, food may feel like an enemy.

There can be joy and spritual insight through fasting, when the withholding of food is our own choice.

This morning, I will be at the communion table, partaking of the body and the blood, a bizarre transmogrification, but one in which I participate, hoping that one day something will click and my faith will no longer be elusive. I always take away something of value, a feeling of positive mysticism, feeling that I have indeed been spiritually fed. And yet, walking away, my mouth still damp with wine, a voice in one ear whispers "Believe," while one in the other breathes, "Look before you leap."

09:51 AM in Mary Beth's Kitchen, Spiritual Journey | Permalink | Comments (3) | TrackBack

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040812222556/longleaf.typepad.com/switched_at_birth/2004/02/index.html

Food and Place - #4

By Brain Crayons

Today's post will be my first (and maybe last?) contribution to the Ecotone topic of Food and Place. My blog is not usually "place" themed, and my understanding is that the ecotone spot is really a gathering place for those blogs that are primarily about "place". I don't fall under that category, but I do have a story I could share about Food and Place.

We lived up north. Actually, in Ohio, which to me is very north these days. We were surrounded by maples and wooded areas, and seasons that included harsh winters and brief summers. While young and on summer break, we would sometimes venture down to this other place, called Texas. Our maternal grandparents lived there, and we would head that way for a visit.

I truly can't remember the first time I visited the restaurant known as Jacala's. One thing I do remember is that Jacala's has always meant three things for me ... (1) San Antonio, Texas (2) Family, and (3) Excellent Mexican food. Before there even was a me, my extended family would meet at this neighborhood Mexican restaurant. Birthday? Christening? Graduation? Engagement? Any of these, and other family occasions, would find us all huddled together at Jacala's. We were likely to run into Willie Nelson, or John Wayne, or a host of other known faces there. Many of our photos were taken in this place, and in fact, the ONLY photo in existence with all my siblings and both parents was taken in this restaurant.

My maternal grandparents moved from Czechoslovakia to San Antonio, Texas, by way of the Statue of Liberty. My grandfather was originally a cabinet maker. He went on to live a new life in this place of San Antonio, Texas. He was maybe the purest man I've ever known.

Anyway, when we would make our pilgrimmages from up north down to the dusty warm land of Texas, we would anxiously wait for that first glimpse of Jacala's. It was better than home away from home. There was more family within those walls than maybe ever within our home. At Jacala's, we smiled and visited. We took pictures and dined on salsa and chips. We partook of an

excellent menu of enchiladas, spanish rice, frijoles, tostados, guacamole, tacos, and the Jacala family secret -- puffy tacos! Only in San Antonio, Texas, and only in Jacala's can you get a puffy taco that will make your mouth water in your dreams. Whether the seasoned beef or the micro-shredded lettuce and just-barely-melted cheese, a puffy taco will never leave your memory. Yes, the food was beyond compare.

Not once (not even once) in the 15 years or so of migrating from wherever we happened to be in that year to our annual or semi-annual visit to San Antonio, Texas, did we miss a visit to Jacala's. In fact, there were times when we might have only been in town long enough to catch a meal with family. Flying from California to New York? How 'bout stopping over long enough to meet me at Jacala's for lunch? Driving from Florida to Washington? Surely you have time to stop at Jacala's and have dinner?

As our lives were woven and we spread to all corners of the country, the only true constant was that our "meeting place" always remained Jacala's in San Antonio. Births, deaths, marriage, divorces, and everthing in-between has seen the mariachi sound of the patio lights of Jacala's.

I didn't know (back in 1958) that I would eventually make my home in San Antonio, Texas. Or that I would raise my own children there. But it gives me a lasting peace that the one true constant in our ever-moving world is a place just right around the corner. Jacala's still stands, and I'm still ordering my favorite --- the #4, Con Queso, that is. That's the enchilada plate with a puffy taco and a chile con queso on the side. It comes with rice and beans, and a plentiful supply of salsa and chips.

Mostly, it comes with history, and family. San Antonio, Texas is where both my grandchildren have been born, and where my maternal grandparents died. I was married here. Both my sons were born here. Our history circles around this gathering place. Even though our family, and the extended reaches of it, are spread all over the nation, we've always had Jacala's to come home to. At Jacala's, family is seated at the table, within your reach. I love this place.

Posted by: ntexas99 on Feb 01, 04 | 11:57 pm

[0] Trackbacks [0] Pingbacks COMMENTS

The #4 sounds great. How wonderful Jacala's is still in business.

Even though you don't write *primarily* about place, I hope you'll join Ecotone regularly. The wiki is trying to get people to think about place and encourage them to write about it -- not be an exclusive club! Everyone's welcome.

Posted by: Pica on Feb 02, 04 | 2:03 am

Amen to Pica's comments: you don't have to be primarily "place-centered" (place obsessed?) to participate in Ecotone. If nothing else, it's just kind of fun to brainstorm on the biweekly topics (like taking a non-graded creative writing class with exercises).

Where in Ohio did you live? I was born & raised in Columbus, then went to school in Toledo. Ohio, of course, is a great place to be FROM.

Posted by: Lorianne on Feb 02, 04 | 5:42 pm

Don't be shy! It's un-Texan -- and picking up a shared topic and blogging on it is great fun. You make me think I'll be visiting the wrong end of the state when I go to Houston next month.

Posted by: P. on Feb 04, 04 | 3:26 am

I can't wait to visit SA sometime. I've worked on 2 different books where I've had to find photos of the city, and I'm in love with the Riverwalk just based on the pictures.

Jacala's sounds heavenly. It's great to hear about places like that, that have been around for years. I've never heard of a puffy taco! I need one!!
Thanks for sharing your memories of a special place.

Posted by: laurie on Feb 04, 04 | 4:47 pm

Thank you to everyone for the welcome, and for the generous comments. I'll be keeping my eye on the ecotone site. I love seeing the stories there!

Posted by: ntexas99 on Feb 08, 04 | 4:22 am

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20051122142622/http://www.braincrayons.com/comments.php?id=35_0_1_0_C

Food Capitals Of The World

By Feathers of Hope (Numenius)]

A note for the Ecotone Wiki's *entries on* Food and Place.

I think it's a peculiarly American thing to name many a town and burgh the world capital of something or other. Not surprisingly a large fraction of these are food-related. Evidently Sacramento, not far from here, is the almond capital of the world. (Perhaps this makes Governor Arnold the Almond King?) Chico, a little farther to the north, isn't daunted by this proclamation and also claims this title.

Perhaps most famous in California is Gilroy, south of the Bay Area, which is the garlic capital of the world, and nearby is Castroville, the artichoke capital of the world. A few miles to the south is Watsonville, the strawberry capital of the world. Throw in a bit of Santa Cruz county wine, and you have the makings of a good meal there.

As in the case of the almonds, sometimes there are several claimants to a title. Three towns in the Southern U.S. -- Belzoni, Mississippi, Savannah, Tennessee, and Des Allemands, Louisiana -- call themselves the catfish capital of the world.

Many of the capitals have food festivals associated with them. Gilroy has a garlic festival the last weekend in July that draws well over 100,000 people. Garlic fiends that we are, this sounds a good bit more appetizing than the annual Shrimp and Petroleum Festival held over Labor Day weekend in Morgan City, Louisiana.

Posted by Numenius at February 1, 2004 11:15 PM

Comments

Yes it's quite bizarre especially when it extends beyond food - barbed wire capital, hubcap city??? Thanks for the thoughts and links.

Posted by: Coup de Vent at February 2, 2004 12:07 AM

Be happy that you live in California; things are even weirder in my home state of Ohio. Marion, Ohio is the popcorn capital of the world, and nearby Waldo, Ohio is the birthplace of the bologna sandwich.

Posted by: Lorianne at February 2, 2004 01:44 AM

Utah's pride is being the state with the highest Jell-o and ice cream consumption per capita in the nation.

Posted by: Stephen at February 3, 2004 02:31 PM

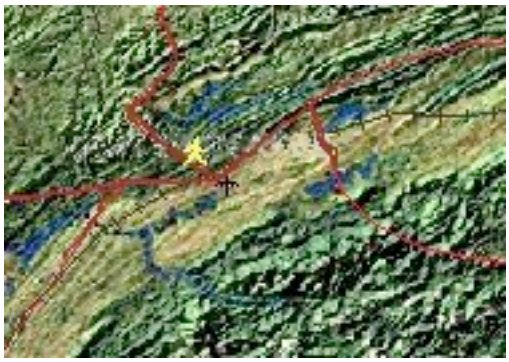
Actually, RIPON, CA is the Almond Capitol of the World.

Posted by: Amy at September 20, 2004 10:55 PM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/02/01/food_capitals_of.html

Burger/Joint

By P.



I'm an eater -- a gourmand, I guess you'd say. It's a consuming passion and my greatest, and no doubt most deadly, sin. I find I love the act of eating and the comfortable feeling of having eaten well, and while fine suppers in romantic circumstances are all very well, I can't separate them as memories from disturbing dinners in atrocious surroundings. Can I choose between artistically dripped sauces in Washington and appalling fried calamari in New Jersey? Between my disappointing first bowl of grits in a southern Denny's and homemade sausage in a Catskills country firehouse? How can I forget Mr Burger And Chinese Too? I'm afraid that to me, eating is too much fun; seldom does a unique meal, by itself, leave a good story to tell. So this is a story about place more than food -- or rather, about a non-place, full of non-food and a sort of non-community.

It was late last summer, in the hottest part of mid-August, when I try not to travel and end up driving anyway. We had fought our way over the Blue Ridge in a blinding thunderstorm on I-77, in a white-knuckled stream of traffic dotted with tankers and plagued with aggressive SUV drivers, all of us afraid to slow down too much lest we be hit from behind by that large shadow half-visible in the mirror. Even the back seat, normally an inexhaustible fountain of demands and comments, had fallen silent.

Then, out of the weather and into the foothills of the Virginia mountains, we found ourselves in a miles-long backup of cars at the inadequate junction of I-77 and I-81, at the beginning of that remarkable stretch of I-81 where you're going both north and south, if the signs are to be believed.

From the back seat comes the announcement: "I have to go to the bathroom!"

Myself, I'd rather be dodging tankers in the rain.

Tensely, we waited out the traffic jam, all the while eyeing roadside bushes and wishing we were in Pennsylvania, where they don't clear the right-of-way as thoroughly. Hopefully, we swung southwest at last on the northbound highway -- but it wasn't until we turned north again that we found a place to stop.

The scene struck me as we came up to it. Under a silver sky, there was a narrow valley with a highway bridge across it and a mighty river of traffic instead of water slashing between the hills. Looking impossibly long, a tanker truck caught the light as it crossed the bridge. All around, trees lined the horizon, dark in the shadowless light.

To the right, a cluster of low buildings you might find anywhere in the U.S. -- but teeming, as an oasis on the edge of a great desert might be (Last Burger For A Thousand Miles! Tank Up and, well, you know). A meaningless place in itself, but full of importance.

Maybe it was relief. We found it, of course, at McDonald's, that essential adjunct to American motor travel. But in the crowded men's room, it was plain everyone felt the same sense of release from strain. In accents of the deep South, the mountains and the Midwest, the men were gossipping about weather and distance and challenges overcome. It was the last place I would have looked for it, but everyone seemed happy.

Not everyone, actually. Facing the dining room's main door were seven huge people, jammed into the narrow metal and fiberglass slots provided as seating in fast-food places. Stone-faced, they eyed the scene like squat statues meant to ward off intruders (Abandon All Appetite, Ye

Who Enter Here), or else to accept small sacrifices from grudging strangers. I could relate to their expressions a bit: I know from undignified experience that fat is surprisingly squishy, but they could not have been comfortable, racked in like that. I tried, and failed, to imagine what they were driving. I would not have looked forward to that, either. I hoped they did not have to go far.

Opposite them, beside the door, a man with a white beard watched out the window. Unlike the rest of us, he had a couple of bags with him, and a moment's speculation led my daughter and me to deduce, and find, the bus station across the oil-spotted parking lot. A spectacularly tall family walked by, in colorful college T-shirts that defied guessing, for the schools named had nothing to do, geographically, with our route and weren't even famous for basketball. Everywhere at this way station in the middle of nowhere, there were prosperous families and hardscrabble truckers, midwesterners and tidewater-dwellers, chattering and hurrying.

I assume we ate something. Knowing my daughter's tastes, it was doubtless chicken nuggets, requested, nibbled and left unfinished on her part -- for she is *not* an eater and we encourage her. I would have had a salad, though I dislike the bland greens you get in such places. But it was OK. We needed sustenance and rest as well as relief. It was good not to be moving for a few minutes, even if we were far from home and among strangers. I remember we celebrated by buying a dessert.

Could an isolated caravanserai in the Sahara be much different, or more welcome?

Source: http://my.core.com/~pzicari/text/FoodTravel.html

Hill Food

By Older and Growing

This one's for the bi-weekly Ecotone topic, which is currently on Food and Place:

I'm probably missing out on something, but I've never been one to see food as an art-form. Although sharing a meal together can be a happy social event, an excuse, should we need one, to spend time with friends, I can never regard the food itself as much more than fuel for the body. That may be why food adds to the pleasure of camping and climbing trips. I'm not bothered by the simple nature of the diet or the basic preparation facilities; quite the reverse – I delight in the simplicity of nutritious, satisfying meals prepared over a single-burner backpacking stove. The whole outdoors experience becomes perfectly integrated- existence focused on the essentials of shelter, food, and appreciation of the immediate environment; all else fades into a distant irrelevance.

Life in the outdoors is full of ritual. Small tents have to be kept tidy otherwise anarchy reigns and tempers fray as every other minute is spent in searching for something; like as not something found and put down only a minute ago. "A place for everything, and everything in its place" may sound a touch Draconian, but it works and avoids wasted time and false accusations against one's tent-mate. So, morning starts with the washing ritual, followed by the first-coffee-of-the-day ritual (standing in a quiet campsite whilst most are still asleep, cradling a steaming hot cup in

chilly hands, gazing at the hills and guessing what the weather has in store), then the breakfast ritual, then the sort-out-the-food-for-the-day ritual and finally the rucksack packing ritual. Hill food has to be easy to carry, easy to eat, high calorie-to-weight ratio and ideally based on complex carbohydrates. And last thing before leaving, down a pint of water – it's easier to carry inside your stomach than on your back.

Knowing that it's physiologically good to stop for an intake of fluid and calories is a great excuse for stopping to satisfy more than the physical needs of the body (yes, those as well…). Having to take off rucksack and delve inside to retrieve water bottle or thermos flask and cereal bar (granola bar in the US??) encourages you to site for a while and rest, turning away from the steep slope immediately ahead, to take in the expanding view unfolding below. This is another of the rituals of hillwalking; you soon develop an eye for a good stopping place - a flat-topped rock to sit on, maybe a large boulder to provide shelter from the wind and a backrest, and an unimpeded view into the valleys below.

These views tend to stick in the mind; having a snack-stop gives time to take in detail that otherwise would be passed over – the moving pattern of light and shade on a far hillside as the wind blows clouds across the sun; a squall blowing a wave of ripples across a lake tucked into the corrie far below; grasses near at hand bend and wave – always the wind making it's presence felt. Or the eye follows possible scrambling or climbing routes up a rock face away across the slope, picking out the lines of weakness and mentally joining them in a continuous way to the summit. Weight is the enemy of fast, comfortable movement, so wherever possible, everything carried on the hill serves more than one purpose. So even food might be said to be dual purpose – it feeds the body and it encourages me to stop and feed the soul at the same time.

Although on day walks summits are often reached around lunch-time, they are rarely places to stop and relax and eat. More usually they are windswept, shrouded in mist, and accompanied by horizontal rain that drives its way into every crevice no matter where you look for shelter. So summits are somewhere to pause briefly, check the map (yes, you know where you are but it's surprisingly easy to take a wrong path – every way is down), and move on. Lunch is had at whatever spot looks most inviting at any time after 11:30 – or indeed at any and all times. Where and when to eat depends far more on the environment than it does on the clock.

The main meal at the end of the day is one of the best times when camping. A time of purposeful yet restful activity, crouched over a stove, with luck in the golden light of the setting sun – yes, it does occasionally happen that way, more often than you might believe, and when it does the effect is quite magical. Sitting perched on a folding three-legged stool, plate in lap, watching the last rays of the setting sun setting the peaks and clouds ablaze whilst dusk has already arrived down in the valley, shoulders hunched against the evening chill, savouring the inner warmth from piping-hot supper and enjoying simply being there too much to retreat from the cold into the tent.

Even on rainy days, mealtimes are still a pleasure. Provided the wind direction is as predicted when the tent was pitched, I can sit in the porch, sheltered by a pegged-out door flap, watching grey clouds and lashing rain whilst the stove hisses gently just outside the doorway, then retreat into warmth and comfort when the meal is ready. Mealtimes when camping take on a

significance that far outweighs the simplicity of their menus.

Oh, you want to know what we actually eat? Okay here goes…

Breakfast is of cereals, long-life milk, a banana, maybe some bread and margarine.
Snacks during the day: three cereal (aka granola/muesli) bars (no chocolate – too sticky!).
Lunch: on-the-spot sandwiches of crackers and cream cheese from a tube (quick and easy, and no waste if there's no time to have lunch), followed by a slab of fruit cake or sticky ginger cake and an apple
Dinner: Something rice or pasta based, like long-life tortellini with a tomato and basil sauce.

And as much coffee as I get time to brew.

// posted by andy @ 2:44 PM permalink

Comments

Isn't it magical how a smashed peanut butter & jelly sandwich tastes like gourmet food if you eat it on the top of a mountain, the sun drying the pack-sweat from your back? Perhaps the most important ingredient in "trail mix" is the trail itself.
Lorianne | Homepage | 02.03.04 - 3:17 pm | #

I have a feeling that jelly in US-speak must be something different to jelly in UK-speak...

But I DO know what you mean Lorianne
Andy | Homepage | 02.03.04 - 10:37 pm | #

"Perhaps the most important ingredient in "trail mix" is the trail itself." Lorianne, you are RIGHT about that - well said.

Hill food gives you the excuse to enjoy the hill. I like that.

ntexas99 | Homepage | #

Source:
http://olderandgrowing.blogspot.com/2004_02_01_olderandgrowing_archive.html#107581946095033641

Tuesday, February 03, 2004

By Cassandra Pages

FOOD AND PLACE: Ecotone Topic for February 2

Since I read the name of the current topic, the memory of one meal has kept pushing itself

forward, like a special dish insistently proffered by a Middle Eastern hostess. I don't know why. There have been many more spectacular or romantic places, and many meals in which I can remember virtually every bite, every taste. Of this one, I cannot even remember what we ate. But it has insisted that I tell about it, so I will try.

My parents and my husband and I decided, one early summer day, to drive up, away from the lake, into the wild state land ten miles or so to the east. Let's take a picnic, I said, so my mother and I packed sandwiches and something to drink, and we piled into the car. When we crossed from the regular class C roads onto state land, none of us could remember the way, so we crisscrossed on roads that all looked the same through the deep woods, looking for familiar landmarks. Our destination was a pond, invisible from the road but marked by a small place where the underbrush had been cleared beneath large evergreens, known mostly to people like me who had worked for the state environmental or forestry departments. I hadn't been there for some years. We stumbled onto a riding encampment where a group was beginning an overnight trail ride; we found the old fossil pit full of shattered shale, and stopped so that my husband, who had grown up in granite-boned New England, could find some fossil shells of his own. Eventually we found the right combination of turns and dips and culverts, and came to the clearing. We parked, and walked in through the woods to the dam at the end of the pond, where we spread ourselves out on the grass, unwrapped the food, and ate.

It was a beautiful day in late June, and the sun had been shining on our grassy couch long enough to send up the fragrance of hayscented fern and Indian paintbrush. The "pond" such as it was, is a remnant, slowly filling in. The dam at this end, built in the thirties by the CCC, probably, was small, only twenty-five or thirty feet long: a grassy knoll with a small stream spilling out on the other side. There were lots of dead trees in the center of the water, and thicker brush beyond, and every time I had visited I'd seen ducks, and often an osprey or blue heron, whose nest you could see in a tall dead tree. Of the four of us, I was the only one who had explored the real secret of this place: from the far side of the dam, an unmarked trail led to a path where a person in hip-waders could enter the water, dark with tannic acid, and carefully wade toward the middle, where, beyond the brush and dead trees, a large, ancient, quaking bog opened like a magical field. The sphagnum moss was thick and easily supported the weight of adults. Tall pitcher plants stood in lethal readiness; cranberries and bog rosemary grew lushly underfoot, and the air buzzed with the sound of thousands of insects. From the dam, all these wonders were invisible; in fact few people knew about the bog's existence. The only clue close by was a patch of sundews who raised their sticky green flower-pads to the light near the stream behind us.

We ate our sandwiches in silence, watching the life of the pond – the big bullfrog tadpoles and green salamanders that lazily moved on the bottom, the water-striders delicately navigating the surface, the tentative nose of a turtle, the flash and cry of a kingfisher - and then each of us turned to the grass around us and began eating the tiny wild strawberries that we could smell in the sunlight. We ate in circles around ourselves until our fingers were pink with strawberry juice, and then lay back, content. "Food always tastes better outdoors," my father remarked, and he told a story about a simple meal he remembered when he was a young soldier somewhere in Europe during World War II, hungry and not knowing if the sun would come up another day.

Why do I remember this? Because it was unusual for the four of us to be there together? Because

it had always been a mysterious and special place for me? Or perhaps it was simply the condensation of that moment: the sun, the strawberries, the people I love best, all safe and happy, while beyond us, out of sight, continued a prehistoric drama of eaters and eaten, of plants and animals switching roles, of specialized species locked in a dance of survival.

Nothing else happened; I checked to see if the sundews were still there, and we walked out through the woods.

7:51 PM

Source: http://cassandrapages.blogspot.com/2004_02_01_cassandrapages_archive.html#107585586352790964

Food is at the essence of place

By First-n-Main

Food is at the essence of place, at least for me. And not just any food but bread. I think about a favorite bakery in North Beach, San Francisco or the Cuban bakery in Miami that sells the most wonderful guava pastries. But it goes much deeper than that. The one memory I carry from my childhood in the Philippines (we moved away when I was three) is of waking up in the darkness and smelling the fresh bread baking down the street. I'm not a good enough writer to describe the aroma or the sense of warmth one can get from it, though I can almost smell it now as I sit here. Today, whenever I pass a bakery in the morning, I'm sometimes overcome with a sense of longing for a place that I never really knew.

Tiffin in Madurai

By under the fire star

This is my contribution to the Ecotone group blogging topic, Food and Place. (It's a great topic -- why not go there and add a contribution of your own?)

I was in college. I had come to Madurai, in the heart of Tamil Nadu, during a summer vacation. I was studying Tamil privately for two months. I didn't have much money, so I stayed in a very cheap hotel near the Meenakshi temple, called Alankar Lodge. You could open your door and shout down the hall for one of the *thambi*s ('little brothers') – small boys whom the hotel employed - and they would run out to the street and bring back coffee or Fanta or biscuits for you. Several other American students were also staying there, along with Indian travellers.

Everything that I saw or tasted or heard or smelled was absolutely new to me. I was excited, frightened, enchanted. Some days I couldn't eat at all, I was so full of all these feelings. But I did discover a little hole-in-the-wall nearby. A blackboard was propped outside the door, with the day's offerings chalked in Tamil. Just inside the door a man stood behind a small counter with a

compartmented cash box, which he would padlock at the end of the day. There were a few dinky tables. There was a door leading to a tiny kitchen, from which emerged conversation and clattering. The walls were grimy with smoke; or perhaps it was just grime. A man with a big belly, wearing a dhoti tucked up to knee level, would saunter around to ask what you wanted. In a very short time he would bang down a metal plate with your food on it; and afterwards, a smaller plate with a paper chit, with the amount due written by hand.

At that time, my favourite food was *upma*, probably because I wasn't yet able to eat spicy food. It is a bland concoction, like cream of wheat with some onions and green chillies added. I would order *upma* and coffee, served very sweet, milky and strong, in a little steel tumbler which was set in a smaller steel cup. The coffee was made frothy by pouring it from one container to another, with as much air in between as possible. I liked to eat my *upma* with butter melting into it. The butter arrived in a dollop on a square of banana leaf. It was white butter, un-dyed, unsalted, and usually slightly rancid. It had to be ordered separately.

So I came to this place for the first time, after reading on the chalkboard outside that *upma* was being served. I sat down, and the man with the big belly came over to me, and I summoned up my Tamil and said, "Please give me *upma* with *vennir*" -- *upma* with butter. That man looked at me expressionlessly, and then said, "*Vennai* butter, *vennir* hot water." My face turned much redder than it does these days, and I said, "Yes, please give me butter." He went off to tell the story in the kitchen, and I ate my buttered *upma* and drank my coffee.

It was delicious *upma*, and one of the best language lessons I ever had. I'll never forget the difference between *vennir* and *vennai*, or his deadpan expression and croaking voice; and I smile whenever I look at *upma*.

by Nancy at 4.2.04

Source: http://underthefirestar.blogspot.com/2004/02/tiffin-in-madurai.html

A Lack Thereof

By Laughing~Knees

Debris on a sidewalk in Soest, Germany, 1988

This is the sixteenth installment of the ongoing Ecotone essay series. This week's topic is Food and Place. Please stop by and read the other essays or feel free to contribute your own words.

In this fast-tracked modern world, where the goods that hold up our daily lives magically appear, cut up, cleaned, wrapped, and ready to eat, more and more it seems as if we've lost touch with how and where it all comes from. Even when we do head out into the "wild" to harvest some measure of communion with our green past, we carry all the implements with us, like an astronaut walking on the moon. Throw away the backpack, the quick-drying clothing, the stove

and pot, and most importantly, that nylon ditty bag of sustainables, and we're lost. Most so-called "outdoorsmen" today, if suddenly left to fend for themselves far from the road and the aid of transportation, would quickly find themselves starving to death, even if an abundance of food presents itself an arm's breadth away. Just watch a "Survivor" episode; those people know nothing about actually surviving.

In the late summer of 2001, upset and disoriented from an argument, I set off one weekend for the back country mountains north of Nikko, a national park area 2 hours north of Tokyo, without properly checking my packing list. All I could think of was that I needed to get away from people and from my home. I hoisted my pack and set off to the train station, intent upon images of forest trails and windy ridges.

Things went badly from the start. I had forgotten the map for the area and so missed the campsite that would have set me right at the trail head for the following morning. Instead I had to pitch my tent in an auto camping area, a few kilometers from the trail. It was hot and muggy and all night I lay swatting mosquitoes while drunk campers nearby reveled until the coming of dawn. I got perhaps three hours of sleep, and when morning broke, my muscles and head felt as heavy as the wet mist that sat upon the tent.

I packed quickly and headed off toward the trail, leaving early so that I might avoid the crowds of hikers. The approach to the trailhead zig-zagged along a river valley, with no signs posted, and only by querying a few farmers tending their sweet potato patches did I manage to make it to the trailhead. By that time the sun had already climbed quite high and the Japanese summer heat had begun to melt away the mist. There were no other hikers, which, because I was glad to be alone, I didn't take note of.

The trail led into an overgrown wood with downed trees across the path and thick, almost impenetrable bamboo thicket lining the inclines on either side. Much of the walk involved scrambling through branches and stepping around crumbling ledges. Luckily a few faded wooden signs pointed to the one name of the mountain I was trying to reach and I followed them on faith.

The trail grew steeper and entered a dry ravine riverbed, old painted trail markers polka dotting the boulders and outcroppings. Walking here meant digging my boot toes into gravel and pedaling through loose scree, pumping heart and breath in an effort to stay afloat on a steep slope.

Huge, fat, wingless grasshoppers began to appear all around in the gravel and dry grass. All of them moving in the same direction, adjacent to my own movement. They were so heavy they could barely hop, but even when I approached they seemed not to notice my presence. When I reached a small ridge, I sat on a stump, eating a rice ball and watching the mass movement of the swarm, like a flowing green carpet displacing the stillness of the terrain.

I reached the summit at about noon. The peak overlooked a tarn with lead blue water across the surface of which dragged shadows of the storm clouds, mounting behind the peak opposite. Thunder rumbled from the distance. I stopped to evaluate the trail and saw that I needed to traverse a treacherous slope of loose rocks and slippery mud.

That's when my hypoglycemia, a diabetic reaction to insulin, too little food, and high energy exertion, hit. I absently reached into my pack's top pocket for the chocolate bar I always kept

there for just such occasions. My fingers fumbled around and found… nothing. I threw the pack down and rummaged more carefully throughout the pack, hoping that I had misplaced the bar somewhere in the main compartment. Nothing. I paused, looking into the pack, then pulled out the ditty bag of food I had brought. That would do, I thought. I'll just eat the lunch I had brought. When I opened the bag though, only a package of freeze dried rice, another package of freeze-dried spinach, a packet of soup, and a tea bag fell out. Panicking, I emptied the contents of the pack onto the trail and sifted through everything I had. Nothing.

The hypoglycemic reaction was beginning to make me dizzy and my vision blurred. I forced myself to sit still and think. Carefully I placed everything back into the pack, leaving the ditty bag of food out. I sized up the incoming storm cloud and figured I had just enough time to get my stove going and cook all the food I had left. I found a sheltered space beside a huge boulder, set up my stove, and placed a pot of water on top to boil. I waited.

I observed the landscape around me. With my vision blurring and hands beginning to shake and an uncontrollable sweat slowly drenching my clothes, the mountains seemed surreal. I hugged my knees as a frigid wind blasted the shelter and howled among the treetops back behind the trail. I pulled on my insulated jacket and watched the water in the pot, counting the tiny bubbles forming on the bottom. Steam curled off the edge of the pot and was whipped away by the wind.

During those fatal moments, when I thought I might die, all I could think of was how soft the clouds looked and how I missed my wife, with whom I had argued. The mountains seemed cold and pitiless and my stomach had no belief in the bounty of nature. Everything felt like bones around me.

I was breathing fast when the water started to boil. I emptied the open packages into the pot, not caring what mixed with what, and whispered a litany to myself, of the dream of an explosion of flavors in my mouth. Of warmth streaming down my veins. Of a pact with the world in which my body must sacrifice its independence to house the freewheeling flight of my soul. Food is life, and life is food. There is no such thing as life without the death that food requires.

I could barely hold the bowl as I spooned through it, my hands were shaking so badly. I ate so fast my lips and tongue were scalded. Lights swirled in my eyes and I was shivering from the cold sweat. I used the remaining hot water to make a cup of tea and while it steeped I finished the rice soup. The soup poured into my recesses and glowed like a firefly, reaching into niches of sustenance that only the heat could revive. Gradually the shaking died away and I squatted beside the pot, breathing slowly, in and out. Breathing slowly, slowly. When I switched off the stove the stillness clapped shut around me, with only the wind speaking.

That was perhaps the best meal I ever ate, not because I had abandoned preferences and simply enjoyed the taste of rice and spinach and egg and salt, but because that meal was stripped of distractions. The cold wind, my beating heart, and the flow of calories and nutrients made up the entire moment.

It began to rain.

I put away the tools and scraps and cinched up my pack. I stood up on steady legs. I picked my way across the slippery slope and reached the ridge on the opposite side of the dale. From there it was just a matter of crunching down the steep trail towards the road below, just discernible. And a step ahead of my next meal.

Posted by butuki at 03:59 PM in Nature and Place | Permalink | Comments (6) (0)

What a story. So many things for me to take away.

Posted by Beth W. at February 6, 2004 08:28 AM

Love love love these last two images! Gorgeous!

Posted by Pamela at February 6, 2004 08:34 AM

What a riveting story, and so beautifully described. I've been thinking about food a lot this week, as I've been eating so poorly and getting angry at myself for how I'm eating. This story has filled me with such an appreciation for the basics, for the experience of simply eating, of simply being alive. Maybe that experience is always available to us. Thank you — this story has special meaning for me.

Posted by Anita at February 6, 2004 11:12 AM

What a wonderful narrative! Thank you.

Posted by dale at February 6, 2004 05:26 PM

You've given me a vivid picture of what food really is; I won't forget this reminder of why we should pay attention. And besides the food part - what a story about those times when our anger and distress cause us to just "take off" in an unplanned way. I could connect with this very well, butuki.

Posted by beth at February 7, 2004 12:55 AM

Oh my G-d! I wish you many packs with insistent chocolate bars and glycemically sustaining products! I also wish you more of the focus you found to get yourself through. My partner, Paris, is diabetic and we can easily forget to carry the necessary back up stuff. Food and place? A good one….

Posted by Coup de Vent at February 12, 2004 11:22 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040215002641/http://www.butuki.com/archives/2004_02.html#000135

Ethiopia: Nightmare in Kitfo house

By unganisha.org

It's my last evening, and I am in one of Bahir Dar's less illustrious bars.
You knew that when the table looked like it had been hacked into shape with a *panga* [machete], and rusted milk powder tins substituted for ashtrays.
The ashtray on my table has a couple of yellowed molars among the cinders.
Healthy blokes these – not a cavity in them, they didn't fall off because of bad dental hygiene.

The bar is packed with wildly cheering Ethiopian drunks, crowded around the solitary television set.

It's the world athletics championship highlights – some women's long distance race, and the Ethiopian runner is laying the Kenyan runner to waste.
I am tempted to cheer the Kenyan, but the dental artifacts in the tin-can point to dire consequences if I do that.

That's when Ato Yigzaw struts in.
Middle-aged, graying, dressed in one of those suits with Olympic-size padded shoulders, the likes of which have not been seen since the days when mullet hairstyles and communists ruled the planet.

He requests to sit at my table, the only one with free space.
His shifty-eyed stooges pull the chair out for him.
The Ethiopian runner finally wins – the whole bar goes up in one giant scream, and it's not even a Live telecast.
The old geezer, Yigzaw now turns his attention to me –
Was I a tourist? How did I like the country? Where had I been? How were my folks at home? Hope mommy was fine? And so on.

I give him the works.

That's the beauty of Ethiopia – tell any poor innocent Ethiopian about how beautiful their country is, and cite a few important dates in Ethiopian history (Emperor Menelik defeating the invading Italians in 1898 is a universal favorite) – and soon, they are ready to fork over their life savings, and ply you with food and drinks. Despite my protests, the lackeys are sent off to get a few more rounds of beer.

I get to know a bit more about Ato Yigzaw – he is the regional distributor for the popular *Bedele* "monkey" beer. "I would like to invite you for dinner…" he tells me "…special Ethiopian dinner"

Ethiopian cuisine is probably the spiciest in Africa.
Folks here, have the ability to chew vast quantities of raw chilies without batting an eyelid – enough to put any south Indian to shame.
My favorite dish was undoubtedly *Key Wott* – a kind of lamb stew served in dynamite-hot *berbera* sauce. The stew is eaten along with traditional staple *injera*: A flat bread, similar to a giant pancake or a Dosa – but with a texture that lies somewhere between wet parchment and Styrofoam.
The meat stew is served on top of the centrally placed *injera* – and everyone eats out of the same plate.

Soon, I am bundled into Mr.Yigzaw's shiny Toyota pickup – the sidekicks are ordered to ride in the back.
Where are we going?
"Kitfo house!!"

Kitfo house is a smashed up apartment block – the ground floor of which, serves as some kind of home-brewed gym – where people work out on wooden benches using bar-bells made out of rusted truck rims.

The restaurant is upstairs, in a dimly lit room with the lingering smell of coffee, spices and death. A scruffy man in an apron greets us, bowing low, the broom in his hand sweeping the floor -- he is the cook.
Classy place though – instead of the usual wall hangings, they have veritable Turner prize nominees -- fresh carcasses strung up on the walls.
Ato Yigzaw scratches, sniffs and prods before selecting the winning corpse – a particularly rotund looking bovine, which seems to be attracting the envy of all the flies playing prom on it.

The meat is taken away to the kitchen for preparation.
What are we eating? I ask.
"Kitfo!" – and it sounds like a delicacy.
Or so, I thought.

The meat soon comes back in a bowl, accompanied by rolls of injera.
Its minced beef, all right – but raw, as in bloody raw, not even heated to the slight– all of it topped with dollops of rancid homemade butter.

And everyone is waiting for the esteemed foreign guest to take the first bite.
At the risk of stating the bleeding obvious, eating uncooked flesh isn't my favorite pastime -- but there's no way out.

To make matters worse, I am under a paranoid delusion that if I say no, these eager and anxious Ethiopians will beat me like a sick dog. I don't normally get such delusions, but it can only be blamed on the rank arack-like spirit served at Kitfo house. Especially worrying is the cook -- wearing his blood splattered apron, with the smooth handled cleaver tucked casually in his waistband. He catches my stare, and sends me a flinty grin – a gaping mouthful of blackened stumps and tiny bits of golden metal.

So I swallow the meat, great gobfulls of it – e-coli, salmonella, anthrax, ringworm and meat. It tastes hideous. The whole cocktail is repeatedly washed down with mind-numbing doses of stiff spirit. Ato Yigzaw and co. are almost rendered tearful by my enthusiasm.

The rest of the evening disappears in a blur of shrill laughter and ribald jokes – none of which I recall very clearly. But we hatched a diabolical scheme to take over Africa's beer market. Our flagship product was going to be *Bedele* "monkey" beer – smuggled all over the continent in cattle trucks and sold at rock-bottom prices. That evening, even Heineken and Budweiser were brought to their knees in the face of *Bedele* 's continental assault.

So ended my chance to become Africa's liquor baron.
And I haven't contracted any meat-borne diseases (yet).

Source: http://www.unganisha.org/home/logs/perma/20031107/

home cooking

By alembic

This post is my response to ecotone's (February 1, 2004) biweekly topic: Food and Place:

[*Edited -- with addition of a second part*]

I.

I live in gastronomic paradise. Here in Northern California, in a temperate climate that fuses the best of your dreams of Mediterranean living *sans* the dust and clutter of history whatever yen your taste buds decide to bring on can be satisfied almost instantly. Indian, Chinese, Thai, Russian, Moroccan, Italian, French, Mexican you can eat your way through the fare of countries and even continents in the short space of a day without so much as a tinge of worry about the usual afflictions that plague travelers who partake of the local bounty in some exotic location.

Imagine then, one of my compatriots, a local from Marin, on his or her first sojourn in India or Morocco, or Russia, or even Italy, settling in for a meal he or she expects to evoke a sense of the familiar of home through the taste buds. Imagine his or her surprise when that *pasta pomodoro* in a *trattoria* tastes nothing like it does at Luigis or da Carlo or whatever ersatz Italian eatery she or he has been frequenting for years in the bucolic splendor of Marin.

Our sojourner finds him or herself in an odd stew of homesickness hankering for the familiar taste of the flavors of a dish first cooked up by an immigrant hankering for the familiar tastes of home, a place where our sojourner is now trying to evoke the familiar taste of home in a dish cooked up and the spiral of desire continues on its convoluted trajectory.

II.

It was June and the fact that the days were getting longer was old hat by now. The novelty of seeing deer graze on the hill crisscrossed with paved streets has worn off my guests. There was also much less *oohing* and *ahing* at the grocery store where the price of a pound of potato or of a loaf of bread could send my guests, former residents of Eastern Europe, into an animated symposium about war (the second world war), famine, five-year plans, communism, capitalism ... and the shape of my curves.

Still, I lugged bagful of groceries home everyday, cooking up meals in a relentless succession. A thoughtful hostess, my guests complimented me constantly -- though, in retrospect, I realize that I kept producing dish upon dish and urging them to share the bounty of this land because it was much easier than to share my feelings with them.

Some nights we barbecued salmon, others just vegetables. On the night this picture was taken, we barbecued everything: salmon, peppers, zucchinis, eggplants, corn, and the wild Alaska salmon. There was a big bowl of Greek salad too, to go with it all, along with Campari and plenty of wine, some of which we bought only days before as we toured a couple of wineries in Napa and Sonoma.

For weeks that early summer of 2002, I was entertaining my mother and Anna, the woman who had been my nanny and later my friend over the years of my childhood in which I went from an awareness of toys to a preoccupation with boys....

The wine, the only genuine local flavor in this evenings small feast, loosened our tongues, and we spoke, albeit haltingly, in a number of languages, some of which had gotten away from us (like my Hungarian, for example) and some of which we couldnt quite grasp or hold on to long enough to be fluent in (like my mothers English, or Annas mixture of Swedish and English). We babbled on, steering clear of any mention of our amazement that we should all be here, so far from where we had started more than 30 years ago -- or of any talk about a future reunion....

Posted by maria at February 15, 2004 12:06 PM

Comments

Yes. And then returns home and now feels that the local Italian food is not actualy Italian but Marinitalian. And goes out to buy a cookbook.

Posted by: Coup de Vent on February 15, 2004 02:01 PM

Well, I never expect restaurants here to serve authentic ethnic food. Everything's Americanized (i.e. toned down) to not shock people's sensibilities.

Posted by: sya on February 16, 2004 04:57 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040516024840/http://www.ashladle.org/archives/000295.html

FAIRWATER LIONS' CLUB VALENTINE BRUNCH

By The Middlewesterner

The Fairwater Lions Club Valentine Brunch is one of the rituals of this little community. Some years ago, after we'd attended the brunch (as we did again this morning), I made a journal entry about the experience. What I wrote then could pass almost word for word for our experience today:

We went to the Lions' Club Valentine's brunch, Mary and I did, and Mary's mother. We thought we were being so wise trying to get in just as the doors opened at 10:30 a.m. And we were only a few minutes later than that. Well, there were already forty or fifty cars parked around the Civic Center, a mob of people already eating, another mob in line to be served. We entered through the backdoor as required, into the back room of the lower level. If you didn't have your ticket yet, you could buy one here - "at the door" was a dollar more than "in advance." In one corner, a woman was slicing desserts to serve them. In another, drinks were being prepared behind a make-shift bar: Bloody Mary's seemed the order of the day. A sign on the wall: "Old Tables - Residents May Borrow." Twenty people, or twenty-five, were seated at the tables there in the backroom, cupping their drinks and talking and cupping their drinks, waiting for the line to shrink. The murmur of talk rose and fell, rose and fell. We got into the line right away.

Oh it was an Iowa picnic! Pea salad and macaroni salads and potato salad and apple salad and marshmallow salad. Scalloped potatoes - "Sir, would you care for some scalloped potatoes," says the owner of the lumber yard. Pancakes and french toast. Vegetables. Fried chicken, sausages, slices of ham. Orange juice and milk and coffee. Our plates full, we passed over the dessert table for the moment.

We found a place at a table. Tables set together ran the length of the room; lines of them parallel to each other, one and then another. And more. Chairs tightly spaced: "Elbow room! cried Daniel Boone." None of the tables was entirely full; and, in the great eternal cosmic dance of things, as people were done being served, carrying their heavy plates with two hands, other people were finished, leaving their table, making space for the new arrivals. The murmur of talk in the room rose and fell, rose and fell. Pass the syrup, please. Do you want some dessert? Which of the Stellmachers is that? Isn't this an interesting apple salad - carameled apple salad, sweet and nutty.

As if we might still be hungry, as if we needed them, we got desserts. I offer Mary a taste: "The sour cream frosting really makes that," she says of the rich chocolate bar.

Then we gather up our own trays and plates and silverware, in the great eternal cosmic dance, and leave them in their proper places. Like an Iowa picnic, you must clear up after yourself, leave the park in the same condition you found it. We are out the door, then, into the sunshine. We will not have to eat again for a very long time.

Source: http://middlewesterner.blogspot.com/2004_02_15_middlewesterner_archive.html

Stones and Place

Bi-Weekly Topics for February 15, 2004

Stones in sermon

By On the Rocks

I have been a rock fan for years, but I can't qualify as a rock "hound" because I can't remember what they're called. The nice thing about rocks, though, is that they aren't offended when you get their names wrong.

In a fundamental way that food and buildings and poets cannot overwhelm, rocks ARE a place. There isn't a place on Earth without them, providing shape and a sort of fingerprint that marks each region as itself, unlike all others.

I am a geology fan, in the way some guys sit down on Sundays and get themselves worked up about football, but then go on about their lives for the rest of the week except for occasional conversations that go, "Aaah, those Browns!"-- "Bah!"

I caught the bug from teachers in high school and college who were true devotees, and I might have pursued it further, but for an inability to recognize the rocks themselves ("Gabbro?" I hazard. "Micaceous schist, fool!" I hear). Since one can't go far in geology without having one's schists together, I quickly sought a more suitable career. But I never lost my attraction to stones and the bedrock they came from.

It may run in the family. My grandfather brought back from his travels wonderful lumps of pink and rose quartz for his rock garden out behind the garage; they were salvaged when he broke up housekeeping and now grace my father's garden along with great lumps of garnet someone else fetched from the Adirondacks, and water-smoothed hunks of fossil-rich shale from central New York.

Without any prompting, my daughter got it, too -- or else it's the magpie gene that all of us share and have to outgrow. At 2, she took so many pieces of decorative crushed marble from a neighbor's front garden that I had to buy him another bag. She gathered crushed shale from her grandfather's driveway -- to me, just fill, but to her, a souvenir of her trip. What was I to say? I have my share of such bits: Weathered, rounded, tan sandstone pebbles from off the New England coast -- maybe a few of them are marble; fragments of smooth limestone from New York creeks; a fragile piece of Florida sand cemented together -- in the process of becoming rock -- with lime from shells. On a trip to Alaska, we collected several pounds of rounded basalt (probably) pebbles, black with tiny flecks of quartz and sometimes a hint of coppery green, for a dripping-dish thing that we never completed. In my mind, the rocks became a symbol of the halcyon summer before 9/11, for it would never have been possible to lug those, and a handful of thrift-store silverware, onto an airplane afterward.

My household has several little collections of crinoid stems and bivalves set in shale, for my wife picks up stones, too. A book-sized hunk of coal down cellar, fished from a red-bottomed Kentucky creek where the only life was a green slime, reminds me of a trip and what I fear about mining.

The soft Devonian shales of my boyhood home cut like cake under the knife of glacial runoff, and after the glaciers went, streams that remained cut deep, fascinating gorges I loved to explore. My present hometown has the same pattern of glens and gullies, and it gives me pleasure to recognize them, buried as they are in the urban landscape. I guess it's a measure of my middle age that I've never clambered down inside.

Stones imprinted me with a couple of vivid memories. A piece of the Canadian Shield, a rusty, large-grained pebble that was wave-washed from a layer of sand at the bottom of a lake where we kids were playing, left me an image of sloshing around on a big truck tire, having fun in bright sunlight, and of shock and sudden pain when the girl next door beaned me. I must have been 6 or 7. I remember she was kept indoors all the next day to impress on her the gravity of stoning her friends. My sister suffered, too, because then she had no one to play with.

And a hunk of that Devonian shale, knocked loose by a friend I was climbing in a gorge with, sliced my eyebrow once. I remember I scrambled to the top and jogged down a safer slope to the stream at the bottom -- mainly fearful that if I didn't get the blood off my face and jacket, I would

get busted and be forbidden to go up the gorge again. I guess I succeeded, but my oldest glasses still bear the bloodstain, if you look closely enough.

(Why do I still have a pair of 30-year-old glasses? I can't answer that.)

All the really gorgeous landscapes have good rocks. Well, not all of them, but the ones that sing to me. They're the bones of the place, durable and plastic; hard and unforgiving to the hasty and careless, but accommodating under the patient pressure of weight or water. I like rocks. I have never thrown one in anger.

Source: http://my.core.com/~pzicari/text/Rocks_Place.html

Rocks and Stones

By London and the North

I am half a beat away
half a stride balancing
on slippery tide ironed weed
and the oystercatchers are digging deep
curlews deeper
clumsy me arms out like wings
teetering and landbound

Visit Ecotone for todays topic on Stones and Rocks

Posted by Coup de Vent at 09:28 AM | Comments (2) | TrackBack

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040412170103/http://www.airenet.co.uk/alife/2004_02.html

Stones and Rocks

By Older and Growing

As a rock climber, how could I resist the current Ecotone topic of "Stones and Rocks"...

England is hardly known for its rockiness. Gentle rolling hills, rural landscapes of farms, fields and hedgerows are more representative of the characteristics that we associate with Englishness. True, the borders of land and sea sometimes expose the underlying skeleton in cliffs and rocky shorelines, but for the most part that skeleton remains well hidden; England does not have the body of a lean athlete, rather that of a well-fed, even corpulent, country gentleman.

But if you know where to look, the evidence of that skeleton is there. Rock climbers have been searching out these places for decades; there's hardly a crag or outcrop in the country that hasn't been discovered, explored, tested, documented and revisited countless times. To the casual passer by, the significance of these places may be hardly noticed –at times picturesque, brooding, decaying; yet to the climber places of challenge, adrenalin, focus, self-discovery; places to come home to, revisiting old friends. For the climber gets to know these rocks intimately; all their forms, features, colours, textures and hidden places.

Each of these crags has a unique character; they all have a powerful draw for climbers, but in different ways. The sleeping giants of rounded sandstone laying peacefully in the Kent woods at Harrison's Rocks; the gritstone adventure playground of Stanage Edge, a riot of tumbling blocks, buttresses, bays and chimneys, running for miles at the edge of Peak district moorland; the gentler angled nursery of Birchen Edge, rocks worn smooth and ground beneath them now heavily eroded by the feet of so many fledgling climbers; and tucked away next door, the greener rocks of Chatsworth Edge – green from lichen, green from the trees that overhang, green from the grass at the rocks' foot, grass that remains largely untrampled. This last is a beautiful place to be at the end of an Autumn afternoon – an idyll of copper leaves, green-gold rocks and burnished skies.

The mood of these places changes dramatically with the weather and the seasons. The ominous beetling grey walls and overhangs of The Roaches in Staffordshire can be intimidating and forbidding under leaden skies; yet on a spring morning the feel turns to one of rugged charm. Birchen Edge, usually friendly and welcoming in all weathers, gains an air of mystery and loneliness when approached through Autumn mists. Perhaps that is why the three huge boulders at the edge of the moor above the crag were named after Nelson's ships at Trafalgar, appearing as they supposedly do as three great ships under sail emerging from the mist. Lawrencefield has perhaps the most consistent feel of any crag, possibly deriving from its man-made origins as a gritstone quarry - a few abandoned mill stones can still be seen scattered around, providing a useful spot to sit and don rock shoes. Surrounded by rock on three sides, the entire south-facing quarry glows golden pink on sunny days, a colour still present in the sand at the foot of the rocks even on the gloomiest of winter mornings.

Close to, the features and textures of the rock become all important. Different rock types possess profoundly different characteristics which in turn demand quite different styles of climbing.

Sandstone can be a nightmare for the uninitiated. The soft rock cannot sustain hard edges – all features are smooth, rounded; irregularities that might provide purchase for frantically scrabbling hands and feet have been eroded to the merest undulations in the surface by the action of countless hands and feet – being the nearest rocks to London, these are over-used to the point of requiring strict etiquette to avoid destroying their recreational capacity completely. "Holds" on sandstone have a frustrating tendency to slope down and out; cracks are shallow and offer little purchase; years of being been gripped by sweaty hands have impregnated some holds with sweat leaving a permanently slimy feel; other patches carry a ball-bearing layer of sand grains causing feet and fingers to skate unwillingly over the surface.

Sandstone, not surprisingly, is not well favoured by UK climbers. Its only merit is its accessibility for those living in the South East. But move further north and an ongoing debate emerges between the aficionados of the two most common rock types in the climbing areas in the central core of the country. Limestone calls for delicacy of touch; gritstone – God's Own Rock – yields to a more gymnastic approach, earning its followers the nickname of "Gritstone Monkey" . For all its apparent smoothness, limestone, especially when weather-washed and free from vegetation, has the texture of very fine sandpaper, giving surprising grip even on smooth surfaces – in the dry. In the wet though, it turns treacherously greasy and unclimbable – best not to get caught in a storm when on limestone. Gritstone on the other hand is courser, rougher, can and will give you bloody knuckles and even a rash-like effect on the fingertips at the end of the day, caused by pressure on the skin of tiny pin-sharp grains of quartz. Yet the rough surface texture acts like the tread on a tyre, providing grip from those same points of quartz grains even when a veritable waterfall is running over the slabs. Limestone tends to have small, sharp, hard edges, demanding precision, balance and trust in the strength of the fingertips. Gritstone weathers to more rounded shapes; holds tend to be larger – the best known as jugs (short for jug-handles) for obvious reasons, especially those pulse-relieving "thanks God" holds.

So it is that, known so well, so intimately, the rock becomes a friend, sharing some of the most intense moments of relationship. Unyielding, it can stand aloof; repelling all onslaughts it can be a tormentor; calling forth focus and self belief it becomes a coach; allowing freedom for expression and deep self-examination it is a counsellor; sharing the joy – and sometimes the pain –of being alive it is a friend.

Lifeless it is not.

posted by andy @ 4:20 PM permalink

Comments

Hi Andy. Good to find someone else in blogland who appreciates the stonescape of the (dis-)UK. I don't climb - in the serious sense. Just try to stay upright when walking over the limestone pavements of Malham or when looking up to admire the strange shapes of Brimham Rocks. Great climbing/outcrops around where I am in the Millstone Grit of North and West Yorkshire. Good also to find another 'local' person writing on Ecotone!
Coup de Vent | Homepage | 02.15.04 - 9:16 pm | #

this is another of those times where I wished the story could go on and on forever, entranced as I was in the telling of the tale.

I've always been particularly fond of texture and touch, and this articulate and evocative glimpse into the differences (and similarities) did not disappoint.

Excellence again, andy. Bravo.
ntexas99 | Homepage | 02.16.04 - 5:14 am | #

Great writing Andy.

Trouble is I have always found rock so unyielding when I fall!
Euan | Homepage | 02.16.04 - 12:16 pm | #

Source:
http://olderandgrowing.blogspot.com/2004_02_01_olderandgrowing_archive.html#107686202956918076

Indian Rock

By Feathers of Hope (Numenius)

An entry for the Ecotone Wiki's topic on Stones and Rocks.

Berkeley, in addition to its fame as a center of development of California cuisine (the town's radical past now usurped by the gourmet ghetto on Shattuck Avenue), is also noteworthy as one of the original training grounds for modern rock climbing. In the 1930s, the California mountaineers who would go on to do many of the first ascents in the Sierra Nevadas, among them Dick Leonard and David Brower, would practice their bouldering techniques in North Berkeley where there is a set of crags composed of rhyolite.

Indian Rock is the most famous of these boulders. It got its name from nearby mortar basins in the rock used by natives for grinding acorns. It is less than a mile from my old house, and I would often go there on a walk. It has a great view from the top, and as can be seen from the steps in the photo, you don't have to go up the steep side with ropes to get to the top.

Posted by Numenius at February 15, 2004 10:46 PM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/02/15/indian_rock.html

Interludes with the Rocky World

By Switched At Birth

It was a mid-June late afternoon in Bass Harbor, Maine. The tide was close to dead low. Buck and I walked out to the farthest point on the rocks. Sharp rocks, slippery places and pools teeming with life, we had to take care in placing each step. Thousands of mussels glistened blackly, shimmering silver, green and purple. The sea gulls wheeled hungrily overhead.

The gulls' ritual was mesmerizing: flying low to pick up a mussel, they would angle out over a large flat rocky expanse, drop the mussel to crack its shell, then dive to scoop up and eat the live creature inside.

We spied a huge coral-colored starfish in a crevice, the largest either of us had ever seen. The thought of removing him (killing him) and taking him home with me briefly fluttered across my primitive brain, and just as instantly was rejected. The rocky pools were home to many smaller starfish, as well. Some coral colored like the first; others brown, silvery or blue. The brown ones struck me as reptilian, snakelike and--with all deference to snakes -- a little creepy. The blue ones were mysterious and elegant.

We became so involved our explorations that we failed to notice the tide had turned. It was time to get back to shore -- quickly!

Once there, we changed into our soft clothes, fixed a drink, and began to make preparations for dinner. Sitting at a round wood table in front of an old-fashioned picture window, we watched, facinated, as the tide inexorably rolled in, obliterating the individual pools and rocks. We threw on our jackets and went outside for a closer look.

One of the fattest cats I have ever seen came waddling up to be admired, his bright orange fur rocketing showers of hair and dander as he rubbed, univited, against our legs. We walked over to sit at a small picnic table, paint peeling from its legs. The cat leaped onto the center of the table, rolled over on his back, paws waving, and eyed us flirtatiously as if to say, "Okay. I've gone straight to my best trick. Now, how about sharing some of that delicious-smelling crabmeat with me?" I flicked a few drops of scotch and water on his head instead, and like a shot he was off his back, onto his feet, and twelve feet away from the table, clearly indignant at being treated so disrespectfully.

In no time at all, however, the sounds of a family next door and the voices of young children at play wafted through the rose hedge. He smoothed his ruffled fur, put on his cat smile, and

sashayed off to ply his charms with the neighbors. Judging by this fellow's size, his act is usually a big hit.

It was growing dark, and the midges drove us indoors for our dinner. What a feast: locally grown tomatoes and butter and sugar corn from Sawyers Market in Southwest Harbor, along with pristine crabmeat from The C. H. Rich Crab Company in Bass Harbor, gently seasoned and warmed.

We took a bowl of rich chocolate ice cream upstairs to indulge in while reading. All was well for a few minutes. . . until my right eyelid and underneath the eye began to feel itchy. Without meaning to, I started rubbing it. Then a lump developed on both eyelids, and the resultant swelling was ugly and uncomfortable.

The rest of the night was a rocky routine of cold compresses and benedril. I thought a black fly or mosquito was responsible. But when we returned home, an allergy test revealed "CAT".

Despite a swollen face, we went out exploring again the next day at the Acadia National Park. We went for our third visit in as many years to the Valley Cove section. At one spot there, the trail momentarily ends and rock to rock climbing around a high cliff area with no room for error begins. A major slip, and you face jagged rocks, and a sheer long drop to the water below. This day, the length of the most dangerous portion was not was long as either of us recalled, but the Acadia Mountain ascent seemed both longer and more difficult than we remembered.

Lunchtime found us at the peak of Acadia Mountain, and we spotted a flat rock to sit on, stretch out our legs and enjoy a sandwich. Re-energized, we headed down the mountains, crossed a carriage road, and made the easy climb up St. Sauveur Mountain. At the exquisite Valley Peak, we ventured off the trail onto an outcropping of rock overlooking Frenchman Bay and the ocean. It was an inspiring site, and a great place to share an apple. Several impudent chipmunks agreed, scurrying boldly about, trying to get into our backpacks! It was a dazzlingly bright day, dry and cool.

I am thinking back today about how surreal it felt to return to Pensacola, which was flying hurricane flags at the time: sultry and humid, with heavy rain, thunder and lightning in the high winds.

12:09 PM in Travel | Permalink

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040812222556/longleaf.typepad.com/switched_at_birth/2004/02/index.html

Places of the spirit - sacred stones

By Mulubinba Moments

In 1998 I went to visit my sister in Cheddar, UK, for the first time. This trip was special as I was travelling on my own having left the children at home with my parents. (Geoff was off on one of his “spiritually uplifting” holidays - windsurfing with friends in Maui). One of Sue and my favourite pastimes on that trip was to explore the countryside around Somerset/Devon using the Ordnance Survey maps. We had no children to keep entertained and therefore could wander at will...luxury! The Ordnance Survey maps have almost everything imaginable marked on them from houses to ruins to stone circles and tumuli. I was particularly curious about the prehistoric sacred sites and so was keen to explore the countryside on a mission to find as many as I could. We had spent the day up on Exmoor, lunched at Porlock Weir and were driving up the old toll road towards the main road when I noticed a standing stone marked on the map not far off the road - we decided, naturally, to see if we could find it. It was early evening in June - the light was soft and muted. As we walked along the path to the stone we noticed the vegetation had changed to a woodland of very dark, low trees. It was eerily silent and brooding. The Culbone Stone as it is called was standing in the middle of a tiny clearing, completely on its own. It had a wheel cross inscribed on it which seemed strangely out of place. Around its base the grass had been flattened as if people had been standing or dancing there. No one was about and I had the distinct impression we were trespassing on forbidden territory - the atmosphere was “watchful”. This was a place of ancient spirits from a time long ago. We stayed long enough to take a photo and then retreated hastily. It had been a very wierd but nonetheless hugely spiritual place.

While preparing this post I was able to discover that the Culbone stone had been discovered in 1940. The wheel cross was incised around 7th to 9th Century. Apparently it is located close to a stone row which implies however that the stone had once been a prehistoric monument that had been Christianised. Was the surrounding ambience of that woodland resentment perhaps? Click the search button at the Megalithic Portal to read how TimP describes his impressions of the Culbone Stone and includes a photo taken from a slightly different angle. Some people commenting on his photo claim to see a face - check out his article.

September 11, 2003 in Jenny's posts, Religion | Permalink

Comments

I found this a very interesting post. By reading it, it gave me a sudden urge to jump onto a plane and fly to England to check it out. I am one of those people who are very interested in witchcraft, magic and magical places. When next i travel to England i must check out this place. I will also keep looking at your weblog, in my personal opinion i think it is very well set out, very interesting and well written. Keep up the good work.

Posted by: Anna | September 12, 2003 at 06:54 PM

I'm curious if you noticed the likeness of the face when you were there. It seems quite clear in your photo and even clearer in the one on the Megalithic Portal page. I would imagine that if you were not conscious of it, it could have had a strong, and perhaps frightening, subliminal effect on your perceptions of the stone. Also, does it look as if the face was actually carved there by people, or is it just a coincidence, like the face on mars? It looks like the texture of the face is different than that of the rest of the rock.

Posted by: Tvindy | September 12, 2003 at 07:47 PM

Buck & I will be on the Isle of Arran in Scotland this September. The "standing stones of Machrie" on Machrie Moor there are somewhat famous. I am especially looking forward to seeing them now that I've read this post, and will be sure to send you a photo!

Posted by: Beth W. | February 17, 2004 at 10:31 AM

Source: http://mulubinba.typepad.com/mulubinba_moments/2003/09/places_of_the_s_2.html

Emergence

By Fragments from Floyd

I am so off stride these last few days, waking up late after unrestful "sleep" as the nasoraptors prowl the aveolar caves and tracheal trees for prey. They come and they go, but even when they are gone, my mind and my hands are disjunct, cut off from one another, the supply lines severed by troop movements in the night.

The logistics of war make for lousy reading, so I am keeping my muddled thoughts confined to quarters. The poor muse is taking Universal Precautions--gloves, mask, and gown-- and so at the moment it is quite impossible to hear from her anything she might divulge on which to write. I hear only the sound of one lung wheezing, the Zen of the Rhinovirus. This, too, shall pass.

The warm sun yesterday was therapeutic for both of us. We spent a good bit of the day outside getting the wood-storing area ready for a new layer of gravel, there, and along the driveway this week coming up. We pried up the locust runners and small flat cinderblocks from the frozen muck. The stacks close to the house are gone now, used down to the ground. Those blocks and chunks and sticks of firewood blessed us with comfortable radiant heat over a hard winter, and now are reduced to only so much ash to show for all those years of hardwoods standing tall in the forest, and then two years segmented in the rank and file of human necessity.

After we get the gravel in, we'll put the runners back down and start rebuilding the woodpile for next year. Several cords of maple and hickory, oak and poplar are waiting over in the pasture where they have been stored in lengths, teepee-style, for almost a full year already. It will be good and dry come next September. And I have three large trees (two windfall, one power company line clearing victim) down and waiting to be bucked up into stovewood. I'm saving that work for when Ann's sisters come to visit in a couple of weeks. The estrogens will be so high for a while around here that a fella will want a place to go do manly work. Or pretend to.

The dog thought he'd died and gone to heaven with not one but TWO of his humans outside yesterday afternoon for the sole purpose of entertaining him, and of course, also to watch him show off by digging in the soggy sides of the branch like a dervish. Every piece of wood we moved out of the way was something for him to prance around with, taunting us to catch him. The more we organized the more he disorganized--cosmos chasing chaos on the small scale.

We saw our first butterfly flitting around in the low sun, its shadow appearing on the ground where we were working before we traced the angle back to find the frittilary overhead, fresh from a long winter nap under a rock overhang up on the ridgetop, perhaps. We reckoned that during the day we might find our first flower in bloom--a Coltsfoot, transplanted along the driveway where I'd been raking dead leaves away earlier in the day. Just as the sun sank behind

the western ridge, I found the naked, leafless yellow bloom along the rock wall where the stones hold heat and speed up the bloom date by at least a week.

This morning, the first bluebird, calling from the highest branch of the maple across the road from the front porch, its chirping whistle unmistakable--a declarative, then an interrogative phrase in a nasal register. Where has this male been since we last heard from his kind in October? Perhaps just down mountain twenty miles from here--in Roanoke or Woolwine--where temps are ten degrees warmer and a few insects emerge on warmer winter days, providing a snack to tide the birds over until later. But even now, what will they eat until the insects get active again? Maybe the bluebird saw our fritillary butterfly yesterday and had him to dinner.

Keep your TheraFlu. Spring in these small doses are a homeopathic dilution of the season ahead, and more than enough tonic to chase away the dregs of a winter cold.

Posted by fred1st on February 29, 2004 8:30 AM | Permalink

Comments

Fred - spring trumps winter once again, and trumps the flu, too.

Posted by: Tom Montag | February 29, 2004 8:52 AM

This was so beautifully written, with heavy doses of that usual wit and charm, and laced with tidbits of spring. How refreshing to hear the bluebirds sing, and enjoy Tsuga's chaos, and especially to see the yellow bud that clings to the warmth of the rocks. Thanks for sharing.

Posted by: ntexas99 | February 29, 2004 1:39 PM

"The logistics of war" may have made reading tough for you, but I can't see they hurt your writing much - if anything, you have been writing even more engagingly than usual since you came down with the cold. So maybe you better just stay sick, then, for the sake of your readers?

O.K., bad joke, sorry!

What kind of fritillary? I am used to seeing mourning cloaks and Compton's tortoise shells at the equivalent point in our calendar; don't know that I've ever seen anything else. But your lepidopterae are considerably more diverse than Pennsylvania's, I suspect.

Posted by: Dave | February 29, 2004 3:02 PM

Today's post reminds me of the period in my life when I lived in Seaford, Virginia (1979-1985). We raised an organic garden, canned the produce and heated the whole house with wood I cut and bucked. My former wife worked in stained glass, and we called this "our Mother Earth phase." I ran up and down the country roads, sometimes as much as 50 miles a week. I'd come home and sit in the hot tub. This time of year, I would become obsessed with "cheating winter," which consisted of celebrating the warm days and taking weeklong vacation trips anywhere where it was warm. My life now is very much different, we follow our forks in the road, but I guess the point is to relish it all, as it happens.

Posted by: Denny | February 29, 2004 3:55 PM

Source: http://www.fragmentsfromfloyd.com/fragments/2004/02/emergence.html

Marking Place

By Feathers of Hope (Pica)

For the Ecotone wiki's joint topic on Stones and Rocks.

Ever since our paleolithic ancestors started painting on stone, it has been the material of choice for marking, in a more or less permanent way, a geographic location of particular significance. The art of Scottish sculptor Ian Hamilton Finlay explores this neoclassically (a commission at UC San Diego shows a 1987 example), but cairns on mountaintops are as interesting in their way as the Trajan column. Stone: permanence. Human interaction with stone: human attempt to project permanence.

Gravestones are the markers most of us will encounter, but even they are less than permanent what with acid rain and ordinary erosion. When my father was cremated, my mother scattered his ashes to the waves from the northern California clifftops by their home. At the time I missed the lack of a stone that would give me a place to visit, to mourn. A series of rocks guards the inlet where the ashes scattered five years ago. They are bigger, more imposing, than most gravestones, and during our visit there this weekend I was able to touch my father's memory by a visit to the cliff and the rocks below. The pelagic cormorants are coming into breeding plumage; California gray whales are migrating north. The surf pounds the rocks and the cycle continues. One day these rocks will be sand.

Posted by Pica at February 16, 2004 09:14 PM

Comments

My father was cremated in Florida and the whereabouts of his ashes are unknown. But there was a time when I was a child that he sang in the casino in Madeira so when I visited there as an adult I found a rock high up on the island which I designated the rock in his memory.

I love your descriptions of nature's presence.

Posted by: Coup de Vent at February 17, 2004 12:16 AM

Pica, that last line of yours just about knocked me off my feet. Thank you.

Posted by: Lorianne at February 17, 2004 02:40 AM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/02/16/marking_place.html

Stone girl dancing

By Hoarded Ordinaries

(This is my contribution to the Ecotone topic, Stones and Rocks.)

Years ago when Chris and I lived at the Cambridge Zen Center, I often did retreats at the Diamond Hill Zen Monastery in Cumberland, Rhode Island. The Cambridge Zen Center is the heart of Cambridge's Central Square, so going to Cumberland (a "thickly settled" suburb by New Hampshire standards) was like taking a country getaway.

The monastery itself is a Korean-style temple built on a hill behind the Providence Zen Center. Behind the monastery, a small woods sits tucked amidst neighboring houses: new ranches and colonials built alongside a handful of older farmhouses. Down the street is a horse farm, across the street a veterinarian maintains a small-animal practice, and not five minutes away is the usual assortment of garishly commercial drug-stores, fast food restaurants, and strip malls.

When I first started going on retreat in Cumberland, I would spend my breaks reading. Retreats in my Zen school are highly structured: everyone participates in a monastic schedule of bowing, chanting, sitting, walking, and working. After each meal, however, there is a short break when you are free to do what you'd like. Although there are prohibitions against "pleasure" reading or journaling, activities which presumably encourage excessive thinking, we were otherwise free to use our breaks as we wished: napping, doing yoga, sketching, walking.

Although reading wasn't encouraged, it wasn't explicitly prohibited. Sprinkled through the monastery was a collection of our Zen Master's books, "permitted" reading. One day early into my practice I picked up one of Zen Master Seung Sahn's books and read the following interchange:

- Long ago a Zen Master said, 'When you hear a wooden chicken crow, you will understand your mind.' What does this mean?
- The student said, "A stone girl dances to the music of a flute with no holes."

I remember stopping when I read these lines. What could they mean? At the time I was a serious-minded Christian who had little patience for Zen silliness. If this book and Zen Master insisted on not making sense, I wasn't going to waste any more time engaging in foolish wordplay. I'd walk instead.

The woods behind the monastery became my refuge. Sore and achy from too many hours spent cross-legged, I'd walk the woods with long, smooth strides. Several foot-beaten trails wended their way among isolated rocks, glacial erratics; the monastery itself is built on stone, its pilings driven directly into granite. Each night I'd retire to my basement bedroom with its window overlooking a small pond, trees, and those very pilings rooted in rock, my dreams nested in the earth's stony breast.

I remember on one particular retreat I sat next to one of our Zen Masters; our row of cushions faced a long picture window overlooking that same pond. We weren't supposed to look out the window during meditation; we were supposed to keep our eyes trained loosely on the floor directly in front of our meditation mat. It didn't matter, though, for I didn't need to look out the window: I'd already memorized the view I'd seen so many times before on other retreats or during walking mediation when we'd pace the wood deck outside.

No, I didn't need to look out that window as I sat because I could intensely feel what was transpiring around me. Silence hones the senses, so after hours of sitting still you become aware

of nuances you typically ignore. Have been taught in my early days of Zen practice to "sit like an unmoving mountain," I was acutely aware of my body's internal rumblings or the occasional soughing and settling of the bodies sitting near me. The Zen Master I sat next to is a mountain of a man, very strong and solid, but I learned that even he sometimes sways with sleepiness or subtly corrects his sagging posture, almost but not entirely silent.

It was on this retreat that I heard it. It was in the late afternoon; we had just returned from a stint of walking meditation outside in those woods where so often I'd find solitary refuge. We had one more sitting session before breaking for dinner; the day was sloping downward into its accustomed afternoon ritual.

That was when I heard it. The room was quiet; people on either side of me were meditating with inaudible breaths. It sounded like a slow, distant train coming nearer, a muted hum with a low, bellowing resonance that inundated like a deep ringing bell. It sounded like a lowing ox or a rumbling storm; it sounded like a tornado or an approaching truck. Whatever the sound, it came not from outside, not from the picture window with its view of pond and surrounding woods, not from the moss-covered rocks that stood on either side of the monatery.

No, that low rumbling came from deep below the monastery; I could hear, feel, and visualize it vibrating from the center of the earth as it got closer, closer, closer, resonating right into my cushion, ass, then right up my meditating spine as the words appeared without emotion in my mind:

"The stone girl is dancing!"

The sound resonated for five seconds, perhaps. To this day I'm not sure if I felt that earthquake as much as I heard it approaching quite clearly from the center of the earth. There was no damage; many people in the monastery and at the bustling Zen Center down the hill neither heard nor felt it. Newspapers reported a slight but measurable tremor in the greater Providence area sometime after 3:30 pm that day; I just happened to be awake and watching at that precise moment. Mother Earth, my favorite stone girl, sometimes tires of her long sitting. Like any monk or Master, she too settles, soughs, and sighs in her seat.

Posted by lorianne at February 18, 2004 05:27 AM

Comments

O, to listen so well that we hear the mountain speak.

Posted by: Tom Montag at February 18, 2004 06:49 AM

Magnificently told. Thank you.

Posted by: dale at February 18, 2004 08:48 AM

My coffee and fig newton tasted much better to me, accompanied as they were by your wonderfully told tale. Thanks for adding to the pleasure of my morning.

Posted by: Beth W. at February 18, 2004 09:59 AM

Your story made me smile. Now if you could just work in that flute with no holes...

Posted by: Cody at February 18, 2004 12:34 PM

Great essay.

I have enjoyed earthquakes the few times I've experienced them. Usually just tremors, but once, in Taipei, a violent shaking that went on for maybe 15 seconds. An awe-inspiring realization, that this Earth is not at all a passive or lifeless creature.

Posted by: Dave at February 18, 2004 03:58 PM

Hello, everyone! Thanks for the kind words!

Dave, I've always told my husband I won't move to California because I hate earthquakes. But actually, I've experienced 3 mild 'quakes in my life, and none have been anywhere near California: one was in Ohio, the second was this one in Rhode Island, and the third was in our old house in Hillsboro, NH. Maybe California would be the safest place for me! ;-)

Cody, the only comments I could possibly make about the "flute with no holes" would be excessively bawdy in nature, so I'll refrain. "Silence is better than holiness." ;-)

Mmmm...fig newtons. Thanks for making *me* smile, Beth!

Posted by: Lorianne at February 19, 2004 06:09 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040707122023/http://www.schaub.com/lori/blog/archives/000088.htm

Uluru - rock of spirits

By Mulubinba Moments

Living overseas as a little girl with a father in the Australian Embassy I would boast about the natural wonders of Australia to my friends in the hope of convincing them to come and visit. One such wonder was "Ayers Rock" or Uluru which is its official and original name. I had never seen the rock, I had simply heard of it and seen pictures in books. Two years ago our family finally decided to explore some parts of the Northern Territory including the two World Heritage sights of Kakadu National Park and Uluru. Living in a city on the Eastern coast of Australia it is difficult to appreciate just how enormous Australia is. Uluru is practically a four hour drive from Alice Springs and it is necessary to book accommodation well in advance. The road is straight with occasional dips and driving along, you are surrounded by red soil interspersed with low olive green scrub and low trees.

I was not prepared for my first sighting of Uluru - it appeared suddenly on the horizon. Its enormous size struck us when we realised it was still 60km away. It rises 318m above the desert floor and has a circumference of 8km. It extends three and a half miles below the surface. Composed of a sandstone rich in felspar it changes colour in differing atmospheric and light conditions. This photo was taken out of the car window with video (apologies for the blurred foreground - we did not own a digital camera then).

The true wonder of Uluru is the spirituality associated with it. To sit and gaze at it at sunset is intensely spiritual. It has been sacred for thousands of years - the original tribe of Anangu have ownership and it is only right that I refer you to their official website Uluru - Kata Tjuta National Park simply because they can tell its story much better than I can. If you do come to Australia, I would recommend that you make the pilgrimmage to this very sacred place.

February 19, 2004 in Place | Permalink

Source:

Comments

Thanks for the post & the link. I love how the official website politely asks you not to climb Uluru but then gives safety tips in case you do.

Posted by: Lorianne | February 19, 2004 at 10:00 PM

I would love to sit and watch Uluru bathed in the glow of the setting sun. I can understand how spiritual that would be.

Posted by: Marie | February 20, 2004 at 02:51 AM

Lorianne, I agree with you about the safety tips. Uluru was given back to the original owners some years ago but it was after the tourist operators had set up business. People have been

climbing the rock for so long now that it was deemed "unfair" to ban them from doing so. Visitors are asked to respect the sanctity of Uluru by making the decision not to climb the rock but they cannot be banned from doing so. Unfortunately many people do not value the sacred worth of places. I had the same feeling of unease when I visited some of the European cathedrals and people were posing for photos in front of the altars.

Posted by: Jenny | February 20, 2004 at 07:14 AM

It is interesting how many giant rocks there are in the world that are considered sacred. I wonder how much it may have to do with nomadic people's using them as identifiable landmarks that can be seen from great distances. (Plus the fact that some of them are really impressive.)

Posted by: Tvindy | February 20, 2004 at 03:39 PM

Uluru does not look commercialized. It looks like you can walk right up to it, but in the States anything that might have been sacred is three times guarded and then accompanied by a Disneyland like museum.

Posted by: Chris Gibson | February 22, 2004 at 01:58 PM

im an 11 year old girl in year 6 who has been given a prject on uluru. i would like to know why does it glow?

Posted by: kristen | September 13, 2006 at 09:27 PM

hi it's kristen again. my project is due in two days and i need some help on Dick Smith so if you know any sites please tell me. also i will send you a file of my project for your help

Posted by: Kristen | September 18, 2006 at 04:40 PM

i will send a file of it as soon as i find out how to send it.

i hope you like it.

Posted by: kristen | September 20, 2006 at 09:34 PM

Source: http://mulubinba.typepad.com/mulubinba_moments/2004/02/uluru_rock_of_s.html

Skipping, Tumbling, Praying Stones

By bird on the moon

In the beginning was the stone. It began to roll, and ironically, it gathered moss.
-Isadore Upinksy, Cutting the Mustard in an Ambiguously Structured Reality

As a child, my pockets were always full of stones. Id go to the riverbank, and collect stones for a whole afternoon, on the virtues of their color, size, shape and texture. Stones taught me my first lessons on uniqueness, and finding heaven within remarkably small details. Some of the best of those years remain with me, though now its rare that Ill keep a stone that has settled along my path. But Ill pause to bend down, touch, observe, and for a moment hold the cold stillness in my hand, ponder its millions of years in age, and let it go...

There was a cathartic joy in my youth in tossing rocks into the river and the mudflats, the splat and kerplunk of the Earths reception was calming to a little boy with much on his still forming and quite confused mind. One day, I remember reading a comic strip where two characters were nestled in a pen and ink equivalent of my little edge of the world. The boy tossed stone as the girl watched, lording over him a bit. She tells him that it took thousands of years for that stone to make it to the point where his grubby little hands found and tossed it, and it would take thousands of years for it to return, if at all. He sighs, suddenly fraught with guilt. I tried to toss a stone that day but couldnt, and had to be content sitting upon them, watching the play of the gulls in a mid-winters breeze, and the passing of ships, large and terribly complicated, through wild currents of the channel.

Stonehenge, the Kabaa, the Blarney Stone, Dome of the Rock, the Shivalingams of the Bramaputra River, Uluru; these stones and rocks of varying sizes mark points of pilgrimage and create around them a holy space, catalysts of ancient energies and divine messages to the faithful. Like lodestone, they gather to them the iron filings of our veneration and devotion. They seem to transform their landscapes, concave the light and transfix the viewer. We touch, kiss, grapple and clutch them, we smooth them with our passionate fingers or climbing feet. Somehow, these outcroppings and splinters of deeper Earth jab through our liminal awareness and remind the animal within what exactly we are dealing with, the nature of our nature, a crystallization of our base elements into a form that requires great strength to change. Even the mightiest river cannot forge a canyon overnight. Through stories and legends, mere pebbles become attractors of magic, and radiate a power that speaks to the heart in the molten language of its birth.

Often, if we journey to a sacred (in dogma or personal association) place, we will bring back a stone. If we dont lose it or forget its origins, when we hold it again, the memory of that place returns. I unfold the satchels of my now meager collection of rocks and travel back to Haiti, the Olympic Peninsula, Hungary, the coast of Maine or even those places I havent been; Israel, the Antarctic, Guatemala, Outer Space. To anyone else, it may seem like a bozo is on the carpet staring at rocks, to me, my passport is being stamped and Im far away. I know I cannot prove that these bits of our crust retain the essence of their origin, but they contain the molecular memory from where and whence the were birthed from the soil. How many other hands have traded and revered these stones, became lost or found in their swirls and patterns, and revered them as holy? For whom after me shall these become more than mineral, a life and process not geological but energetic, transformative, universal?

A sweat lodge near here was built on the side of a hill. After the first ceremony was performed, a boulder rolled down the hill and settled on the corner of the east gate. A visiting Chippewa elder said, this stone is a place holder. It keeps the space, like a corner stone, it anchors and affirms it within the environment. Like the Hajis revolutions around the Kabaa, the world near that hill and the bent saplings that have made a holy space for humans revolves around that tumbled boulder, which in its excitement, could have demolished or hurt. Instead, it came to rest, and assumed its duty as a pivot, or axis, between human and the world of which we are comprised but distant in mind, keeping watch over the other stones made red in the fire for our arduous prayers.

Perhaps thats the attraction we seekers have for the stones; each is a little axis, even a little planet, itself in orbit to the billion year song of the Earth and a nexus for our fleeting time upon it. Why not venerate something far older and seemingly unchanged than our quick-as-blink

lives? Contact with such a stone that draws us could be like approaching a god of old times, a stalwart, a strength in times of turmoil (My Lord is a rock in a weary land, glory, halleluia!).

With stones, we heal and hurt. We toss them with Molotov Cocktails over streets of shattered glass and peace, or place them on the body with great care and delicacy, to bejewel and fascinate remind our organism of its origin. We build temples of them. For stones, we travel far, abroad and within. From a tiniest glittering grain to vast monuments of granite, we place immense value upon them, and the world around these changes through their luster or attached history. We live upon stone, and die upon it, and return to it, even if we havent returned the stones we picked up along the way. Though not alive as we define it, we are outlived by the famous and common stones, and our lives are woven by some threads of mineral that begin with the Universes beginning. Our most fundamental connection to the Earth may very well be through a stone that tumbles in our pocket, or by which we leave an offering of ourselves on our holy pilgrimages and ecstatic wanderings upon this slight sphere, skipping across the surface of totality, tossed by a young hand, creating worlds to pass the time.

Written as a contribution to Ecotone Wiki's most recent topic, "Stones and Rocks."

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040603111620/http://birdonthemoon.com/archive/week_2004_02_15.html

Cairns

By Cirrus

Submitted as part of the Ecotone topic: Stones and Rocks

The morning broke sunny yet hazy, mild, and calm. Not unusual, except we were staying at the Lake of the Clouds Hut, just south and 1000 feet below the normally socked-in summit of Mount Washington. Having scaled the summit yesterday, we loaded our packs and headed for the car about 4000 feet below us.

From the hut, we actually ascended a trail that would lead to the top of Tuckerman's Ravine where we would begin the descent. The trail is not really a foot path, but actually a series of foot-worn stones and rocks. Every third or fourth stone is marked with a fading white blaze. In between the stones is a mix of thin, sandy soil and tiny arctic plants clinging on for dear life. Pockets of dry sedge grass provide rustle in the light breeze which has started to kick up with the heating of the sun.

But it's the cairns that make a statement. Along our path, and on the other paths in the open plateau, stand eerie piles of stones on guard--like sentries. Over the last hundred years or so, many a traveller have collaboratively constructed these signposts to help guide hikers through the common phenomena of fog, mist, and snow. On many days, hikers find their way to the summit only by walking cairn to cairn--with faith.

But today, when the fog has lifted to reveal the series of cairns as far as the eye can see, it is otherworldy. You expect these stone sentries to move, or talk, or breathe. It makes me think of pre-historic people who used stone to mark time, seasons, years. My mind focuses on images of

Stonehenge. In a century where the difference between a 0 and 1 can mean the difference between whether my bank account shows the right balance, it is hard to imagine moving large stones into position that align with a sunrise on the solstice.

On this day, I am in a world of stone. It is under my feet. It is in my line of vision, whether I look ahead or back. The world is primarily hues of brown, gray, white. This is a harsh environment but it calls so many to it. It can't be that such a world of rock makes us feel safer. The weather rakes across these rocks scraping most life down to the shortest height and only the most protected places. Do the rocks make us feel more grounded at these lofty heights? Or is it our past calling us; some spiritual connection that is embedded deep within our soul. Some argue that our souls long for the open savannahs of Africa. Well, maybe part of our soul longs for a world where large stones served our ancestors as shelter, guideposts, and timepieces.

February 20, 2004 in Ecotone | Permalink

Comments

My first experience with hiking in an area with a tradition of cairns was in the Acadia National Park on Mount Dessert Island in Maine. They are a practical (sometimes life-saving or at least foot saving) aide, of course. What I like best about them, though, is the comfort of knowing other feet have been to a place before mine, and that both good sense and good will were present, too. I enjoyed this essay very much.

Posted by: Beth W. at February 20, 2004 05:43 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040405231925/http://cirrus.typepad.com/local_weather_musings/2004/02/cairns.html

Ocean and Sea

Bi-Weekly Topics for March 1, 2004

Sea Dreams

by Triks (London and the North)

I dream of the sea. Sometimes we go there. With my ball.

It is the biggest place I know
soft underfoot
moving under my belly
I can't outrun it - I run with it.

I am rarely still like this.
Here I am dreaming
and counting the seconds till my release command when I can get back in
and run past the waves
fly with my ball
sometimes it comes back
sometimes doesn't
sometimes I get it
sometimes they do

you can't fetch the waves
I try
I bite at them

out there
it's the place I like best

Read more writings on Sea and Ocean in Ecotone, the place bloggers' wiki.

Posted by Triks at 12:06 AM Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040401131044/http://www.airenet.co.uk/alife/2004_03.html

Child of Small Waters

By Switched At Birth

Herewith, my thoughts on the Ecotone wiki's topic for this date, OceanandSea. The Ecotone site is a facinating intersection for blogs of place. Stop by to visit and explore if you haven't been there before.

Regarding oceans and seas, I am a child of small waters.

The magnificence of oceans and seas unnerves me. I love to walk on the sugar white sands of Pensacola Beach, watching the crabs scuttle into their holes, picking up pastel colored tiny coquina shells to examine. But when it comes time for swimming, give me a cement pond, please, where I can see through the chlorinated water all the way to the bottom and the edges are no farther than I can gracelessly dog-paddle in any direction.

The last time I swam in the warm Gulf of Mexico was a few months before Buck and I were married, more than twenty years ago. It was a Sunday afternoon. We were frolicking like porpoises. Buck went swimming away from me in a fast line underwater -- just showing off, playing. Unbeknownst to him, his trajectory took him straight into the middle of a small group of women treading water and, low and behold, he surfaced in a school of nuns! The good sisters were having a day retreat on the beach, some in the water and others rowed up in folding chairs on the shore, wimples on their heads and their noses an impenetrable blob of thick white sunblock. They looked like big, placid sea gulls.

I am a true child of ponds, small lakes, streams and natural springs. As a young girl, I spent many early mornings and late afternoons into dusk sitting on the wooden dock of Lake Valrico in a rural area of central Florida near Tampa, where I spent most of my childhood and adolescence. Barefoot, a skinny kid in shorts, I loved sitting on that old dock, conversing silently with my mirrored reflection, dark fish shapes darting just under the waters' murky surface. The tree-lined shore on the far side of that small lake seemed a world away. In fact, my first piano teacher, Mrs. Medard, lived in a big white house nestled in those trees, not objectively far at all.

Mrs. Medard frightened me a little. She was formal, stern and seemed quite old to my nine year old self. She had a method designed to teach me how to hold my hands in proper alignment with the keyboard. Putting a quarter in the middle of the flat surface of the backs of both of my hands, she would instruct me to play some exercise. Inevitably, I would get rattled, jerk my hands to the side, and the coins would roll off, lost inside my teacher's grand piano. Thinking about it now, the logistics don't seem to work. I can't figure out how quarters could roll off my little child hands and somehow fall into the bowels of Mrs. Medard's piano. . . but it's my memory, and I'm sticking to it. I fear I must have bothered Mrs. Medard some, too. She died of a heart attack shortly after my lesson one Saturday afternoon.

Lake Valrico received my tears, both flash floods and the slow, constant drip from my eyes into the eyes of my reflection, in the weeks and months after my father died. Small waters have always been there to comfort me.

My thoughts are not grand, not oceanic. They meander like some brook, crossing fields, woods and swampy areas. Sometimes they submerge beneath the earth's surface, subterranean and cold.

Longleaf has a series of natural springs. They bubble up into a sandy stream bed. The water flows with the tilt of the land, through the forest of mixed pine and hardwoods, deep into the swamp where it is almost dark even in the middle of the day. Walking in the deep forest that borders the swamp, the treetops form a high canopy, and only a little light filters through in spots. It is one of my favorite places to wander. The stream is about two feet wide in most places there, with musical rills created where logs have fallen and formed makeshift miniature waterfalls. The most gorgeous ferns grow there, together with unusual plants such as Never Wet

and even the occasional wild lilly, with startlingly bright yellow blooms. The damp earth is heavy, black and fragrant. Animal tracks abound. Wrenching "dry cork in a bottle" woodpecker sounds split the silence, and the beating of a large owl's wings may be heard.

It is a place of mysteries; of answers and questions.

I don't think I could ever get my mind around oceans and seas. But ponds, small lakes, streams and natural springs have a human scale that suits me. I can poke along our stream bed, exploring, watching the minnows dart from sunlight to shadow at my approach.

With a pocket full of pecan halves, a tangerine and a native plant reference guide, I enjoy my small adventure at the water's edge.

11:29 PM in Longleaf Preserve | Permalink

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20040714202946/longleaf.typepad.com/switched_at_birth/2004/02/child_of_small_.htm

Poem

By Sea Hear

This poem is my first contribution to the Ecotone project.

The topic there today is OceanAndSea...

* * * * * * *

Whales beach with bleeding ears

in places they've rarely been seen.

Fleeing naval noise, aural atrocity,

sonic attack.

Unimaginable assault, irreparable rips

in the fabric of Creation.

Our seas - while we are here -

being blasted by brats

testing

the limits of our times.

Loud orphans drowning out
Ancient lullabies of the Sea.

Their unholy sounds
wreaking havoc upon
Ancestral calling.

This armour brings damage
to our home.
There is no defence
for such killing.

Sunk treasures of knowing
in liquid depth echoes
of navy hearts beating:
Waiting to be heard.

* * * * * * *

posted by jaihn : 5:32 PM

Source: http://seahear.blogspot.com/2004_03_01_seahear_archive.html#107816250944301234

Sea/scape

By P.

MELBOURNE, FL.

It was 2 o'clock in the morning and my sinuses were killing me.

Almost exactly three years ago today, I had flown to Melbourne for a conference. Intoxicated by 75-degree air in February, I had left open the door to my hotel room's porch, to savor the exotic experience and listen to the surf, 80 feet down and a hundred yards away.

But now, my sinuses, affronted by air travel and appalled by mildew and unaccustomed seaside moisture, had thrown up the barricades in open revolt, and it was hard to breathe, let alone sleep. I had to close the door.

But before I dragged it shut, I stopped to look out. Far below me, the lights of the hotel faded across the tawny sand to the surf, which was an uncertain line of gray in the dimness. To my left, clusters of hotel and apartment lights attenuated beside the shore till nothing remained but the more-or-less-regular sparks of streetlights along U.S. 1A up toward Cocoa Beach. Beyond the surf, dim sparkles hinted at moving water, and beyond that was only the deepest, purest black I can remember ever seeing. Above, a haze gave back the lights of the shore as a gray-blue and faded away to the invisible horizon, where the sky was as uncompromisingly black as the water. No stars. No passing ships. Not so much as an airplane.

Against such darkness, the brilliant shoreline seemed puny. A light wind covered any hiss from the surf, but a heavy thud …. thud … thud … carried to me. (I wonder now if the frequency of the waves changes with wind and weather, or if it's a function of the saltiness of the water and the shape of the bottom -- whether hurricane waves crash at the same frequency as those I saw, but a much greater amplitude.)

It was a scene to make you feel -- well, I didn't feel small, but soft and ineffective. I remember the chorus of a Shape Notes song came to mind:

The Earth and sea shall pass away, and the…e…e …e old rolling skies.

It's a great old song if you disregard the words. I hummed it to myself. The unpleasant feeling in my sinuses reasserted itself, and I remembered why I stood there. I closed the door, turned on the air conditioner and went for the decongestants.

Eschatology comes easily after midnight, a thousand miles from home, when one is wearing only pajamas. Processed air and chemicals put me readily back to sleep.

Source: http://my.core.com/~pzicari/text/Sea.html

Ocean Water

By Feathers of Hope (Pica)

"Water is good for taking away your troubles. The ocean is best because it's big enough for all of them."
--My Cousin Susan

"On any given morning, the caffeine levels in the Puget Sound spike at around nine."
--Oceanographer Dave

Two random thoughts for the Ecotone Wiki's *March 1 entry on* Ocean and Sea.

Posted by Pica at March 1, 2004 09:52 PM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/03/01/ocean_water.html

Sea stones

By ever so humble

I went for a walk by the sea this afternoon and found these sun-warmed rocks on a bench. Scoured and broken off the tops of mountains, carried a few feet a year in glacier ice, dropped on a rocky coast as the ice retreated, tumbled smooth by centuries of stormy North Atlantic waves, they had been chosen by a beachcomber from among thousands of similar rocks and placed on this bench where I happened upon them. I knelt to take a picture.

Bright blue skies, no wind, air temperature almost 50 degrees... I felt a little sunstruck and woozy with the simple beauty and unusual warmth of the day. The flat calm sea was a mirror for the sky; everything was blue, blue, blue as far as my eyes could see. I felt I could sit stone still, soak up the sun's rays, and gaze at the infinite horizon... until the tide came in.

Our coast is rocky, our ocean is cold. Skies can be leaden, clouds laden with rain. The wind bites and howls. In March, storms from the northeast will hurl seaweed high with seaspray and toss battered lobster traps and roll boulders over dunes and rocky embankments into the middle of Route 1A, Ocean Blvd. We see this because we can't stay away; we must go look at the ocean during or after a storm. The craziest people surf in it, elated by the elemental; their wetsuits make them look like slick black seals with bodies just a little too slender and limbs just a little too long.

The cold Labrador Current runs down the coasts of Nova Scotia and Maine and spins out counterclockwise at the bottom of the Gulf of Maine, above Cape Ann, Massachusetts, 30 miles south of us. Even in the summer it can be too cold to swim. If the wind blows offshore, it skims off the top sun-warmed layer of water, pushes it east out to sea like a child's blown-away raft, and the coldest water wells up from the dark deep and takes your breath away. Your feet are ice blocks, your ankles feel like a toothache, you watch amazed as children dive under waves and come up screaming and wild. When their lips turn blue you make them come out, though they protest.

You go back to your chair sunk in the warm sand. Better to sit in the sun and watch, you think, because you are old and worn smooth and wise like a stone by the sea.

(Linked to Ecotone's March 1 topic OceanAndSea.)

March 01, 2004 | Permalink

Comments

'...worn smooth and wise like a stone by the sea.' How beautiful.

Posted by: MD | March 1, 2004 10:12 PM

My God, another poem written as prose. So beautiful I felt I was there.

Posted by: Denny | March 2, 2004 08:39 AM

Wonderful post & picture. Have you posted a link to this on Ecotone, the wiki for bloggers-of-place? The most recent biweekly topic is on Ocean & Sea, so this post would definitely qualify. You can follow the link on my blogroll if you've never checked it out...

Posted by: Lorianne | March 2, 2004 01:18 PM

I was shy about it but, Lorianne, you convinced me and I added the link. In college I majored in English and anthropology and finished with a degree in geography, so reading and writing about "where" has always held a fascination for me.

Posted by: Amy | March 2, 2004 07:18 PM

Happy to see you at Ecotone. I, the land-locked, sat this one out.

Yeah. Worn smooth. That feels about right.

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20040401154214/http://everyday.blogs.com/humble/2004/03/_i_went

for_a.html

Secrets Of The Deep

By Feathers of Hope (Numenius)

A note for the Ecotone Wiki's *entry on* Ocean and Sea.

There's an excellent gallery of fishes and other creatures from the deep sea here. Do not view if you're prone to nightmares. *(From* Metafilter*)*.

Closer to the littoral zone, giant crabs are invading Norwegian coastal waters. These crabs were originally from the Bering sea and Kamchatka and were introduced in the 1930s into the Barents Sea for food production. Following a population explosion in the 1990s, these crabs rapidly moving down the Norwegian coast, eating every fish in sight.

Posted by Numenius at March 2, 2004 11:30 PM

Comments

Those deep sea fish really do look like monsters of the deep - not at all the pretty fish we see darting in the shallower waters.

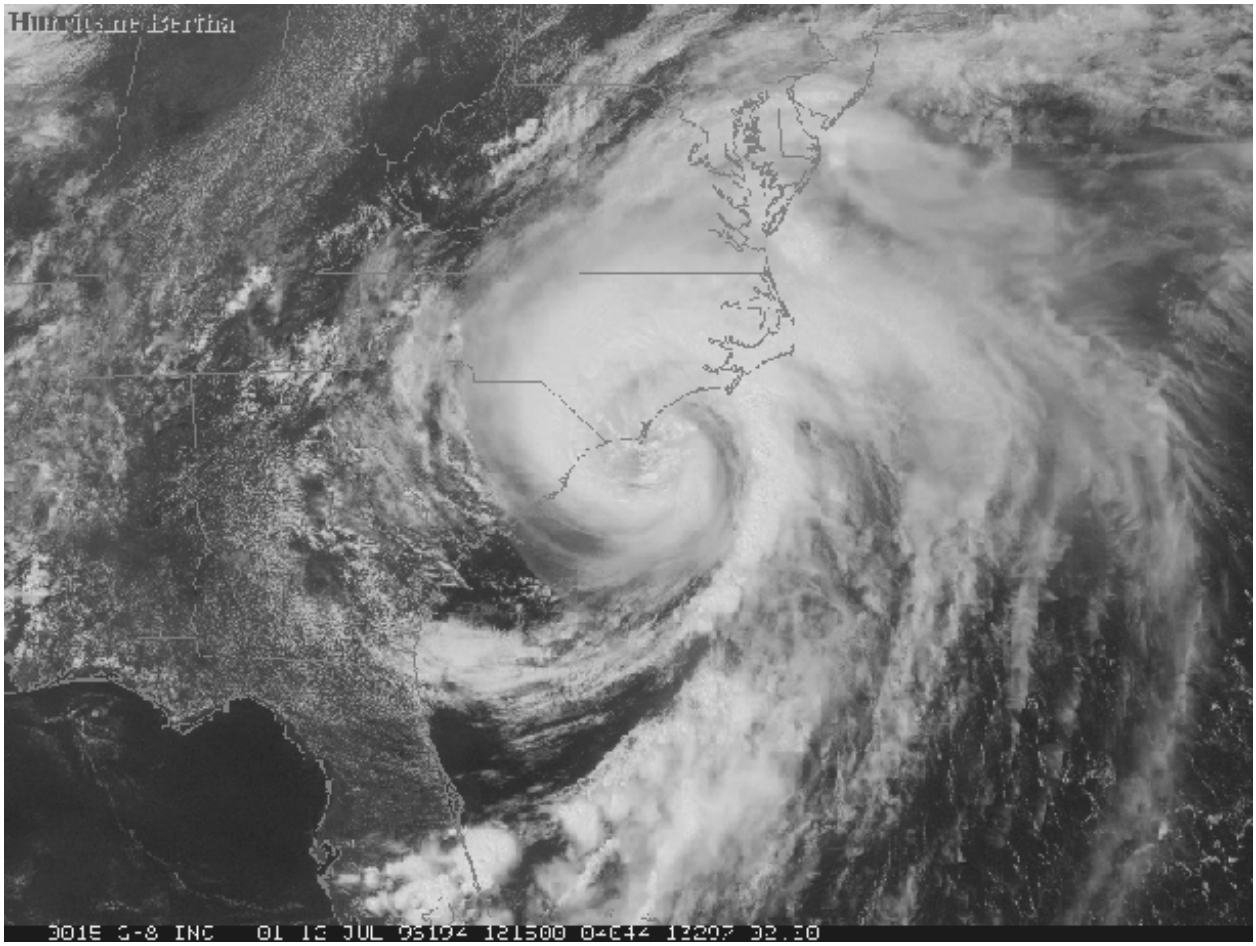
Posted by: Jenny at March 3, 2004 02:37 AM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/03/02/secrets_of_the_d.html

Bertha

By cirrus

Submitted as part of the Ecotone topic: Ocean and Sea



The car pointed south and rumbled steadily down route 95
We listen to the wipers clicking back and forth, fighting the pelting rain
At Providence, the wind roared up Narragansett Bay, buffeted our Sentra
We parked behind a dune, not far from Watch Hill
With a few steps through three-foot high beach grass we were there

There was no beach, the sea was eroding the dunes
We stood amidst the grass, our feet in the surf
The ocean in front of us, mean and nasty
Waves pounding on shore, the wind whisking the surface into a froth
She would be less than a hurricane when she would make landfall in a few hours

Nevermind the official status, we stood awestruck nonetheless
We're not alone, we're buoyed by a handful of others
Here, there, other spectators, everyone gazing at the sea
Not everyone stood idly by, surfers ventured into the churning waters
Each of us longing for a more intimate visit with this stranger from the Tropics

Each gust of wind, each new wave crashing, hightens our excitement
We want more, our souls stretching to feel the intensity
Around us on this stormy day, Bertha's energy ebbing and flowing

We're safe here, this storm won't topple our house or sink our boat
When we've had enough we'll be able to drive home in a warm car

Evening falls, our clothes soaked through
I point the car back north, the highway nearly empty now
The night is dark, the wind has subsided
I can smell the sea in the car, my ears can still hear the surf
And I hold on to the primoridal energy that Bertha shared on this mid summer day

For more on Hurrican Bertha in 1996, see this NOAA site

March 06, 2004 in Ecotone | Permalink

Comments

Growing up in Florida, I know just what you mean about the particular energy, smell, low barometric pressure, color and quality of the wind associated with hurricanes (and those long, deep rolling waves). I've been in homes when part of the roof was torn off and old oak trees jerked out by the roots. And the season will be here again before we know it.

Posted by: Beth W. | March 7, 2004 02:40 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040405234301/http://cirrus.typepad.com/local_weather_musings/2004/03/bertha.html

Spiders and Place

Bi-Weekly Topics for March 15, 2004

Miss Muffet Has Left the Building

By Fragments from Floyd

This biweekly topic at Ecotone for March 15 will be "Spiders and Place". I'll just let the images speak for spiders on our place. I've linked to the original posts that went with them, too, if you just can't get enough ArachnoPhilia. Enjoy!

Come Into My Parlor

Ephemera

Truth Plain and Simple
Lost in Space

Posted by fred1st on March 11, 2004 7:31 AM | Permalink

Comments

What a showoff.

Really, though, these shots are amazing, as I've told you before. I'm still not sure how you caught them.

Posted by: Trey | March 11, 2004 9:01 AM

Ohmigosh! Here you are, sticking space hubbles on your desktop, and for a month I've been trying to draw a spider web for my banner on Spinning! Maybe I could buy a photo off you?

Posted by: susan | March 11, 2004 9:03 AM

And this too, I haven't seen such gorgeous spider webs since I took pictures of HUGE (I'm talking, like six feet!)ones catching morning sunlight along a highway in Alabama.

Posted by: susan | March 11, 2004 9:05 AM

Beautiful. In the throes of winter, I'd forgotten what cobwebs look like. (Excepting, of course, the ones here in the house...)

Posted by: Lorianne | March 11, 2004 9:06 AM

Awesome photos!

Posted by: Jenny | March 11, 2004 9:31 PM

Oh my! Would it be silly of me to say that these are so beautiful that I'm almost choked up with appreciation? Something about the juxtaposition of the photos, the perfect lighting, and the accompanying stories just really zings shockwaves into my happy places.

This may become my new favorite fredism. Yummy.

Posted by: ntexas99 | March 12, 2004 12:26 AM

These are just wonderful, Fred. Thanks!

Posted by: beth | March 15, 2004 8:19 PM

Source:
http://www.fragmentsfromfloyd.com/fragments/2004/03/miss_muffet_has_left_the_build.html

SPIDER IN THE BATH TUB

By The Middlewesterner

I dust off this old essay as my contribution to Ecotone's "Spiders and Place" topic this week.

How a spider finds its way into our bathtub, I confess I don't know. The occurrence is common enough, in our house at least, that I have to think these creatures are particularly adept at getting themselves into such situations. They are not, I'm finding, particularly talented when it comes to getting themselves out, however.

Even as I write this, a spider struggles against the porcelain world in which it finds itself imprisoned. It came sometime during the night, was there when I rose this morning, two and a half hours ago. Its day, thus far, has been entirely devoted to scaling the sheet white cliffs that surround it - or, rather, attempting to scale them.

Our tub is of an ordinary variety, twenty-eight inches broad, fifty-eight inches long, and - most telling - thirteen perpendicular inches deep. To me it would appear to be not an especially attractive tableau upon which to play out one's little drama - no food, no water (at the moment),

and no hiding place but the drain, no obvious footholds - but I am not the spider and my choice of landscapes might seem likewise as peculiar to him.

So one of the eight-legged wonders of the world has wandered into our tub again and, resourceful as this one is, there it remains. Eight legs, he's discovering, are not legs enough to pull him out of this little mess he's gotten himself into. He knows now, I believe, that there is no easy escape, for he has circled the tub entirely, testing its boundaries, facing steep walls everywhere.

When I first saw him this morning, he was madly flailing his legs, on the theory perhaps that simple hard work would be sufficient to free himself. Hard work, he quickly discovered as he made no progress whatever, was not the answer, as is generally the case in these Sisyphean dilemmas.

If not hard work, then cunning perhaps? While I watched from my distance, the spider appeared to massage two of its front legs with its mouth and feelers, coating them - I assume - with some of its homemade rosin. First he carefully prepared the front-most leg on his right side, then the second leg from the front on his left, testing each as he finished. He employed the two legs he had gummed as anchors, fixing them to the wall of the tub and holding them in place while scrambling about with the other six. He made half an inch progress, as far as he could move with those two legs set; and then his anchors failed him and he slid backwards to the bottom of the tub. And there he sat.

A few minutes later, he moved about six inches toward the front of the tub and proceeded to apply his rosin to two of his hind legs - the hindmost leg on his left side, the second from the rear on the right. Again he rested, and then again he moved himself forward and upward, using the rosined legs not so much as anchors but as the main driving units of his climbing machine. His other legs seemed to move more lightly and quickly, while the rosined ones were brought deliberately forward, alternately, with each bit of progress, and were used for upward thrust. Of course the attempt was only as successful as the previous, and soon he was back the half inch to the beginning.

The next time I checked his progress, he had moved almost the length of the bathtub, crossing above the drain and resting to the right of it, in the corner. His position afforded me an especially good view of him as I set my elbows on the side of the tub and bent to observe him more closely. This, it began to appear, was to be his most ambitious assault yet, for as I peered from above I saw him place each of the front four legs into his mouth (or so it seemed), one at a time, working them in and out, painstakingly slowly in and out, massaging each with his feelers, testing each and applying more rosin when the results seemed unsatisfactory; then he started work on the four hind legs. From my position, I was unable to tell whether these went into his mouth or not, but I noted his mouth was moving energetically all the while, in a kind of sucking motion. Soon he had the hind legs readied.

Very slowly, almost resolutely, he headed upward again, one leg set carefully, then another, until he had gained nearly an inch and a half. The attempt ended in mid-step, when all the legs lost hold at once and he slipped again to the bottom. He sat perfectly still then, and if I were one to

attribute human characteristics to eight-legged creatures, I'd venture to say he was disgusted by the futility of it all. I left him to his fate, poured myself another cup of coffee, and listened a while to some Beethoven on the radio.

Since I started writing these few pages, I've checked on the spider's progress every ten minutes or so, to see whether, wunderbar, he has succeeded in extricating himself from his rather hopeless circumstances. Often, as I enter the bathroom, he simply appears to be resting - sometimes in one corner, sometimes in another, or anywhere along either side. He had, I'm convinced, tested every conceivable route of escape. Once, as I entered, I saw that he'd made a snatch of progress by anchoring one hind leg to a piece of grit attached to the side of the tub. Yet even as I stood observing him, that tenuous foothold gave way and he slid backwards. Another time he was running somewhat sideways along the wall of the tub, as if to use centrifugal force to hold him against the porcelain. This attempt, too, was futile.

I do feel a bit foolish every time I descend the flight of stairs from my office to check on his efforts. And, too, I do feel somewhat foolish expending the energy and hours (for I am a slow writer) needed to record this insignificant little tragedy - an inconsequential struggle that matters little to the rest of the cosmos.

I am not one to believe very deeply that spiders and such are inhabited by the souls of our ancestors, nor that I too shall be a spider or cat or cow someday. I am not particularly fond of eight-legged creatures, and have no more empathy for the animal world than most of the rest of men. Yes, I am a meat-eater, a custom I have inherited and one I have thus far found enjoyable. Yet the whole morning I have noticed myself wondering if this is a metaphor for our existence in the universe. Is life a continual struggle to roll the stone to the top of the mountain, only to see it roll back to the bottom, again and again? Some days it surely seems that such is the extent of human existence. Then again some days life seems to hold much more than that.

On my most recent trip down the stairs to observe the spider, I found him motionless, his legs splayed around him. I watched for seven minutes and he didn't move at all. Without apparent reason, then, he moved a few steps forward suddenly, stopped; turned one hundred eighty degrees and moved a few steps, stopped; turned ninety degrees and moved a few steps more. He stood motionless for an instant, then went round in a circle, then another. He was motionless again for a minute or so, before he started applying the rosin to one foreleg, then another. By this time I'd watched his struggle for five hours and here he was, back to the beginning, putting rosin on exactly the same forelegs as when I first observed him.

What sensations had he felt, I wondered, while he sat motionless those seven minutes. What befuddlement caused him then to move first in one direction, then another, then still a third, and finally to walk in circles? What silver thread of instinct told him to start preparing his legs with rosin again, for another assault on the white cliffs that surrounded him? I confess I don't know. I had been content to observe his fate. It was apparent now that he didn't recognize the futility of his efforts. A spider in the bath tub is condemned to one of two, or possibly three, destinies: if he remained entirely undisturbed, he could scramble and scramble until he had no strength left, until he starved to death; or, should one of us in the house want to take a shower, he would end mashed against the porcelain or washed down the drain; or if he were adventuresome to a high

degree, he might try his luck in the drain, make his way through the standing water in the curve of pipe, find his way to the sewer and, through a manhole cover, to daylight and freedom. Those were, it seemed to me, his possible fates.

For myself, I know I'd be immensely unhappy to think there is no possible rescue from my own stupidities. How a spider finds its way into our bath tub, I don't know; nor am I always cognizant of the routes I'm taking into silly predicaments of my own. I, too, have walked in circles, frustrated.

As the spider was applying rosin to the second leg, readying himself for yet another attempt, I took a piece of cardboard, got him onto it, carried him to the garage and left him there to fend for himself among the flies and wasps. This action was not - and was not meant to be - consequential; it was simply a personal affirmation of some sort, one made against my intellectual desire to observe the spider's natural fate, an affirmation, perhaps, that there is more to living than the mere avoidance of death. Something. It was a gesture I felt the need to make, the way one raises his fist against a threatening sky.

posted by Tom Montag @ 4:21 AM

Source: http://middlewesterner.blogspot.com/2004_03_15_middlewesterner_archive.html

The Worlds We Weave

By g r a p e z

The web is an almost endless firmament of threads. While searching for blogs concerned with nature, I came upon a wiki called Ecotone. From that wiki, I discovered some interesting blogs, Fragments from Floyd by Fred and Cassandra's Pages just two exceptional examples of these. From Fred's page last week I discovered that Ecotone runs biweekly topics in which its community of bloggers discuss a single topic en masse. And today's happens to be about spiders.

Spiders in New England are such tame characters. No Black Widows or Tarantulas roam the back roads here. My closest encounters usually occur inside, maybe spotting an eight-legged creature scurrying across the bathroom tiles. I usually leave it alone, considering it a small pet that collects undesirable insects, much like a cat that catches mice. And furthermore, on a superstitious note, I don’t wish it to rain.

Which brings me to my encounters with spiders in the great outdoors, usually just those threads between low-hanging branches. They'll catch your face while hiking like a loose strand of hair that just won't go back in place. Or those small rock spiders I see when resting on a rock: they clamber all around hiking their own steep territory, looking for their own inspiration.

But when younger, I saw spiders as welcome curiosities and Daddy Long Legs were my favorite ones. Their small pill-sized bodies, held in suspension by eight long thin spindly legs, presented an otherworldly creature to eyes trained on Saturday films of aliens and monsters. Here was a real monster.

Children are cruel sometimes and I'll forego the horror stories here, but leave it said that Daddy Long Legs were approached with both dread and fascination. They made the world of tree and pond more than New Hampshire lakeside property, but a land of marvel and wonder.

In reflection, I guess that's what all creatures do for us humans, whether those creatures be insect, animal, or next door neighbor (or blogger.) They remind us that the world is a miraculous place, full of, miracle of miracles, abundant and various life. Including our selves. And including our souls.

A Noiseless, Patient Spider

Noiseless, patient spider,
I mark'd, where, on a little promontory, it stood, isolated;
Mark'd how, to explore the vacant, vast surrounding,
It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself;
Ever unreeling them--ever tirelessly speeding them.

And you, O my Soul, where you stand,
Surrounded, surrounded, in measureless oceans of space,
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing,--seeking the spheres, to connect them;
Till the bridge you will need, be form'd--till the ductile anchor hold;
Till the gossamer thread you fling, catch somewhere, O my Soul.

by: Walt Whitman

posted by Greg @ 2:00 AM

Source: http://grapez.blogspot.com/2004/03/worlds-we-weave.html

Sat down beside her

By Working bug

Long after dark every worknight, I climb two flights of shabby stairs to fetch my car. In contrast to our gleaming offices, the garage is old and is maintained with an eye to keeping it from collapsing, not impressing visitors and staff. So the cream-colored walls are stained where indifferent mopping has sloshed dirt on them, the undersides of the stairs are rusty and the steel

reinforcements bolted on to stave off catastrophe are painted only with red primer. The only decoration is a decades-old legal disclaimer whose white background paint has gone tan and blistered. The rogue apostrophe in "*the company will take no control of your vehicle or it's contents*" never fails to make me wince.

At the top of these stairs is an ill-fitting industrial door. On warm summer nights, someone props it open to relieve the smell of damp and dust from the old masonry inside. And so the stairwell becomes the parlor of the largest spider I have ever seen outside a zoo.

Its globular tan body must be the size of a quarter. On warm nights it builds a classic spiral web, efficiently braced, across the upper right corner of the doorway, where it can trap moths and other insectile tourists blundering unwarily toward the harsh light over the landing. By its size, it must feed lavishly.

I am always impressed when I mount the stairs and see the master in its workshop. With a sweep of my briefcase, I could spoil its night, or worse, but instead I duck underneath and continue on my way, daily reminding myself that I want to live and let live. Nevertheless, the spider and web make me uncomfortable. They're an apt metaphor for the city I live in and my relation to it.

The walk to my desk takes me along a sidewalk that is part of the blocks-long path between a downtown shelter and a meals site for the homeless. When I meet someone there, we eye each other warily, trying to seem not to notice at all. I am not much less shabby than they are, but cleaner, and obviously employed. Sometimes they ask for money. Sometimes, if I have change, I give it. Sometimes I'll nod, if I happen to catch someone's eye; sometimes I'll hear "what's happening!" as I pass.

Over the years, we have logged one robbery, some car break-ins, one dramatic arrest (fat cop nearly dies trying to outrun lady car thief in high heels); several auto accidents and one fistfight. Old-timers tell the hilarious story of how a stripper and a customer had a falling-out in our parking lot; the John tried to hit her with his car; she dragged him out and chased him into the ladies room of the bar across the street, loudly promising colorful mayhem until the police arrived to bust them both.

The crime rate is not high, really, but to a boy raised in the country, where you knew everyone and worried about dogs, not people, it's uncomfortable. Embracing diversity is harder than it looks.

Certainly there's race. You try to avoid the subject, but you can't deny a difference, even if your Mediterranean ancestors were nearly as brown as theirs. And some of the thin, tattered guys I pass look at me as if they're see Part Of The Problem in the pudgy white guy approaching. There's a bigger economic and emotional gulf -- for I'm going to a good job and a warm, cluttered home, and they're leaving a utilitarian free meal and headed for a Spartan place crowded with unpredictable strangers.

Some other differences in values must be driven by money. I hate asking for anything and I can't imagine asking for spare change. Some of these folks do it with aplomb -- seemingly unfazed, some with good (if dubious) stories. The best was one who spoke passionately to me for a minute about getting right with God and drew from me some hesitant agreement about Christian virtue, then concluded: "Give me a dollar." I gave him that, and welcome; I thought of it as admission. It can't be easy work. Another panhandler caught me in the parking lot and didn't want to take no

for an answer. He followed me into the office door, where the guard stopped him. As I walked away, I looked back to see some office bigwigs -- and some of the top citizens of the city -- strolling in the door while the hapless guard was trying to throw the interloper out.

Many of the women I work with look for escorts to their cars. I leave later, but don't feel so vulnerable. It may be a matter of odds, but I have not been bothered, even late at night. But perhaps the security guards have learned my habits, for their van is always in the parking lot I cross when I walk out, and it always pulls away just after I pass. Maybe they know something I don't. They're not telling. I don't really want to ask.

I suppose that the fat, industrial-strength spider at the top of the stairs and I have something in common. It, too, has a fortunate place in the world. I doubt it's aware of that, though.

I'll leave it alone. But I'll step warily as I pass.

Source: http://my.core.com/~pzicari/text/Spider.html

Monday, March 15, 2004

By The Cassandra Pages

ECOTONE TOPIC for March 15: SPIDERS

Charlotte probably gets the credit for making me into a spider protectress. I read E.B. White's classic at an early age and have ever afterwards identified all spiders with the heroine of that book. My mother, though, was their advocate in real life. She taught me to be a friend of all creatures, and showed me that they all have their place. "It's more scared of you than you are of it" was the way I was introduced to snakes, snapping turtles, spiders, and even wasps and bees. "Let's just be quiet and watch it for a little while." As a result I don't remember ever being especially afraid of anything I found in nature; in fact I was surprised and affronted the first time a bee stung me. I learned to be respectful, yes; but scared, no.

We lived in a rambling old house with a large spider-harboring attic and spider-friendly gardens; I often woke to a lawn covered with dew-studded "fairy" webs. In the summers we went to our unfinished camp on the lake where for years we were mere visitors amid the fauna who really lived there. Our lake house always had spiders in it. They were mainly allowed to stay put, in the bathroom or the damp downstairs, or were escorted gently outside. That's my policy today, too – we've had a resident spider (or its progency) in the bathroom for years, and my often-unused studio has many more, their egg-cases hanging in the corners. I don't remember most of these spiders as individuals, but there's one who remains stickily in my mind.

She – let's say it was a she – lived under the dock. This was cohabitation, when I was eight or nine, because I lived on top. The dock was long, maybe fifteen feet, and six sturdy feet wide, and it stretched out into the lake from the shore, supported by several posts sunk into the lake bottom. The water at the end was well over my head, so diving and jumping were safe, and there was sun on that end nearly all day long. It was a fine place to fish, worm-can at one's side; or to play with dolls, or sunbathe with a book, and later in my adolescence it was a place for solitude and

daydreaming, or lying on my back at night, gazing at the stars.

But when the sun baked down on the dock, midday, all you had to do was swing your head over the far edge to find yourself eye-to-eye with the other inhabitant: an enormous black spider with hairy legs that would go scurrying through a crack into the darkness beneath the dock. She rarely came up onto the top surface, and although all the kids who swam there knew about the spider and had varying degrees of, shall we say, familiarity with her, no one deliberately splashed her or tried to knock her into the water. That seems strange to me now; maybe we knew the adults would have been angry at us. But perhaps she was preserved because she did scare us a little, and provided part of our fun.

Almost every time we swam, one ritual was to dive underneath the old metal barrels that supported the far end of the dock, and come up into the small dark place underneath. There was two feet of headroom in which to breathe, and another foot on either side of one's shoulders, but it was quite dark, with a little light filtering in through the cracks in the decking and between the barrels, and the water was always still. That was an advantage, because it meant you could see very clearly all the way to the bottom. Small fish frequented this place too, moving their blue-tipped fins slowly in the water. And – there was always the spider. Finding her was the challenge of going under the dock, and while you were there, treading water and looking around for a glimpse of her hairy legs, a sunfish or rock bass was likely to come up behind you and take a nip of your tender, pale, young back. We worried about eels – although I only saw one there in all those years – and snapping turtles, who kept their distance. So in reality, it was just the spider: slightly menacing; annoyed but not enough to relinquish her territory;, an adult-substitute of sorts in this child-world where we were utterly free; a reliable constant from season to season.

"I see her!" we'd announce, and, mission completed, swim back out into the light.

Read other stories of spiders and place at the Ecotone Wiki.

4:41 PM

Source:
http://cassandrapages.blogspot.com/2004_03_14_cassandrapages_archive.html#107938689552824990

Caught in the the web

By Hoarded Ordinaries

Last night, late, as I sat working in the office long after Chris had gone to bed, a small, pale brown spider–waxy and translucent, like a young, freshly hatched thing–walked up the wooden armrest on the chair where I sat, computer on my lap, feet propped on a green upholstered ottoman. Well, hello there, little spider: did you come looking for me?

Although I'm sure there are plenty of spiders in New Hampshire, as there are everywhere, I always think of far-off places, not sites here close to home, when my thoughts turn to spiders. I remember, for instance, the large, dew-bejeweled orbs spun in weedy Ohio fields by garden spiders. These arachnids were large and jet black, sometimes adorned with yellow spots and stripes, and each of their webs was transected by a large white zigzag, like a silken lightning bolt or drunk-stitched cicatrix. These zigzags, I was told, were supposed to keep birds from flying through the webs: a kind of spiderly Do Not Enter sign. I'll never know whether that's true, of course, since the spiders themselves aren't talking.

Then there were the spiders of Jamaica; I don't know what kind. Chris and I took a cruise for our honeymoon, and we stopped for a day in Ocho Rios to walk up the waterfalls: standard tourist stuff. Halfway up the rocky, braided stream, someone nudged Chris who then nudged me, whispering: "Look up." The leafy green treetops were festooned with spiders, each as large as my hand, brightly colored like butterflies. It was a rare and glorious sight for our winter-weary Ohio eyes; for the dirt-poor locals, though, these chitinous gems were as commonplace as backyard rats scurrying in treetops.

And spiders inevitably make me think of Cumberland, Rhode Island and the Zen monastery where I used to spend so many weeks–one in winter, up to three in summer–staring at the floor meditating. Sometimes a spider would wander across the field of my vision as I sat staring at the space of wood floor immediatly in front of my mat, the wood-grain morphing into fanciful shapes and faces as my mood and energy ebbed and flowed: now angel, now demon. Whenever

an actual sentient being interrupted this karmic play by traipsing, eight-legged and multi-jointed, across the floor in front of me, it was a momentous occasion: finally, something to *watch*.

Although I watched various spiders while sitting on retreat in Rhode Island, never did I experience the enlightened clarity of mind that would have allowed me to hear the spiders singing. No, all those hours and days and weeks were spent contemplating spiders who remained entirely and utterly silent, although I still harbor a shred of crazy hope…

One year, you see, when Chris and I both sat a week of retreat, in March, during my spring break from teaching–in a word, during a week much like this one, when the earth was on the brink of spring–it also happened to be the last week of our Zen school's annual 90 day retreat. We ourselves were sitting only one week, but most of the other folks sitting with us had been there, in silence, for three months. The mood was that of barely contained giddiness. The whole monastery had a terminal case of the Ninety-Day Giggles, a situation that was only exacerbated by the fact that the teacher who was leading the retreat had recently gotten engaged to the fellow sitting next to her. For Valentine's Day, Piotrek had snuck into Jane's room and used dental floss–the closest thing to a craft supply he could find in the monastery kitchen–to weave a large spiderweb-like tapestry in her window, the words "I love you" and a translucent red cellophane heart, cobbled together from a produce-wrapper, hanging at the center.

Sitting this week of retreat was like meditating in the middle of a big Zen slumber party, the men rough-housing in their rooms while the women giggled in theirs. One guy, though, slept alone in a sleeping bag out on the wooden deck that skirted the glass-windowed dharma room. Surreptitious whispers told the tale: he'd slept outside in his expensive four-season sleeping bag every night, eschewing both bed and bedroom, for the entire retreat: January, February, March. Some nights the snow drifted over his prone sleeping form; he kept alive thanks to the warmth of that four-season bag and the sheer strength of the fire in his belly.

On the last day of the retreat, we gathered in a circle to share a brief word about our experience: a chance to thank teachers, tell embarrassing stories about roommates, and otherwise exercise those long-underused vocal cords. When it came time for Wilderness Man to speak, he wove an intricate rhapsody describing the oneness he'd achieved with nature: at one with snow and cold, he had finally attained the clarity of mind to hear the spiders singing.

"You heard what?" the guy sitting next to him interrupted.

"I heard the spiders singing." The room shifted in its collective seat, squirming with the tension of stifled giggles that threatening to erupt at any moment.

"Dude, spiders don't sing. What the hell are you talking about?" The wry skeptic who posed this question was smirking, barely containing his glee at the absurdity of singing spiders. "I mean, maybe you've been sleeping alone for too long, dude!" At this the women started giggling, then laughing, Spider Man looking crestfallen and bemused.

"No, really. I heard the spiders singing. They have a clear, high-pitched call: peep, peep!"

"Ah, dude, those aren't spiders. Those are the damn frogs–spring peepers. They call like that from the pond every spring…"

By this point, all hope was gone: the room was rolling with laughter, sides splitting at the absurdity of singing spiders. Recovering from the initial sting of his mistake–the occurrence he'd

taken as a sign of his impending enlightenment was a vernal commonplace–Spider Man too laughed, his first tense giggles cascading into deep-belly guffaws. "Singing spiders: I thought I heard singing spiders! Man, I need to get a room, and a bed, and a woman. Piotrek, you got any more of that dental floss?"

Zen, like spiders, is nothing special. You'll find it underfoot, in the trees, in your bedroom window, or in your very own fiery belly, anytime and all the time. Even when you think you aren't looking for it, enlightenment will walk unexpected up your armrest, pale and translucent, seeking you out with its story. And that's sweeter than any spider-song, and more precious.

- *This entry is my contribution for the Ecotone bi-weekly topic, Spiders and Place. For those of you not familiar with Ecotone, it's a site "intended as a portal for those who are interested in learning and writing about place." If you've never checked it out, give yourself a treat. If you've been there before, take another gander.)*

Comments

Kevin Kim Says:
Mar 16, 2004 at 8:25 am

I'm reminded of two things right away:

1. Regarding the "peep"ing spiders: Sankara's example of the rope we think is a snake but which, upon closer examination, turns out merely to be a rope– an example of "subration," moving from lower truth to higher truth, clearer seeing.

2. Regarding where we "find" Zen: I think of Yoda's sermon on the Force, one of only two such theological speeches in the first Star Wars trilogy: "You must feel the Force around you– between you, me, the tree, the rock– yes, everywhere! Even between the land and the ship."

Alas, Luke Skywalker's reply to his teacher is a bitter dismissal: "You are impossible."

That's where many of us buttmonkeys find ourselves– stuck in the realm of the impossible, not realizing we're only a stifled fart away from the ordinary and actual.

Kevin

zenchick Says:
Mar 16, 2004 at 10:02 am

This is awesome, on so many levels.
I almost didn't read it, as I am a certified aracnaphobe, and once I saw that you were writing about those THINGS I almost stopped…but I'm glad I didn't.
The subtle but strong transition from the spider on your chair to where you find Zen was like a lullaby, both in concept and in writing.
Thanks!

Lorianne Says:
Mar 17, 2004 at 10:43 pm

Kevin, you too are impossible. That, of course, means you are like Yoda, and we all love you for it!

Zenchick, I'm so glad you stuck around to read the whole post since it wasn't "really" about spiders after all. When I was a kid, I was so terrified of spiders & bugs, I was afraid to *touch* any book with *pictures* of bugs in it. I somehow thought the pictures would come alive & crawl on me (eww!)

Source: http://hoardedordinaries.wordpress.com/2004/03/16/caught-in-the-the-web/

rsvp to the anarchid rally

By alembic

This post is my response to ecotone's (March 15, 2004) biweekly topic: Spiders And Place:

On Sunday, which was what, March 14? I was in the early grip of exhaustion from my third bout with some kind of flu bug or other, my throat raw, my mood even crabbier from the unrelenting heat wave that has swept over us in such a rush. There was that March 15 deadline looming over at ecotone, but I thought I would skip this one, for what can I say about spiders, anyway? They dont paralyze me with fear but nor do I go out of my way to hang out in their company. I admit, I am careful to save the odd little spider that comes up the water spout and then promptly gets lost in the vast emptiness of the bathtub.

Then again, most of the spiders I come across in the house or in the garden are small, thin in other words, fragile-looking and in need of protection. (The black widows in the darker recesses of the garage are another subject ... and, having lived this long in California, I know how to spot their presence ... which they certainly advertise with bravado!)

So, imagine my surprise when, at around sunset, I went to close the door to deck off the kitchen area, and, in the window next to the door, I saw the reflection of something rather large, almost bat-like, swaying in an out of focus. Synchronicity, it seems, brought me the opportunity to spot the largest spider I have ever encountered in my backyard so far, and the first one ever to give me a slight shiver. I guess, size does really matter and although 2 inches may not be anything to croon about, when you are a spider, that could put you easily on the smooth road and into the fast lane to boasting. This ferocious arachnid Arnold had already spun a large orb web, which looked like a batters cage as it already covered the upper half of the window.

There wasnt enough light nor did I have the requisite skills to capture the truly frightening hairy features of this creature with my camera, but here is what I stared at through the lens:

My spider encounters didnt end here. This business of synchronicity, like the heat wave, was bent on lasting statements. I was in no mood to make dinner, what with the heat and the flu taunting me, so I decided to go to the store and buy plenty of ingredients for a refreshing salad a version of fatoush salad that I have been perfecting. When I reached into the neat row of hearts of Romaine lettuce, I felt a shock shoot up from the tip of my finger, through my arm, right through my shoulder. I assumed I got an electric shock of sorts, and it wasnt only after a minute or so that I noticed the swelling on my finger. There were no wasps to be seen (aside from those few shoppers that have descended from their well-appointed hives from exclusive neighborhood on the hill behind the store and were walking about with their stinging attitude....). But there were plenty of bugs in the lettuce, as I found out later when I made the salad, all of which made me think that the jolt from finger to shoulder came courtesy of a spider unhappy at the prospect of losing its brunch buffet of bugs at my hands.

So, although I tried my best to avoid writing anything about spiders this week, they spotted me and saw and easy mark. "Hey you," they called, "you have a spinnerette, dont you? Use it then ... make your own orbed web. Thread the words, sticky with the essence of our command performance for this post ... and if you cant catch anything tasty or nourishing this way, know that you were here, snug in the center of your own flimsy web."

Posted by maria at March 16, 2004 11:09 AM

Comments

Oh, my. Terrific and weird, Maria, and I hope your finger is OK.

Posted by: beth on March 16, 2004 11:53 AM

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20040516014526/http://www.ashladle.org/archives/000313.html

Spiders Of The Sea

By Feathers of Hope (Numenius)

It's been a while since I've studied any marine biology, but this Ecotone wiki topic on spiders and place makes me think of pycnogonids. The Pycnogonida are a group of marine arthropods related to the arachnids such as spiders, scorpions, mites, and ticks. Another name for the group is the Pantopoda, meaning "all legs", which is pretty much a description of what they look like.

I don't know whether I've seen one live, but they're to be found on the Pacific coast. One list gives nine species for the San Francisco Bay. Around Bodega Bay (home of the Bodega Marine Laboratory), one species *Pycnogonum stearnsi* is listed as uncommon under rocks (given the locality, I think this means the rocks of the breakwater). Members of its genus feed on coelenterates, especially sea anemones. To quote from Ricketts *et al.* book *Between Pacific Tides*:

A border design of these grotesque yet picturesque animals might surround the pen-and-ink representation of a nightmare. Most sea spiders spend part of their tender youth in close juxtaposition to a coelenterate -- the larvae, in fact, usually feed on the juices of their hydroid or anemone host...It is especially common among the caves and crevices of Tomales Bluff, Marin County; sometimes half a dozen occur on a single anemone.

Posted by Numenius at March 16, 2004 11:21 PM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/03/16/spiders_of_the_s.html

Fozzy Memories

By Brain Crayons

This week at Ecotone, the topic is *Spiders and Place*.

If you live in a house where boys are being raised, you may as well get used to the fact that you will be surrounded by all sorts of creepy, crawly things. Unfortunately, I never did get used to it. Even to this day, I find myself getting the willies when creepy, crawly things find me (and they always do find me).

My youngest son, especially, was a lover of all things creepy and crawly. He especially seemed

to have an affinity for lizards. Okay, I am completely aware that they were really called chameleons or geckos or Chinese dragons or some such thing, but as far as I was concerned, they were lizards. He had several aquariums filled with these type creatures in his bedroom. This provided ample reason for me to stay completely away from his room, (as if the mounds of dirty clothes weren't a good enough reason). I learned to tolerate the lizards, mostly by ignoring that they existed.

One summer day, he changed the rules of the game. He came through the front door with a huge smile on his face. He was carrying a little box from the pet store. I didn't want to know. That evening at the dinner table, the boys were doing their usual brotherly bickering. "You tell her." "No, I'm not telling her nothing." This went on for a while until finally the tattletale brother piped up with his squeaky adolescent voice, "Hey, Mom, ask Spike what he brought home today!" I looked at the boys, and they had shiny, eager eyes. I was sure I'd be sorry, but I asked the question. It turns out my son was the proud Papa of a *Grammastola rosea*, otherwise known as a Chilean Rose Tarantula. He had named him Fozzy, and "did I want to see him up close?" Uhm, no.

I should have just packed my bags and moved into a motel right then and there.

I fussed. I cried. I whimpered. I demanded. I said that I simply would not live in a house with a hairy creepy crawly big spider. I begged their father for assistance in this war against the spider. He simply smiled and shrugged his shoulders with the proverbial "boys will be boys" look on his face. I was doomed.

From that day forward, I avoided that entire wing of the house altogether. I would have had it hermetically sealed if possible. Of course, my son assured me that Fozzy could not escape his aquarium home. He further assured me that tarantulas are actually friendly, and that if I got to know Fozzy, that I would probably love him.

Not likely.

Of course, you know what happened next.

One night at the dinner table, the tattletale son calmly announced, "Did you tell Mom that Fozzy got out last night?" Biscuit midway to my mouth. Me, with frozen look of panic. Son with sheepish grin. Husband shrugging shoulders. From that moment on, I never knew another moment of peace.

Because everyone in the family knew of my arachnid aversion, they took immense pleasure in messing with me at every opportunity. They would creep up behind me to tickle me with feathers, just to see me squeal and jump a foot in the air. Or they would sneak up behind me and drop cotton balls over my shoulder, just close enough to brush my cheek. This was particularly effective in producing and ear-splitting scream, followed immediately by the spider dance. Much fun. Ha-ha-ha. I wasn't laughing.

Approximately one week later. Early Sunday morning. The entire house is awakened by a

wallpaper-peeling scream. Youngest son dashes out of his bedroom excitedly exclaiming, "All right! Mom found Fozzy!"

Yes, indeed. Mom trapped in the kitchen, cornered by the biggest, hairiest spider ever to have crossed her unfortunate path. Sons watch Mom squirm. Giggle, giggle. Entire family enjoying the entertainment value of this scene. Well, to be honest, Mom wasn't looking so much like she was having that much fun. Mom was waving a broom over her head, taking careful aim. Youngest son rushes into kitchen and scoops up Fozzy the spider. Waves Fozzy dangerously close to Mom's face. Mom hits the floor in a dead faint.

Now, I've lived to see some pretty terrible things in my life. I've had some rough patches, and been through some seriously difficult times. But the one that did me in was a fuzzy spider named Fozzy. I've never fainted in my life until the day I was forced to look into the eyes of a hairy spider known as Fozzy, as my son dangled him in front of my face. The hairs on my arm still stand straight up if I even try to think about that day.

My family is nothing if not humorous. That Christmas, I received an entirely Fozzy-inspired Christmas. My gifts included the ever-wonderful movie Arachnophobia, as well as a Spiderman watch, and two pounds of Gummi Spiders. My personal favorites were the black plastic spider rings, and the crowning jewel, a 14k gold necklace with a spider pendant.

Thanks to Fozzy, it became a family tradition that every year some sort of spider-themed gift or another would show up under the tree for Mom. My family is not only humorous, they are also very creative. Usually the gift would be wrapped in something original like fake spider webs left-over from Halloween, and the gift card would say something like, "Leggy Love from Fozzy."

I never did learn to love spiders. However, I must admit that after all these years, I've actually grown fond of the Fozzy tradition. How could I not love something that was the source of so much teasing and fun in our family?

I'm just thanking my lucky stars that Fozzy was a spider, (even if he was a rather large and hairy spider). After all, he could have been a snake instead.

In which case, I would have had to move to Cleveland.

Posted by: ntexas99 on Mar 21, 04 | 5:53 am

Comments

This is wonderfully written and gave me smiles! All of your work is well written. I just don't always take the time to tell you, because of my difficulties with comments.

Posted by: Stormwind on Mar 22, 04 | 8:27 pm

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20051122142705/http://www.braincrayons.com/comments.php?id=92_0_1_0_C

Spiders and Place

Bi-Weekly Topics for March 15, 2004

Miss Muffet Has Left the Building

By Fragments from Floyd

This biweekly topic at Ecotone for March 15 will be "Spiders and Place". I'll just let the images speak for spiders on our place. I've linked to the original posts that went with them, too, if you just can't get enough ArachnoPhilia. Enjoy!

Come Into My Parlor

Ephemera

Truth Plain and Simple
Lost in Space

Posted by fred1st on March 11, 2004 7:31 AM | Permalink

Comments

What a showoff.

Really, though, these shots are amazing, as I've told you before. I'm still not sure how you caught them.

Posted by: Trey | March 11, 2004 9:01 AM

Ohmigosh! Here you are, sticking space hubbles on your desktop, and for a month I've been trying to draw a spider web for my banner on Spinning! Maybe I could buy a photo off you?

Posted by: susan | March 11, 2004 9:03 AM

And this too, I haven't seen such gorgeous spider webs since I took pictures of HUGE (I'm talking, like six feet!)ones catching morning sunlight along a highway in Alabama.

Posted by: susan | March 11, 2004 9:05 AM

Beautiful. In the throes of winter, I'd forgotten what cobwebs look like. (Excepting, of course, the ones here in the house...)

Posted by: Lorianne | March 11, 2004 9:06 AM

Awesome photos!

Posted by: Jenny | March 11, 2004 9:31 PM

Oh my! Would it be silly of me to say that these are so beautiful that I'm almost choked up with appreciation? Something about the juxtaposition of the photos, the perfect lighting, and the accompanying stories just really zings shockwaves into my happy places.

This may become my new favorite fredism. Yummy.

Posted by: ntexas99 | March 12, 2004 12:26 AM

These are just wonderful, Fred. Thanks!

Posted by: beth | March 15, 2004 8:19 PM

Source:
http://www.fragmentsfromfloyd.com/fragments/2004/03/miss_muffet_has_left_the_build.html

SPIDER IN THE BATH TUB

By The Middlewesterner

I dust off this old essay as my contribution to Ecotone's "Spiders and Place" topic this week.

How a spider finds its way into our bathtub, I confess I don't know. The occurrence is common enough, in our house at least, that I have to think these creatures are particularly adept at getting themselves into such situations. They are not, I'm finding, particularly talented when it comes to getting themselves out, however.

Even as I write this, a spider struggles against the porcelain world in which it finds itself imprisoned. It came sometime during the night, was there when I rose this morning, two and a half hours ago. Its day, thus far, has been entirely devoted to scaling the sheet white cliffs that surround it - or, rather, attempting to scale them.

Our tub is of an ordinary variety, twenty-eight inches broad, fifty-eight inches long, and - most telling - thirteen perpendicular inches deep. To me it would appear to be not an especially attractive tableau upon which to play out one's little drama - no food, no water (at the moment),

and no hiding place but the drain, no obvious footholds - but I am not the spider and my choice of landscapes might seem likewise as peculiar to him.

So one of the eight-legged wonders of the world has wandered into our tub again and, resourceful as this one is, there it remains. Eight legs, he's discovering, are not legs enough to pull him out of this little mess he's gotten himself into. He knows now, I believe, that there is no easy escape, for he has circled the tub entirely, testing its boundaries, facing steep walls everywhere.

When I first saw him this morning, he was madly flailing his legs, on the theory perhaps that simple hard work would be sufficient to free himself. Hard work, he quickly discovered as he made no progress whatever, was not the answer, as is generally the case in these Sisyphean dilemmas.

If not hard work, then cunning perhaps? While I watched from my distance, the spider appeared to massage two of its front legs with its mouth and feelers, coating them - I assume - with some of its homemade rosin. First he carefully prepared the front-most leg on his right side, then the second leg from the front on his left, testing each as he finished. He employed the two legs he had gummed as anchors, fixing them to the wall of the tub and holding them in place while scrambling about with the other six. He made half an inch progress, as far as he could move with those two legs set; and then his anchors failed him and he slid backwards to the bottom of the tub. And there he sat.

A few minutes later, he moved about six inches toward the front of the tub and proceeded to apply his rosin to two of his hind legs - the hindmost leg on his left side, the second from the rear on the right. Again he rested, and then again he moved himself forward and upward, using the rosined legs not so much as anchors but as the main driving units of his climbing machine. His other legs seemed to move more lightly and quickly, while the rosined ones were brought deliberately forward, alternately, with each bit of progress, and were used for upward thrust. Of course the attempt was only as successful as the previous, and soon he was back the half inch to the beginning.

The next time I checked his progress, he had moved almost the length of the bathtub, crossing above the drain and resting to the right of it, in the corner. His position afforded me an especially good view of him as I set my elbows on the side of the tub and bent to observe him more closely. This, it began to appear, was to be his most ambitious assault yet, for as I peered from above I saw him place each of the front four legs into his mouth (or so it seemed), one at a time, working them in and out, painstakingly slowly in and out, massaging each with his feelers, testing each and applying more rosin when the results seemed unsatisfactory; then he started work on the four hind legs. From my position, I was unable to tell whether these went into his mouth or not, but I noted his mouth was moving energetically all the while, in a kind of sucking motion. Soon he had the hind legs readied.

Very slowly, almost resolutely, he headed upward again, one leg set carefully, then another, until he had gained nearly an inch and a half. The attempt ended in mid-step, when all the legs lost hold at once and he slipped again to the bottom. He sat perfectly still then, and if I were one to

attribute human characteristics to eight-legged creatures, I'd venture to say he was disgusted by the futility of it all. I left him to his fate, poured myself another cup of coffee, and listened a while to some Beethoven on the radio.

Since I started writing these few pages, I've checked on the spider's progress every ten minutes or so, to see whether, wunderbar, he has succeeded in extricating himself from his rather hopeless circumstances. Often, as I enter the bathroom, he simply appears to be resting - sometimes in one corner, sometimes in another, or anywhere along either side. He had, I'm convinced, tested every conceivable route of escape. Once, as I entered, I saw that he'd made a snatch of progress by anchoring one hind leg to a piece of grit attached to the side of the tub. Yet even as I stood observing him, that tenuous foothold gave way and he slid backwards. Another time he was running somewhat sideways along the wall of the tub, as if to use centrifugal force to hold him against the porcelain. This attempt, too, was futile.

I do feel a bit foolish every time I descend the flight of stairs from my office to check on his efforts. And, too, I do feel somewhat foolish expending the energy and hours (for I am a slow writer) needed to record this insignificant little tragedy - an inconsequential struggle that matters little to the rest of the cosmos.

I am not one to believe very deeply that spiders and such are inhabited by the souls of our ancestors, nor that I too shall be a spider or cat or cow someday. I am not particularly fond of eight-legged creatures, and have no more empathy for the animal world than most of the rest of men. Yes, I am a meat-eater, a custom I have inherited and one I have thus far found enjoyable. Yet the whole morning I have noticed myself wondering if this is a metaphor for our existence in the universe. Is life a continual struggle to roll the stone to the top of the mountain, only to see it roll back to the bottom, again and again? Some days it surely seems that such is the extent of human existence. Then again some days life seems to hold much more than that.

On my most recent trip down the stairs to observe the spider, I found him motionless, his legs splayed around him. I watched for seven minutes and he didn't move at all. Without apparent reason, then, he moved a few steps forward suddenly, stopped; turned one hundred eighty degrees and moved a few steps, stopped; turned ninety degrees and moved a few steps more. He stood motionless for an instant, then went round in a circle, then another. He was motionless again for a minute or so, before he started applying the rosin to one foreleg, then another. By this time I'd watched his struggle for five hours and here he was, back to the beginning, putting rosin on exactly the same forelegs as when I first observed him.

What sensations had he felt, I wondered, while he sat motionless those seven minutes. What befuddlement caused him then to move first in one direction, then another, then still a third, and finally to walk in circles? What silver thread of instinct told him to start preparing his legs with rosin again, for another assault on the white cliffs that surrounded him? I confess I don't know. I had been content to observe his fate. It was apparent now that he didn't recognize the futility of his efforts. A spider in the bath tub is condemned to one of two, or possibly three, destinies: if he remained entirely undisturbed, he could scramble and scramble until he had no strength left, until he starved to death; or, should one of us in the house want to take a shower, he would end mashed against the porcelain or washed down the drain; or if he were adventuresome to a high

degree, he might try his luck in the drain, make his way through the standing water in the curve of pipe, find his way to the sewer and, through a manhole cover, to daylight and freedom. Those were, it seemed to me, his possible fates.

For myself, I know I'd be immensely unhappy to think there is no possible rescue from my own stupidities. How a spider finds its way into our bath tub, I don't know; nor am I always cognizant of the routes I'm taking into silly predicaments of my own. I, too, have walked in circles, frustrated.

As the spider was applying rosin to the second leg, readying himself for yet another attempt, I took a piece of cardboard, got him onto it, carried him to the garage and left him there to fend for himself among the flies and wasps. This action was not - and was not meant to be - consequential; it was simply a personal affirmation of some sort, one made against my intellectual desire to observe the spider's natural fate, an affirmation, perhaps, that there is more to living than the mere avoidance of death. Something. It was a gesture I felt the need to make, the way one raises his fist against a threatening sky.

posted by Tom Montag @ 4:21 AM

Source: http://middlewesterner.blogspot.com/2004_03_15_middlewesterner_archive.html

The Worlds We Weave

By g r a p e z

The web is an almost endless firmament of threads. While searching for blogs concerned with nature, I came upon a wiki called Ecotone. From that wiki, I discovered some interesting blogs, Fragments from Floyd by Fred and Cassandra's Pages just two exceptional examples of these. From Fred's page last week I discovered that Ecotone runs biweekly topics in which its community of bloggers discuss a single topic en masse. And today's happens to be about spiders.

Spiders in New England are such tame characters. No Black Widows or Tarantulas roam the back roads here. My closest encounters usually occur inside, maybe spotting an eight-legged creature scurrying across the bathroom tiles. I usually leave it alone, considering it a small pet that collects undesirable insects, much like a cat that catches mice. And furthermore, on a superstitious note, I don’t wish it to rain.

Which brings me to my encounters with spiders in the great outdoors, usually just those threads between low-hanging branches. They'll catch your face while hiking like a loose strand of hair that just won't go back in place. Or those small rock spiders I see when resting on a rock: they clamber all around hiking their own steep territory, looking for their own inspiration.

But when younger, I saw spiders as welcome curiosities and Daddy Long Legs were my favorite ones. Their small pill-sized bodies, held in suspension by eight long thin spindly legs, presented an otherworldly creature to eyes trained on Saturday films of aliens and monsters. Here was a real monster.

Children are cruel sometimes and I'll forego the horror stories here, but leave it said that Daddy Long Legs were approached with both dread and fascination. They made the world of tree and pond more than New Hampshire lakeside property, but a land of marvel and wonder.

In reflection, I guess that's what all creatures do for us humans, whether those creatures be insect, animal, or next door neighbor (or blogger.) They remind us that the world is a miraculous place, full of, miracle of miracles, abundant and various life. Including our selves. And including our souls.

A Noiseless, Patient Spider

Noiseless, patient spider,
I mark'd, where, on a little promontory, it stood, isolated;
Mark'd how, to explore the vacant, vast surrounding,
It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself;
Ever unreeling them--ever tirelessly speeding them.

And you, O my Soul, where you stand,
Surrounded, surrounded, in measureless oceans of space,
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing,--seeking the spheres, to connect them;
Till the bridge you will need, be form'd--till the ductile anchor hold;
Till the gossamer thread you fling, catch somewhere, O my Soul.

by: Walt Whitman

posted by Greg @ 2:00 AM

Source: http://grapez.blogspot.com/2004/03/worlds-we-weave.html

Sat down beside her

By Working bug

Long after dark every worknight, I climb two flights of shabby stairs to fetch my car. In contrast to our gleaming offices, the garage is old and is maintained with an eye to keeping it from collapsing, not impressing visitors and staff. So the cream-colored walls are stained where indifferent mopping has sloshed dirt on them, the undersides of the stairs are rusty and the steel

reinforcements bolted on to stave off catastrophe are painted only with red primer. The only decoration is a decades-old legal disclaimer whose white background paint has gone tan and blistered. The rogue apostrophe in "*the company will take no control of your vehicle or it's contents*" never fails to make me wince.

At the top of these stairs is an ill-fitting industrial door. On warm summer nights, someone props it open to relieve the smell of damp and dust from the old masonry inside. And so the stairwell becomes the parlor of the largest spider I have ever seen outside a zoo.

Its globular tan body must be the size of a quarter. On warm nights it builds a classic spiral web, efficiently braced, across the upper right corner of the doorway, where it can trap moths and other insectile tourists blundering unwarily toward the harsh light over the landing. By its size, it must feed lavishly.

I am always impressed when I mount the stairs and see the master in its workshop. With a sweep of my briefcase, I could spoil its night, or worse, but instead I duck underneath and continue on my way, daily reminding myself that I want to live and let live. Nevertheless, the spider and web make me uncomfortable. They're an apt metaphor for the city I live in and my relation to it.

The walk to my desk takes me along a sidewalk that is part of the blocks-long path between a downtown shelter and a meals site for the homeless. When I meet someone there, we eye each other warily, trying to seem not to notice at all. I am not much less shabby than they are, but cleaner, and obviously employed. Sometimes they ask for money. Sometimes, if I have change, I give it. Sometimes I'll nod, if I happen to catch someone's eye; sometimes I'll hear "what's happening!" as I pass.

Over the years, we have logged one robbery, some car break-ins, one dramatic arrest (fat cop nearly dies trying to outrun lady car thief in high heels); several auto accidents and one fistfight. Old-timers tell the hilarious story of how a stripper and a customer had a falling-out in our parking lot; the John tried to hit her with his car; she dragged him out and chased him into the ladies room of the bar across the street, loudly promising colorful mayhem until the police arrived to bust them both.

The crime rate is not high, really, but to a boy raised in the country, where you knew everyone and worried about dogs, not people, it's uncomfortable. Embracing diversity is harder than it looks.

Certainly there's race. You try to avoid the subject, but you can't deny a difference, even if your Mediterranean ancestors were nearly as brown as theirs. And some of the thin, tattered guys I pass look at me as if they're see Part Of The Problem in the pudgy white guy approaching. There's a bigger economic and emotional gulf -- for I'm going to a good job and a warm, cluttered home, and they're leaving a utilitarian free meal and headed for a Spartan place crowded with unpredictable strangers.

Some other differences in values must be driven by money. I hate asking for anything and I can't imagine asking for spare change. Some of these folks do it with aplomb -- seemingly unfazed, some with good (if dubious) stories. The best was one who spoke passionately to me for a minute about getting right with God and drew from me some hesitant agreement about Christian virtue, then concluded: "Give me a dollar." I gave him that, and welcome; I thought of it as admission. It can't be easy work. Another panhandler caught me in the parking lot and didn't want to take no

for an answer. He followed me into the office door, where the guard stopped him. As I walked away, I looked back to see some office bigwigs -- and some of the top citizens of the city -- strolling in the door while the hapless guard was trying to throw the interloper out.

Many of the women I work with look for escorts to their cars. I leave later, but don't feel so vulnerable. It may be a matter of odds, but I have not been bothered, even late at night. But perhaps the security guards have learned my habits, for their van is always in the parking lot I cross when I walk out, and it always pulls away just after I pass. Maybe they know something I don't. They're not telling. I don't really want to ask.

I suppose that the fat, industrial-strength spider at the top of the stairs and I have something in common. It, too, has a fortunate place in the world. I doubt it's aware of that, though.

I'll leave it alone. But I'll step warily as I pass.

Source: http://my.core.com/~pzicari/text/Spider.html

Monday, March 15, 2004

By The Cassandra Pages

ECOTONE TOPIC for March 15: SPIDERS

Charlotte probably gets the credit for making me into a spider protectress. I read E.B. White's classic at an early age and have ever afterwards identified all spiders with the heroine of that book. My mother, though, was their advocate in real life. She taught me to be a friend of all creatures, and showed me that they all have their place. "It's more scared of you than you are of it" was the way I was introduced to snakes, snapping turtles, spiders, and even wasps and bees. "Let's just be quiet and watch it for a little while." As a result I don't remember ever being especially afraid of anything I found in nature; in fact I was surprised and affronted the first time a bee stung me. I learned to be respectful, yes; but scared, no.

We lived in a rambling old house with a large spider-harboring attic and spider-friendly gardens; I often woke to a lawn covered with dew-studded "fairy" webs. In the summers we went to our unfinished camp on the lake where for years we were mere visitors amid the fauna who really lived there. Our lake house always had spiders in it. They were mainly allowed to stay put, in the bathroom or the damp downstairs, or were escorted gently outside. That's my policy today, too – we've had a resident spider (or its progency) in the bathroom for years, and my often-unused studio has many more, their egg-cases hanging in the corners. I don't remember most of these spiders as individuals, but there's one who remains stickily in my mind.

She – let's say it was a she – lived under the dock. This was cohabitation, when I was eight or nine, because I lived on top. The dock was long, maybe fifteen feet, and six sturdy feet wide, and it stretched out into the lake from the shore, supported by several posts sunk into the lake bottom. The water at the end was well over my head, so diving and jumping were safe, and there was sun on that end nearly all day long. It was a fine place to fish, worm-can at one's side; or to play with dolls, or sunbathe with a book, and later in my adolescence it was a place for solitude and

daydreaming, or lying on my back at night, gazing at the stars.

But when the sun baked down on the dock, midday, all you had to do was swing your head over the far edge to find yourself eye-to-eye with the other inhabitant: an enormous black spider with hairy legs that would go scurrying through a crack into the darkness beneath the dock. She rarely came up onto the top surface, and although all the kids who swam there knew about the spider and had varying degrees of, shall we say, familiarity with her, no one deliberately splashed her or tried to knock her into the water. That seems strange to me now; maybe we knew the adults would have been angry at us. But perhaps she was preserved because she did scare us a little, and provided part of our fun.

Almost every time we swam, one ritual was to dive underneath the old metal barrels that supported the far end of the dock, and come up into the small dark place underneath. There was two feet of headroom in which to breathe, and another foot on either side of one's shoulders, but it was quite dark, with a little light filtering in through the cracks in the decking and between the barrels, and the water was always still. That was an advantage, because it meant you could see very clearly all the way to the bottom. Small fish frequented this place too, moving their blue-tipped fins slowly in the water. And – there was always the spider. Finding her was the challenge of going under the dock, and while you were there, treading water and looking around for a glimpse of her hairy legs, a sunfish or rock bass was likely to come up behind you and take a nip of your tender, pale, young back. We worried about eels – although I only saw one there in all those years – and snapping turtles, who kept their distance. So in reality, it was just the spider: slightly menacing; annoyed but not enough to relinquish her territory;, an adult-substitute of sorts in this child-world where we were utterly free; a reliable constant from season to season.

"I see her!" we'd announce, and, mission completed, swim back out into the light.

Read other stories of spiders and place at the Ecotone Wiki.

4:41 PM

Source:
http://cassandrapages.blogspot.com/2004_03_14_cassandrapages_archive.html#107938689552824990

Caught in the the web

By Hoarded Ordinaries

Last night, late, as I sat working in the office long after Chris had gone to bed, a small, pale brown spider–waxy and translucent, like a young, freshly hatched thing–walked up the wooden armrest on the chair where I sat, computer on my lap, feet propped on a green upholstered ottoman. Well, hello there, little spider: did you come looking for me?

Although I'm sure there are plenty of spiders in New Hampshire, as there are everywhere, I always think of far-off places, not sites here close to home, when my thoughts turn to spiders. I remember, for instance, the large, dew-bejeweled orbs spun in weedy Ohio fields by garden spiders. These arachnids were large and jet black, sometimes adorned with yellow spots and stripes, and each of their webs was transected by a large white zigzag, like a silken lightning bolt or drunk-stitched cicatrix. These zigzags, I was told, were supposed to keep birds from flying through the webs: a kind of spiderly Do Not Enter sign. I'll never know whether that's true, of course, since the spiders themselves aren't talking.

Then there were the spiders of Jamaica; I don't know what kind. Chris and I took a cruise for our honeymoon, and we stopped for a day in Ocho Rios to walk up the waterfalls: standard tourist stuff. Halfway up the rocky, braided stream, someone nudged Chris who then nudged me, whispering: "Look up." The leafy green treetops were festooned with spiders, each as large as my hand, brightly colored like butterflies. It was a rare and glorious sight for our winter-weary Ohio eyes; for the dirt-poor locals, though, these chitinous gems were as commonplace as backyard rats scurrying in treetops.

And spiders inevitably make me think of Cumberland, Rhode Island and the Zen monastery where I used to spend so many weeks–one in winter, up to three in summer–staring at the floor meditating. Sometimes a spider would wander across the field of my vision as I sat staring at the space of wood floor immediatly in front of my mat, the wood-grain morphing into fanciful shapes and faces as my mood and energy ebbed and flowed: now angel, now demon. Whenever

an actual sentient being interrupted this karmic play by traipsing, eight-legged and multi-jointed, across the floor in front of me, it was a momentous occasion: finally, something to *watch*.

Although I watched various spiders while sitting on retreat in Rhode Island, never did I experience the enlightened clarity of mind that would have allowed me to hear the spiders singing. No, all those hours and days and weeks were spent contemplating spiders who remained entirely and utterly silent, although I still harbor a shred of crazy hope…

One year, you see, when Chris and I both sat a week of retreat, in March, during my spring break from teaching–in a word, during a week much like this one, when the earth was on the brink of spring–it also happened to be the last week of our Zen school's annual 90 day retreat. We ourselves were sitting only one week, but most of the other folks sitting with us had been there, in silence, for three months. The mood was that of barely contained giddiness. The whole monastery had a terminal case of the Ninety-Day Giggles, a situation that was only exacerbated by the fact that the teacher who was leading the retreat had recently gotten engaged to the fellow sitting next to her. For Valentine's Day, Piotrek had snuck into Jane's room and used dental floss–the closest thing to a craft supply he could find in the monastery kitchen–to weave a large spiderweb-like tapestry in her window, the words "I love you" and a translucent red cellophane heart, cobbled together from a produce-wrapper, hanging at the center.

Sitting this week of retreat was like meditating in the middle of a big Zen slumber party, the men rough-housing in their rooms while the women giggled in theirs. One guy, though, slept alone in a sleeping bag out on the wooden deck that skirted the glass-windowed dharma room. Surreptitious whispers told the tale: he'd slept outside in his expensive four-season sleeping bag every night, eschewing both bed and bedroom, for the entire retreat: January, February, March. Some nights the snow drifted over his prone sleeping form; he kept alive thanks to the warmth of that four-season bag and the sheer strength of the fire in his belly.

On the last day of the retreat, we gathered in a circle to share a brief word about our experience: a chance to thank teachers, tell embarrassing stories about roommates, and otherwise exercise those long-underused vocal cords. When it came time for Wilderness Man to speak, he wove an intricate rhapsody describing the oneness he'd achieved with nature: at one with snow and cold, he had finally attained the clarity of mind to hear the spiders singing.

"You heard what?" the guy sitting next to him interrupted.

"I heard the spiders singing." The room shifted in its collective seat, squirming with the tension of stifled giggles that threatening to erupt at any moment.

"Dude, spiders don't sing. What the hell are you talking about?" The wry skeptic who posed this question was smirking, barely containing his glee at the absurdity of singing spiders. "I mean, maybe you've been sleeping alone for too long, dude!" At this the women started giggling, then laughing, Spider Man looking crestfallen and bemused.

"No, really. I heard the spiders singing. They have a clear, high-pitched call: peep, peep!"

"Ah, dude, those aren't spiders. Those are the damn frogs–spring peepers. They call like that from the pond every spring…"

By this point, all hope was gone: the room was rolling with laughter, sides splitting at the absurdity of singing spiders. Recovering from the initial sting of his mistake–the occurrence he'd

taken as a sign of his impending enlightenment was a vernal commonplace–Spider Man too laughed, his first tense giggles cascading into deep-belly guffaws. "Singing spiders: I thought I heard singing spiders! Man, I need to get a room, and a bed, and a woman. Piotrek, you got any more of that dental floss?"

Zen, like spiders, is nothing special. You'll find it underfoot, in the trees, in your bedroom window, or in your very own fiery belly, anytime and all the time. Even when you think you aren't looking for it, enlightenment will walk unexpected up your armrest, pale and translucent, seeking you out with its story. And that's sweeter than any spider-song, and more precious.

- *This entry is my contribution for the Ecotone bi-weekly topic, Spiders and Place. For those of you not familiar with Ecotone, it's a site "intended as a portal for those who are interested in learning and writing about place." If you've never checked it out, give yourself a treat. If you've been there before, take another gander.)*

Comments

Kevin Kim Says:
Mar 16, 2004 at 8:25 am

I'm reminded of two things right away:

1. Regarding the "peep"ing spiders: Sankara's example of the rope we think is a snake but which, upon closer examination, turns out merely to be a rope– an example of "subration," moving from lower truth to higher truth, clearer seeing.

2. Regarding where we "find" Zen: I think of Yoda's sermon on the Force, one of only two such theological speeches in the first Star Wars trilogy: "You must feel the Force around you– between you, me, the tree, the rock– yes, everywhere! Even between the land and the ship."

Alas, Luke Skywalker's reply to his teacher is a bitter dismissal: "You are impossible."

That's where many of us buttmonkeys find ourselves– stuck in the realm of the impossible, not realizing we're only a stifled fart away from the ordinary and actual.

Kevin

zenchick Says:
Mar 16, 2004 at 10:02 am

This is awesome, on so many levels.
I almost didn't read it, as I am a certified aracnaphobe, and once I saw that you were writing about those THINGS I almost stopped…but I'm glad I didn't.
The subtle but strong transition from the spider on your chair to where you find Zen was like a lullaby, both in concept and in writing.
Thanks!

Lorianne Says:
Mar 17, 2004 at 10:43 pm

Kevin, you too are impossible. That, of course, means you are like Yoda, and we all love you for it! 😉

Zenchick, I'm so glad you stuck around to read the whole post since it wasn't "really" about spiders after all. When I was a kid, I was so terrified of spiders & bugs, I was afraid to *touch* any book with *pictures* of bugs in it. I somehow thought the pictures would come alive & crawl on me (eww!)

Source: http://hoardedordinaries.wordpress.com/2004/03/16/caught-in-the-the-web/

rsvp to the anarchid rally

By alembic

This post is my response to ecotone's (March 15, 2004) biweekly topic: Spiders And Place:

On Sunday, which was what, March 14? I was in the early grip of exhaustion from my third bout with some kind of flu bug or other, my throat raw, my mood even crabbier from the unrelenting heat wave that has swept over us in such a rush. There was that March 15 deadline looming over at ecotone, but I thought I would skip this one, for what can I say about spiders, anyway? They dont paralyze me with fear but nor do I go out of my way to hang out in their company. I admit, I am careful to save the odd little spider that comes up the water spout and then promptly gets lost in the vast emptiness of the bathtub.

Then again, most of the spiders I come across in the house or in the garden are small, thin in other words, fragile-looking and in need of protection. (The black widows in the darker recesses of the garage are another subject ... and, having lived this long in California, I know how to spot their presence ... which they certainly advertise with bravado!)

So, imagine my surprise when, at around sunset, I went to close the door to deck off the kitchen area, and, in the window next to the door, I saw the reflection of something rather large, almost bat-like, swaying in an out of focus. Synchronicity, it seems, brought me the opportunity to spot the largest spider I have ever encountered in my backyard so far, and the first one ever to give me a slight shiver. I guess, size does really matter and although 2 inches may not be anything to croon about, when you are a spider, that could put you easily on the smooth road and into the fast lane to boasting. This ferocious arachnid Arnold had already spun a large orb web, which looked like a batters cage as it already covered the upper half of the window.

There wasnt enough light nor did I have the requisite skills to capture the truly frightening hairy features of this creature with my camera, but here is what I stared at through the lens:

My spider encounters didnt end here. This business of synchronicity, like the heat wave, was bent on lasting statements. I was in no mood to make dinner, what with the heat and the flu taunting me, so I decided to go to the store and buy plenty of ingredients for a refreshing salad a version of fatoush salad that I have been perfecting. When I reached into the neat row of hearts of Romaine lettuce, I felt a shock shoot up from the tip of my finger, through my arm, right through my shoulder. I assumed I got an electric shock of sorts, and it wasnt only after a minute or so that I noticed the swelling on my finger. There were no wasps to be seen (aside from those few shoppers that have descended from their well-appointed hives from exclusive neighborhood on the hill behind the store and were walking about with their stinging attitude....). But there were plenty of bugs in the lettuce, as I found out later when I made the salad, all of which made me think that the jolt from finger to shoulder came courtesy of a spider unhappy at the prospect of losing its brunch buffet of bugs at my hands.

So, although I tried my best to avoid writing anything about spiders this week, they spotted me and saw and easy mark. "Hey you," they called, "you have a spinnerette, dont you? Use it then ... make your own orbed web. Thread the words, sticky with the essence of our command performance for this post ... and if you cant catch anything tasty or nourishing this way, know that you were here, snug in the center of your own flimsy web."

Posted by maria at March 16, 2004 11:09 AM

Comments

Oh, my. Terrific and weird, Maria, and I hope your finger is OK.

Posted by: beth on March 16, 2004 11:53 AM

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20040516014526/http://www.ashladle.org/archives/000313.html

Spiders Of The Sea

By Feathers of Hope (Numenius)

It's been a while since I've studied any marine biology, but this Ecotone wiki topic on spiders and place makes me think of pycnogonids. The Pycnogonida are a group of marine arthropods related to the arachnids such as spiders, scorpions, mites, and ticks. Another name for the group is the Pantopoda, meaning "all legs", which is pretty much a description of what they look like.

I don't know whether I've seen one live, but they're to be found on the Pacific coast. One list gives nine species for the San Francisco Bay. Around Bodega Bay (home of the Bodega Marine Laboratory), one species *Pycnogonum stearnsi* is listed as uncommon under rocks (given the locality, I think this means the rocks of the breakwater). Members of its genus feed on coelenterates, especially sea anemones. To quote from Ricketts *et al.* book *Between Pacific Tides*:

A border design of these grotesque yet picturesque animals might surround the pen-and-ink representation of a nightmare. Most sea spiders spend part of their tender youth in close juxtaposition to a coelenterate -- the larvae, in fact, usually feed on the juices of their hydroid or anemone host...It is especially common among the caves and crevices of Tomales Bluff, Marin County; sometimes half a dozen occur on a single anemone.

Posted by Numenius at March 16, 2004 11:21 PM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/03/16/spiders_of_the_s.html

Fozzy Memories

By Brain Crayons

This week at Ecotone, the topic is *Spiders and Place*.

If you live in a house where boys are being raised, you may as well get used to the fact that you will be surrounded by all sorts of creepy, crawly things. Unfortunately, I never did get used to it. Even to this day, I find myself getting the willies when creepy, crawly things find me (and they always do find me).

My youngest son, especially, was a lover of all things creepy and crawly. He especially seemed

to have an affinity for lizards. Okay, I am completely aware that they were really called chameleons or geckos or Chinese dragons or some such thing, but as far as I was concerned, they were lizards. He had several aquariums filled with these type creatures in his bedroom. This provided ample reason for me to stay completely away from his room, (as if the mounds of dirty clothes weren't a good enough reason). I learned to tolerate the lizards, mostly by ignoring that they existed.

One summer day, he changed the rules of the game. He came through the front door with a huge smile on his face. He was carrying a little box from the pet store. I didn't want to know. That evening at the dinner table, the boys were doing their usual brotherly bickering. "You tell her." "No, I'm not telling her nothing." This went on for a while until finally the tattletale brother piped up with his squeaky adolescent voice, "Hey, Mom, ask Spike what he brought home today!" I looked at the boys, and they had shiny, eager eyes. I was sure I'd be sorry, but I asked the question. It turns out my son was the proud Papa of a *Grammastola rosea*, otherwise known as a Chilean Rose Tarantula. He had named him Fozzy, and "did I want to see him up close?" Uhm, no.

I should have just packed my bags and moved into a motel right then and there.

I fussed. I cried. I whimpered. I demanded. I said that I simply would not live in a house with a hairy creepy crawly big spider. I begged their father for assistance in this war against the spider. He simply smiled and shrugged his shoulders with the proverbial "boys will be boys" look on his face. I was doomed.

From that day forward, I avoided that entire wing of the house altogether. I would have had it hermetically sealed if possible. Of course, my son assured me that Fozzy could not escape his aquarium home. He further assured me that tarantulas are actually friendly, and that if I got to know Fozzy, that I would probably love him.

Not likely.

Of course, you know what happened next.

One night at the dinner table, the tattletale son calmly announced, "Did you tell Mom that Fozzy got out last night?" Biscuit midway to my mouth. Me, with frozen look of panic. Son with sheepish grin. Husband shrugging shoulders. From that moment on, I never knew another moment of peace.

Because everyone in the family knew of my arachnid aversion, they took immense pleasure in messing with me at every opportunity. They would creep up behind me to tickle me with feathers, just to see me squeal and jump a foot in the air. Or they would sneak up behind me and drop cotton balls over my shoulder, just close enough to brush my cheek. This was particularly effective in producing and ear-splitting scream, followed immediately by the spider dance. Much fun. Ha-ha-ha. I wasn't laughing.

Approximately one week later. Early Sunday morning. The entire house is awakened by a

wallpaper-peeling scream. Youngest son dashes out of his bedroom excitedly exclaiming, "All right! Mom found Fozzy!"

Yes, indeed. Mom trapped in the kitchen, cornered by the biggest, hairiest spider ever to have crossed her unfortunate path. Sons watch Mom squirm. Giggle, giggle. Entire family enjoying the entertainment value of this scene. Well, to be honest, Mom wasn't looking so much like she was having that much fun. Mom was waving a broom over her head, taking careful aim. Youngest son rushes into kitchen and scoops up Fozzy the spider. Waves Fozzy dangerously close to Mom's face. Mom hits the floor in a dead faint.

Now, I've lived to see some pretty terrible things in my life. I've had some rough patches, and been through some seriously difficult times. But the one that did me in was a fuzzy spider named Fozzy. I've never fainted in my life until the day I was forced to look into the eyes of a hairy spider known as Fozzy, as my son dangled him in front of my face. The hairs on my arm still stand straight up if I even try to think about that day.

My family is nothing if not humorous. That Christmas, I received an entirely Fozzy-inspired Christmas. My gifts included the ever-wonderful movie Arachnophobia, as well as a Spiderman watch, and two pounds of Gummi Spiders. My personal favorites were the black plastic spider rings, and the crowning jewel, a 14k gold necklace with a spider pendant.

Thanks to Fozzy, it became a family tradition that every year some sort of spider-themed gift or another would show up under the tree for Mom. My family is not only humorous, they are also very creative. Usually the gift would be wrapped in something original like fake spider webs left-over from Halloween, and the gift card would say something like, "Leggy Love from Fozzy."

I never did learn to love spiders. However, I must admit that after all these years, I've actually grown fond of the Fozzy tradition. How could I not love something that was the source of so much teasing and fun in our family?

I'm just thanking my lucky stars that Fozzy was a spider, (even if he was a rather large and hairy spider). After all, he could have been a snake instead.

In which case, I would have had to move to Cleveland.

Posted by: ntexas99 on Mar 21, 04 | 5:53 am

Comments

This is wonderfully written and gave me smiles! All of your work is well written. I just don't always take the time to tell you, because of my difficulties with comments.

Posted by: Stormwind on Mar 22, 04 | 8:27 pm

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20051122142705/http://www.braincrayons.com/comments.php?id=92_0_1_0_C

Smell and Place

Bi-Weekly Topic for April 1, 2004

Smell and Place

By ChickenLil

Hello to all - It's April 1 and I came to see what the Ecotone Wiki is about. I "met" Cassandra recently, because I found her weblog to be resonant with my own, and we even started our blogs the same week a year ago, just before the start of the war. I think my blogging has helped to keep me sane through this past difficult, challenging year, in which - among world events and personal changes - my husband and I finally sold our home and land in New Mexico, which we had spent twenty years caring for...despite the powerful oppositional forces in a transitional neighborhood. Our family grew up and was gone. It took a long time to get out of there, and at times was a wrenching experience. I feel freed by the release, and do not wish to be back, but the memories persist and I try to keep my focus on the beauty, love and healing that were present in that place.

The first year we were delighted by the old apple orchard next door. At least forty huge old trees wore a wild profusion of blossom in the spring. Up close, they were marvelous - white, pink and pale green, multiplied by thousands, adorning the gnarly, unpruned fairy-trees--with a sweetness almost unimaginable.

Our first April there, we had a baby ...our youngest son, Max, was born on my birthday in the upstairs of that house. I remember rocking him by the door open to the deck, enjoying his perfection, and the scent of the apple blossoms wafting in the breezes.

We planted a dozen honeysuckles along a latilla pole fence, and Robert watered them faithfully. While this vine grows like a weed other places, in New Mexico even a weed sometimes needs nurturing to get started. The irrigation ditch ran along the side of the drive, and eventually the honeysuckle and Virginia Creeper and the trumpet vines grew like a jungle, fulfilling a plan and a dream that someday the view of our neighbor's messy yard would be concealed by vines and flowers.

The smell of honeysuckle will always bring me back to my own backyard, and as I stood there inhaling that fragrance, I would remember being a child of about 10 years old, delighting in the honeysuckle in the woods *down the creek* where I grew up in Pennsylvania. Especially in the early evening when the hummingbird-moths would flutter along the fence, the perfume would rise like a dream, and I would nearly swoon with the power of it.

Some sadness wells up with the beauty of these smells, the sense of loss and the memory of family and home that was always mixed with turmoil and pain. It is reflected in the landscape.

We walked the field together our last day, Robert and I and Max. We pondered the empty house, remembering. Twenty years had passed in the wink of an eye. So many stories! In the garden, father and son broke down in tears, we all hugged and the pain seared us; the son said, "I love you - thank you " to his father, who drank the words in like a draught of cool water and wept. As the December sun dropped suddenly behind us, we drove away.

We didn't know, weren't told, but it wouldn't have mattered anyway, that beginning the day after Christmas the huge old evergreens in the front would be chopped down and hauled off, after standing guard at least fifty years on that spot. I was shocked but accepting, as though the sentinels of those dark trees were Robert and I, standing watch, and now we were gone, our shadows never to cool and protect again.

Then, when the fence was taken out, and the roses, the lilacs, the trumpet vines and creeper and the honeysuckle torn from the ditch by the roots, I could only wonder why. It was as if we had held back the inevitable plunder and death by our insistence that beauty was worth something...worth protecting. But we were used to it by now.

Smells that will remind me of that place came to include burning garbage, burning cottonwood, road exhaust, diesel fumes from beeping forklifts and recreational bulldozing. A poignant rush of feeling at home comes with the particular scent of green chile roasting, wafting in the air of late summer as I sit in the shade of the mulberry tree, shucking ears of corn.

The apple orchard, so laden in the fall and reeking of vinegar, as the apples tumbled and rotted on the ground, was mowed down within the first year by chainsaws and replaced eventually by a grey house. The branches were piled high in a summer bonfire, and burned. Several of the trees were so big and their roots so deep, planted by the grandfather of the current owners seventy years ago, that the trees sprang up again from the roots, anew.

Posted by Linda Weissinger Lupowitz at 5:25 PM 0 comments Links to this post

Source: http://chickenlil.blogspot.com/2004_04_01_chickenlil_archive.html

Earthworm Perfume

By Feathers of Hope (Numenius)

An entry for the Ecotone Wiki *topic on* smell and place.

There is such a thing -- honest. Amy Stewart, author of an excellent new book on earthworms and their achievements, writes in her book tour blog about discovering this fragrance:

Finally I pulled off the cap and sprayed it into the air. It hit me, instantly familiar. Worms. No doubt about it. It was the smell of dirt and rotten leaves and compost piles, and also the faint scent of skin, worm skin. I don't know how else to describe it. It was just vaguely -- invertebrate.

The creator of this scent is Christopher Brosius, co-founder of a company called Demeter Fragrances, whose line of fragrances include many evocative of place. One, called Holy Water, comes from the smell of an old Norman church in England. Others in their list include bamboo, funeral home, New Zealand (by special request for the premiere of *The Two Towers*), and the most popular one of all, dirt.

As for Earthworm, Brosius says that the scent is "surprisingly popular...It sells at smaller upscale shops with a very sophisticated clientele."

Posted by Numenius at April 1, 2004 11:03 PM

Comments

The following is from the A Word A Day listserv, and seems to fit so well here ...

petrichor (PET-ri-kuhr) noun

The pleasant smell that accompanies the first rain after a dry spell.

[From petro- (rock), from Greek petros (stone) + ichor (the fluid that is supposed to flow in the veins of the gods in Greek mythology). Coined by researchers I.J. Bear and R.G. Thomas.]

"Petrichor, the name for the smell of rain on dry ground, is from oils given off by vegetation, absorbed onto neighboring surfaces, and released into the air after a first rain."
Matthew Bettelheim; Nature's Laboratory; Shasta Parent (Mt Shasta, California); Jan 2002.

"But, even in the other pieces, her prose breaks into passages of lyrical beauty that come as a sorely needed revifying petrichor amid the pitiless glare of callousness and cruelty."
Pradip Bhattacharya; Forest Interludes; Indianest.com; Jul 29, 2001.

Posted by: P. at April 6, 2004 08:56 AM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/04/01/earthworm_perfum.html

Warm Pine Needles

By Feathers of Hope (Pica)

July in the Gredos mountains, west of Madrid . . . June in Idyllwild . . . May in South Carolina . . . August in the Landes near Bordeaux.

When pine needles have been sitting on the ground, piled up for a while, and get warmed by the sun of the late afternoon, and that languid time and scent is punctuated by occasional languid birdcall, when the breeze rustles the tall pines overhead, then is the best time, the best place, for a nap.

For the Ecotone Wiki's *joint post on* Smell and Place.

Posted by Pica at April 2, 2004 09:42 PM

Comments

So happy to see Idyllwild among your examples! And there's a spot on the Berkeley campus, a path that runs down from Dwinelle, along Strawberry Creek, to Oxford St. Runs through a pine grove, always so fragrant when the weather warms up. I loved riding my bike through there but never though to stop and take a nap. Thanks for the memory!

Posted by: Doc Rock at April 3, 2004 09:09 AM

Smell and Place

By Beginner's Mind

All around us, but particularly out back in the woods there has been a strong smell of wet spring. It's a mixture of the odor of fresh mud, with a strong earthy, humus smell from the damp covering of previous years' leaves. Usually there is the sweet scent of pine, especially in the summer.

Allergies and viruses

By P.

Allergies and viruses have held my nose prisoner for most of my adult life; I don't smell very well (no one will comment on whether I smell good, and I only hope that however badly I smell, I don't smell bad).

But between the mold-and-house-dust season and the pollen season, I sometimes get a furlough. Unfortunately, I notice mainly the strong smells then -- I go from durance to vile. This is the season when the farmer spreads stored manure on fields, making a stink that would gag a moose; when dead critters finally begin to decay; when melting snow overloads the septic tanks; when we return from vacation to an olfactory welcome from the refrigerator (who knew rice would rot so quickly!).

And now is the time for all well-digested canine meals to come out from their discreet blanket of snow and hide in the littered grass, awaiting the unwary foot. I'm told the huntsman calls it "scumble."

Years ago, I used to cut wild daisies to bring to my wife. As the little bundle grew on my passenger seat (I took only a few from each cluster), a smell grew in my car. "Oops," I would think, and absently scrape my shoes. Come to find out it was the daisies themselves -- they're pollinated by cluster flies or one of those other barnyard hangers-on with unspeakable habits, and mimic, well ... you know. I guess that explains why you only get daisylike mums in florists' stores.

River and Estuary

Bi-Weekly Topic for April 15, 2004

3mt-5: The Merrimack River Before 1620

By g r a p e z

This is more history of place, but it does concern the Merrimack River. I will warn you that it is not pleasant reading, for it concerns Indian history, and that is never a happy topic in American History. It's called "The Merrimack River Before 1620".

--

Before European Contact, the Merrimack River was part of a network of riverways and trails for a 'nation' of Indian villages, consisting of families interconnected with other villages through intermarriage and social commerce centering around agriculture, hunting, and fishing. Over thousands of years these communities developed in ways now lost to history. What we do know is that between the years 1617 and 1619, historians estimate that between 75% to 90% of the Indian population of New England died in an epidemic of viral hepatitis or chicken pox passed on by ailing European sailors. Thomas Morton described a village near Massachusetts Bay in his "New English Canaan":

For in a place where many inhabited, there hath been but one left alive, to tell what became of the rest, the livinge being (as it seems) not able to bury the dead, they were left for Crowes, Kites, and vermin to pray upon. And the bones and skulls upon the several places of their habitations, made such a spectacle after my coming into those partes, that as I travailed in the Forrest, nere the Massachusetts, it seemed to mee a new found Golgotha.

For the Pawtucket Indians on the Merrimack River, this "Algonquin apocalypse" left them vulnerable to attacks by their Eastern enemy, the Tarrantines. The Pawtucket chief Nanepashemet at that time held together the largest confederacy in New England. Their center was at Pawtucket Falls on the Merrimack (now Lowell) but their territory extended south to the Mystic River, west to the Concord River, and east to the coast. David Stewart-Smith writes in his doctoral dissertation:

The Merrimack was deeply underpopulated with some villages abandoned. The Tarrantine came in raiding parties from their new location at Penobscot, to bring home corn, captives, and plunder.

And somewhere near Malden, Mass, in 1619, Nanepashemet made his last stand against the Tarrantine, and was killed. Such devastation was precursor to European settlement beginning with Plimoth Plantation 1620. Life on the Merrimack would never be the same.

posted by Greg @ 12:00 AM

Source: http://grapez.blogspot.com/2004_04_11_grapez_archive.html#108199380236870808

Downstream

By P

The metropolis where I live, Cleveland, is defined by its river. That's sort of rare among cities, as I see it. Many great cities have rivers -- London, the Thames; Paris, the Seine; New York, the Hudson. St. Louis has the Mississippi, or the Missippi has St. Louis, and they come close to Cleveland; but if New Orleans were at the mouth of the Rio Grande, or if London ornamented the Severn, they would still be great cities, losing little of their character.

When people hear about the Cuyahoga, they invariably ask, "That's the one that caught fire, isn't it?"

Well, yes, it did. Thirty-five years ago, and quite a few times before that, the river, and sometimes railroad trestles and other structures, burned when oily waste from metal factories caught fire. In 1969, the environmental movement was getting under way, hapless Cleveland got a really nasty moment in the spotlight and the whole United States got started on a cleanup that continues to this day.

"Cuyahoga" is said to mean "crooked" in an Indian language, maybe Erie. Crooked it is -- the river's lower end meanders madly across its deep valley, The Flats, on a path that looks like a sink drain with several traps installed by a demented plumber. One of the continuing delights for visitors and residents alike is watching 600-foot ore carriers navigate 300-foot turns without hitting the steel bulkheads on the sides. The process is like maneuvering a screwdriver through a sink trap, and it's something to see, if you have the patience.

The Flats, half industry and half entertain-ment, line the bulk-headed sides with vast piles of crushed limestone, dusty bulk-storage towers and refurbish brick buildings that boom with music at night. A decade ago, the Flats were busier; now some of the action has moved up the hill to an equally old district of refurbished warehouses, and some of it has moved out to the suburbs, most likely because of a spate of problems in the parking lots.

The Cuyahoga also defines Cleveland by being a divider, as so many other rivers do. To the west were the Irish and German immigrant workers who built the Ohio and Erie canal and stayed to work in the growing factories as Cleveland became a steel town. To the east was the money that

owned the ships and the factories. Then the East Side became the black side, with the whites on the west.

Now, with the blacks in the majority, the west has gathered the Hispanics and many of the Arabs; the east has Chinese and Africans and, in the suburbs, Russians. The synagogues and temples are east; the colleges and museums -- the work of old money -- are east; the huntn' fishn' snowmobilin' crowd are to the west. Because of the limitations of the roads, it takes serious time to get from one side to the other, and often folks don't go.

Oddly for a town where people claim never to cross the river, the Cuyahoga's northern end is a fiesta of bridges. Layers of bridges, like a giant's jungle gym -- wonderfully, the low ones swing and rise to make way for the ships. Another of the continuing delights of the river is watching from a high point while the bridges ponderously rise and fall; the slow-moving scene is accented by traffic and rapid-transit trains pouring gliding back and forth.

The river doesn't go very far. It begins in marshes south and east of the city, wanders through Akron and finally plods up to its destination. Glaciers got it drunk on meltwater and left it confused, though not too confused to dig an impressive gorge through Akron.

Away out on the Cuyahoga's eastern end, I took my canoe and a friend for an experimental trip soon after I brought the boat to Cleveland. It had been my mother's, and had been stored for years under a cottage in New York state. Swatting mosquitos in a rural park, we lowered the boat into the murky water -- and watched in disappointment as it quickly filled and nearly sank before we got back to shore. That canoe is lovely, but it needs some refurbishing and a good soaking before anyone will paddle it with his knees dry.

As a definition, the river leaves a lot to be desired. It doesn't catch fire anymore. Its sides don't define the people, the people define the sides. The murky waters don't splash or gurgle. The fish they harbor aren't very attractive. But it's still alive and busy, and it's fun to watch.

Source: http://my.core.com/~pzicari/text/River.html

Delta Dreaming

By Feathers of Hope (Numenius)

An entry for the Ecotone Wiki topic on River and Estuary

It's one of those places that though nearby — fifteen miles to the south-southeast will put you in the middle of a slough — we never get to. The Delta, formed by the confluence of the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers, consists of thousands of miles of sloughs, levees, submerged islands, channels, and river reaches, a maze of waterways and islands. We're not

aquatic sorts however, and its possibilities for boating and fishing don't lure us. Levees, toe drains, and creeks block entry for those who travel by road.

If I cycle south from here as far as I can go, the road making jogs to the east occasionally, I reach Liberty Island, and can't cross the slough on my bike. It's a land of marshes, pastures, and always a stiff breeze. Beating upwind is never much fun on bicycle, and since the wind usually heads either north or south here, I am not wont to head that far.

I think we have made the east-to-west drive through the Delta once, starting off on Interstate 5, driving past the fields where the sandhill cranes spend the winter, and into the Delta proper. It's rich agricultural land (I've been working recently with the digital state soils map and the Delta shows up as the area with the highest organic matter content), much of it lower than sea level and hence dependent on levees to stay dry. A map of the Delta shows a watery hole in the land pattern at Franks Tract, where the levee failed in 1937 and again in 1938 to flood the area permanently. Our exit from that trek across the Delta was at Rio Vista in Solano County, practically due south from where we live but a circuitous route from our house.

There's a quirky book about the Delta which I recommend entitled *Sturgeon Tales: Stories of the Delta* by Charlie Soderquist, a great benefactor of UC Davis who unfortunately died recently. A talking sturgeon by the name of Sally features prominently in the stories, as well as a fleet of ghost ships. The book is beautifully illustrated with a set of watercolors that well capture the lazy verdure of the region.

Posted by Numenius at April 15, 2004 11:11 PM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/04/15/delta_dreaming.html

Ditches

By C. Little, no less

*This is a letter I wrote to the Albuquerque journal last year, in response to a plea from a North Valley resident for the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District to cease scraping the acequias while the ducks were nesting. I have lived on the ditch for many years, and I am sad to report that the destruction of wildlife and especially wildflowers has been devastating. I don't know what else can be done, beyond pleading and prayer.*This is a post to the ecotone wiki, a collaborative website for writing about place.

I anticipated the standard response from the MRGCD in reply to a recent letter to the editor,protesting the destructive, unconscious mowing of North Valley irrigation ditches, but I suppose this plea will likely be simply ignored.

I am sure the conservancy district employees are hard at work mowing here, mowing there, for months on end, removing the elms, grasses and other unwanted vegetation from the many miles of ditches, with no particular time-table or concern
for the nesting habits of ducks.

In fairness, constant mowing is required to keep pace with the outrageous weeds that will be towering over the paths after a few summer rains. Russian thistle and tumbleweeds, goatheads and pretty little ferns that turn to woody thornbushes are growing quickly, since they have no competition from other plants.

My experience as a ditch-walker over the past twenty years in Corrales is that the multitudes of native plant species and colorful wildflowers that once were commonplace along the ditchbank are now gone forever, the result of commitment to a policy of systematic destruction by bulldozers and mowers.

I remember when, from August to October along the acequias, we enjoyed a brilliant display of fantastic, ten-foot multi-headed sunflowers, black-eyed susans, white asters, purple asters, Indian paintbrush and larkspur, gallardia and cosmos, penstemon and hollyhocks and Mexican primrose...until--along came the bulldozers, late in the summer, but too soon for the seeds to have ripened and fallen.

The next year there would be fewer flowers, and fewer the next, and they too were crushed at the height of their beauty, and the ditch was scraped, back and forth.

Eventually the softclay silt of the banks became unstable, and the gophers moved in, so that in many places the dump trucks came to shore up the banks with concrete chunks. The main canal I used to walk was completely cemented, so as to save the water that grasses and wildflowers might drink while doing their job of holding the banks together with their roots.

Now there is not much left out there on the ditches except weeds and thorns, thistles and goatheads. We still have the perfection of a clear blue sky, sometimes, and the mountain's glory, but down here on the ground where I walk, I haven't seen a single native sunflower, nor a purple aster yet this season– only the isolated goldenrod, gourd or globe mallow. On a Sunday morning early this spring, I observed two men dump garbage bags full of beer bottles into the water at a shady turn, then run away, jump into a SUV and drive off.

The very next day, I watched a pair of mallards with a family of baby ducklings paddling bravely up the flow, restoring hope and great wonder that they still can do it--in the face of such odds, such lack of respect. How much longer, till we look back through the eyes of memory, and wonder when it happened that all that beauty went away, leaving only a dry concrete channel full of trash, a dusty ditchbank and a wall of weeds?

Posted by Linda Weissinger Lupowitz at 7:32 PM

Source: http://chickenlil.blogspot.com/2004/04/ditches-this-is-letter-i-wrote-to.html

The same river twice

By hoarded ordinaries

It seems to be impossible for me to talk about place without simultaneously talking about time. As I sit here typing these words on our back porch, the spring sun warming my bare feet, I naturally and inevitably think back to the first time I sat writing on this porch. It was September and the day was hot: one of summer's last hurrahs. Then as now planes flew overhead; I remember feeling depressed and disconnected, a newcomer in a place where I was another anonymous face. Then in September I wrote by hand in a notebook, seeking solace in silent pages. Only later did I type and edit those words, sending them to other anonymous faces in the form of an essay that searched for the one thing we all secretly crave: connection and recognition, some indication that we indeed are not alone.

Sometimes, remarkably, the blank page talks back. A handful of readers–people I'd never met–told me they found solace and comfort in what I'd written: how could that be? When I'd written it my heart was breaking with that nondescript loneliness that marks the margins of our days, the unnamed ache that bubbles to consciousness only when we stop our hurry and look deeply into the limpid flow of time. If we're all destined to die–and secretly we all know we are–then what is the purpose of this mundane march of time? If ultimately we face our individual fates alone, what is the purpose of human interaction? Feeling the abandonment of a motherless child, I

wrote out of desperation and despair: somewhere, anywhere, is there anyone listening, be it God or man? Somewhere, anywhere, in this time or any other, is there meaning to be found in specificity, the insignificant crawl of a spider inching his forgotten way across a window screen?

Yesterday, feeling more restless than depressed, I took the dog walking along the river. The Ashuelot River runs through campus and through Keene; behind various local businesses runs a fringe of semi-abandoned riparian woods, Ashuelot River Park, that offers a quick getaway for town-worn souls. Yesterday was warm and sunny; I walked in short sleeves, shorts, and sandals. The Park was full of mothers with strollers, parents with bicycling children, kissing lovers and roaming herds of bored-eyed teenagers, all moving and congregating in a flowing swirl of human activity.

The dog and I walked alone through these anonymous faces: the dog and I nearly always walk alone. Dodging embracing lovers and wide-eyed toddlers who asked, awed, if they could pet the nice doggie, I took another photo of a lone maple tree I'd photographed last October. Then in October, this tree shimmered with neon hues of orange and yellow; yesterday, in April, it looked barren and dead, forgotten on an isolated shore.

They say you can't step into the same river twice, but it seems that both writers and photographers continually try to use memory as a bridge between then and now. If I hold dear in my memory the image of an October maple, will it be granted a provisional immortality, burnt into nerve cell and synapse, a pattern that can be quickly and spontaneously recalled? And if I share this dearly held memory with another–with you or any other willing anonymous face–will a connection be cast across space, time, and souls, my memory becoming your memory, a bridge not only to span but to stem time's flow?

The dog, not being burdened with the questions of human consciousness, has no thought for time. Instead, he lives in a perpetual now where the past does not exist, the future is as close as the next savored smell, and you can jump into, joyously, the same river twice, three times, four, and again. To humans aware of their own mortality, rivers are a symbol of time and its passage; to dogs attuned to their own noses and bellies, rivers are an excellent source of cold spring mud and the secretive smell of still-hibernating turtles. The dog has no memory of either September or October; the dog has no worry or care about time, no need for notebooks, photos, or scribbled pages. Neither alone nor apart, the dog has never been struck from the float; instead, he, like

Whitman is forever held in solution. In springtime, while skirting rivers, my spirit watches the dog with envy and with shards of stolen, vicarious joy.

- *This is my contribution to the Ecotone bi-weekly topic, River and Estuary.*

Comments

Jim Says:
Apr 18, 2004 at 4:55 pm

Enjoyed this one tremendously, ma'am. My kind of musing. A cup of coffee, an early morning sunrise, and a picnic table somewhere by the creek and we could sit and discuss the day for a couple of hours…….

Lorianne Says:
Apr 20, 2004 at 12:04 pm

Hi, Jim: so good (as always) to "see" you! Glad to hear you enjoyed more musings on time: it seems that's all I ever write about! Although I'm not a coffee person, a cup of tea (and conversation) by any creek sounds great. I imagine your neck of the woods is beautiful these days, compared to our still-half-dormant landscape here in NH.

Thanks again for the kind words.

Source: http://hoardedordinaries.wordpress.com/2004/04/18/the-same-river-twice/

Sound and Place

Bi-Weekly Topics for May 1, 2004

Summer Symphony

By Fragments from Floyd

This has been a wonderful day of sun, a reprieve from weeks of spring drizzle, welcomed on the eve of the summer solstice. A cold front passed through and carried away the blue haze so that edges are vibrant-razor-sharp. The greenness soothes the eye today under an achingly blue sky. I had almost forgotten.

While the colors were remarkable, it was the sound of this day that made me take notice. Standing at the edge of the creek in the warm sun in the amphitheater of our valley, sound reverberated in layers, bottom to top-the creek rumbling below, a thousand incessant insects stridulating in the middle, while the northwest wind above played the ridges in the treble clef.

The creeks are risen and clear; much of the water enters the flow from underground. Recent rains have forced cold clear water from deep below the surface into the swollen stream-enough water to call it a torrent, and it is raucous, in a hurry. If you could stand at the shore of the ocean and record the sound of breakers, then take out pauses between waves-this is the sound that roars along the valley floor today. Breakers without a break, the bass undertones in this valley full of sound.

The seventeen-year cicadas relentlessly wax and wane their nasal love songs, although now and then the singing males all stop together at once, just for a moment. They preen circumspectly before getting back to their seductive songs. I'm certain they expect at any moment a lured lady locust will climb up to their singing perch and make arthropodic whoopie. It must be a most orgasmic event-to have waited seventeen years for this very moment. I wonder: if you listened closely, could you hear the instant of those little whoops when the next generation of earth-sleeping insects is conceived, followed by a satisfied sigh, just days before death?

On top of the ridges the wind becomes visible as a million leaves race just ahead of its force, like the standing wave that crowds perform in perfectly timed sequence at football games. Before me, a stadium filled with soft leaves. They rise in unison along the leading edge of the wind; they sit back down as it passes, only to stand and cheer again and again.

The cool air today is light, full of energy and ozone. It has come here all the way from the tundra, never breathed before, save by a few caribou, and fewer wolves. The sound of wind in summer treetops brings a multitude of boreal voices, a soft rushing whisper that lacks the shrill whine inflicted in December by this wind's winter relatives traveling over Nameless Creek though bare branches.

The Sounds of Rice Cove

By Switched At Birth

The first time I saw Buck Cove Mountain in Rice Cove, it was a late afternoon in May of 1996. Rice Cove is in the Beaverdam Community near Canton, in Western North Carolina between Asheville and Maggie Valley.

Buck and I found a log to sit on. "I'm in love," I said. "Me, too," he replied. We sat there until dark, drinking in the view, and the sound: except for the soft soughing sound of wind moving around between valley and peak, there was an absence of sound somehow deeper than mere silence. Like a grandma's feather bed, we sank into it.

By September, that silence was broken by earth moving equipment. "You-uns is lucky," we were told by the driver. "No hard pan. We won't have to dynamite." Dynamite. My first real clue that a building project in the mountains was a world away from putting up a home in the flat land of Florida.

By next July, a 600 foot deep water well had been drilled, and we moved in.

The well went dry the next day.

Ah, we got smart, then, and employed the services of a dowser, otherwise known as a "water witch." Ironically, when he wasn't using "a forked rod believed to indicate the presence of water or minerals especially by dipping downward when held over a vein" (Webster's definition), this 83 year old gentleman preached in a hard shell Baptist church.

We lived with water from a truck and showers from a neighbor for several weeks until the new well was drilled.

At last, all the noise-making machines went away, and we were left alone in our sunrise sanctuary.

Mountain coves are level areas sheltered by a horseshoe of mountains. The level areas are used mainly for homes, gardens, to graze cattle and raise hay. The otherwise unusable, nearly vertical slopes are valuable as real estate to sell to crazy people from Florida who have lived on flat ground so long they feel like they are getting ground itch, or perhaps at retirement want to have a feeling of getting closer to heaven.

Everwhat, as our neighbors here might say, we were dazzled by the view of distant mountains, nearby valley, little steepled church and Mr. Best's cows in the pasture just below us.

The silence we "heard" while sitting on the log that first day evolved into a natural symphony. The ever-present doves provided an acoustic background "ooh" sound. At 7:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. each day, a distant man-made sound could be heard when the shift change whistle blew for the paper mill in the nearby town of Canton.

I shall never forget the first time, that summer, hearing a screech owl just outside our bedroom window. I still think it is one of the most hauntingly beautiful sounds in nature.

At this moment I am sitting in a room we started out calling the "sun porch." It has five sets of sliding glass doors and is adjacent to a partially covered deck; a perfect bird-watching spot, with regular and hummingbird feeders set up there. We soon changed the name of this porch to the "snow porch," because it is on the northeast side of the house and is very seldom sunlit. But to watch snow fall in this room is unforgettable. This morning I have seen and heard rose-breasted grosbeaks, Carolina wrens, tufted titmice, bluebirds, doves, and cardinals.

A bird sound we have eventually gotten accustomed to is the "Bam! Bam! Bam!" of a male cardinal -- we call him Red Rover. For at least the past four years, he has been a regular fixture, deliberately flying into the glass doors of the snow porch. He takes a position on a railing about 3 feet away from a door, and "Bam!" We have put out crepe paper streamers, fake owls, rubber snakes. . . . nothing works. For a brief time, two summers ago, he found a mate and was spotted tenderly feeding her choice bits from the feeder. But she left him. Perhaps a torrid affair with this excitable bird was fun. . . but the thought of a lifetime with a bird so controlled by his neuroses must have been too much for her.

The hummingbirds make miniature buzz saw sounds which can be disconcerting. I recall once eating a strawberry jam-covered waffle on the deck when a ruby-throated hummer decided he wanted it. Hovering inches away from my nose, tiny wings moving at warp speed, "Give me that! Give me that!" That was bad enough, but then another aggressive little fellow showed up and they began fighting, diminuitive beaks clicking. Seems ridiculous now, but it felt threatening at the time, and I retreated into the house.

Usually we had arrived from Pensacola each year, (about mid-April), by the time our neighbor had moved his cows into the pasture below us for the spring, summer and early fall. That was always a treat. We called it "Jurassic Park" because of the bodacious sounds made by these cows. I never once heard "Moo," but rather snorts and shrieks in all octaves.

Sometimes the little Methodist church in the valley would have its chimes turned on and set on a timer, so that about five in the afternoon the quavering bell sounds would float up to reach our ears, perfecting the day. Often, all doors and windows open, I played Chopin nocturnes on my ebony Yamaha studio piano, wondering now if music only floats upward or did it descend to those in the valley as well?

Occasionally, we could hear the straining motor sounds of the UPS truck, bringing books, music, or a new pair of hiking shorts to our door.

One of the more memorable sounds here has been the nearby hawk family teaching their juveniles. Papa and or mama scream with ferocity; baby hawk goes "eeeeeee!" They fly over the deck, waggling their wings at me. Marvelous.

Since that first summer in 1996, change has gradually begun to come to the cove. Two summers ago, a nice couple built a home halfway between ours and the main road. We are somewhat shielded from seeing their house in the leafy summertime, but from mid-fall through mid-spring, the pristine view is gone. People add people sounds, some more than others. Lawn is important to these folks, and so lawmower and chainsaw compete with a miniature Schnauzer and his beagle friend as new elements in the orchestra around here.

Returning last week to prepare for a move back to the flatlands, we learned that the 44 acre tract of land adjacent to our 14 acres has been sold. A travel trailer is there now, while the people who bought the land begin to eradicate all of the multiflora roses (considered a pest) and scrape the land clean to build a house and raise horses. Everyone needs a place to live, and it would be supremely arrogant of me to resent any alteration of this landscape which we ourselves altered in 1996, but in my heart it clearly resolves any ambivalence about whether our decision to sell and move is right for us.

This has been a magical time in my life. I have learned to hike mountains, ten to fifteen miles in a day -- what I call a four-peanut butter and jelly hike. I have learned to whitewater raft. And to love wildflowers, and to dream in the mountain mist. An abundance of gifts, sewn into the fabric of my being forever.

Knowing that there really is a time for every season is wisdom, and my heart now is moved most by the sound of the whippoorwill each night in the woods of Longleaf.

07:27 AM in Ecotone Biweekly Essays on Place | Permalink

Comments

I completely understand how you feel. Over the years when our budget has allowed, we have been picking up pieces of land surrounding our homestead to create a buffer zone. This zone is now filled to the brim with turkey, grouse, owls, racoon, the occasional bobcat in addition to numerous birds, flora and fauna.

Posted by: Marie | May 2, 2004 04:44 PM

Somehow I think the whippoorwill, the owls, the hawks, the wildflowers, will miss your sounds and dreams in the mist in turn.
I'm reminded of the old Moody Blues song Tuesday Afternoon:

The trees are drawing me near,
I've got to found out why.
Those gentle voices I hear,
explain it all with a sigh.

I'm certain the trees are sighing seeing your departure.

Posted by: fletch | May 2, 2004 06:05 PM

What a world! This city girl can only imagine.

Posted by: Ana | May 2, 2004 07:57 PM

As people move in to develop homesites, habitat is lost one acre at a time. People need a place to live, but it's sad. And from the planetary perspective, tragic. But you are planting forests! Thanks for the lovely remembrance, and enjoy your new life. Glad to have you as "neighbors."

Posted by: Denny | May 3, 2004 09:05 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040712093815/longleaf.typepad.com/switched_at_birth/2004/05/the_sounds_of_r.html

My Feathered Friend

By C. Little, no Less

I've been asked to post this story again, since my writing website

Tales From The Land of Entrapment *has been down for awhile....*
This is a tale from our former home of twenty years. Apparently the new owners moved in and started pissing off everyone, not realizing they now live in a hornet's nest--a family of warring neighbors that goes back hundreds of years. The neighbors are not happy that the newcomers are dealing out some of their own medicine - bulldozing, cutting down trees, replacing beauty with rocks and gravel, noise and traffic - just like they did all those years!
So it is with some nostalgia and no regrets I present this...
Tale from the Land of Entrapment*:*

(This is also a post for May 1 - Sound and Place on the collaborative weblog/wiki for Writing About Place, Ecotone Wiki)

My Feathered Friend

In the '60s we protested for peace--now?--we'll settle for some peace and quiet.

Our home in Corrales may seem peaceful, yet with the whizzing traffic up front at the road and the barnyard cacophony in back, it is hardly ever quiet. A houseguest emerged from his slumber one morning with a puzzled look on his face, asking, "*Is there a zoo around here*?" The cows' mysterious mooing is like a cross between a rusty gate hinge and an elephant mating call.

Our second-story bedroom opens out onto a deck facing west towards the irrigation ditch and the rising escarpment. You can hear everything at once from up there?those cows, horses, burros, goats, sheep, yowling tomcats and howling coyotes, literally. Bullfrogs and crickets throb through summer nights occasionally pierced by the eerie feline cries of peahens. Church bells bong on Sunday morning, while hot-air balloons hiss and drift over the field, accompanied by a chorus of barking dogs.

Mornings we awaken, depending on the season, to honking geese, raucous crows, chortly finches and sparrows squabbling; the strange and wonderful sandhill cranes cruising by; woodpeckers working at the eaves, or comedic roadrunners chattering, challenging a watchful cat.

Sometimes I lie semi-awake in bed listening for my favorite bird, so small I?ve never seen her, yet she returns each spring with her distinctive song?a long story with a question mark at the end. She arrives with a big voice by the time the apricot trees burst into blossom, alive with an industry of bees.

Other days are less pleasant--rude awakenings to the sounds of my neighbor?s recreational bulldozing, incessant beeping front-end loaders and backhoes scraping, chainsaws, road construction and heavy equipment hitting it hard at 6 a.m.

continue reading at myfeatheredfriend.html

Posted by Linda Weissinger Lupowitz at 6:55 PM

Source: http://chickenlil.blogspot.com/2004/04/my-feathered-friend-ive-been-asked-to.html

The Sound of Here

By Feathers of Hope (Pica)

An entry for the Ecotone Wiki's joint post on Sound of Place

As Numenius pointed out, yesterday at 4:00 am I got up trying to locate a calling barred owl.

I am not normally walking about at that time of day. Scorpius was rising in the south and the air was still. No barred owl. Lowing cattle--polled herefords, mostly. I don't know why they do this some of the time and not others; it seems unrelated to when they get fed or the time of day. There it was, though: the drone of I-80. At four in the morning.

I write this at dusk and we just walked out and took more or less the same route. There were quite a few cars about, disturbing the frantic chattering of the Western kingbirds. But most of the other birds had stopped apart from a lone mockingbird--and a lone great-horned owl who was just waking up.

I yearn to hear all this sometime without human sound competing with it all, obliterating it. These days you have to go a long, long way to find that. Farther, I think, than the range of the Western kingbird.

Posted by Pica at May 1, 2004 08:36 PM | TrackBack

Comments

Just come on down here (as you're about to do!) and tell me who these birds are who're always yelling their heads off. Them, the crickets, the very occasional car--that's all you'll hear! other than me, also twittering.

Posted by: Doc Rock at May 2, 2004 10:00 AM Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/05/01/the_sound_of_her.html

Concrete, Steel and Stone

By ifyouseekay

From here, its not just highway noise, its individual vehicles, one by one, each sounds different than the last. That one was a semi for sure, that, a small car or truck, and oh yesthat was undeniably a motorcycle. There is another vehicle sound, much more distinctive, and much more annoying, but I dont hear it right now, so I wont mention it. It is frequent enough, however, that I will hear it before I am finished, and I will mention it as it approaches.

I signed the lease on this apartment before I moved to Missoula. I had seen pictures of the interior and I knew where it lay on the map. The highway noise, I was told, was not bad unless you were on the far south side of the building. I did not ask which side of the building I was going to be on. The deal was too good, a furnished 2 bedroom for 520 a month with a creek in the back yard and, beyond that, one of the finest natural parks in Missoula.

When I arrived, the slow rustling of the creek only meters from my back door was only occasionally drowned out by the throbbing of a motorcycle or frustrated hum of an 18 wheeler ripping its way through Montanas air. As you might expect, I am on the very south side of this building, and the noise of the highway is constant in its intermittence.

The stream, though, is intermittent in its constancy. Every night I am lulled to sleep by cars and trucks rolling over stained asphalt and water rolling over polished rocks. I was not awakened the first time the streams constancy proved intermittent, but, when I woke on December 29th, I noticed its absence.

It had slowed to a trickle as the temperature dropped, first, below freezing, and then below zero as Missoula sped into winter. On December 28th it still flowed in a winding crevasse between two ever growing sheets of ice. The next morning, if there was a flow, it was silenced by a thick sheet of ice that spread over the entire surface of the stream. I had heard it would happen, but I didnt quite believe it. I had never seen a frozen stream, I didnt understand how something so amazingly mobile could just suddenly halt in silence.

The highway noise continued, more intermittent than ever as more and more people stayed inside. Everything is dampened in the winter here. The sun hides, people stay inside, doors and windows are closed and covered, and the world loses color and is only white and gray. But the truckers keep on. They blow past much slower, but they still tear our air 24 hours a day.

And there it is. The sound I was telling you about earlier. It took longer than I thought it would, but it always comes. Each freight train screams its own chord. Some blast only one or two tones. Thos trains sound sick, like shadows of what they could be. But most have 3 or 4 full notes, always tuned differently. And each conductor has his or her own style. Toot toot tooooot. Hoooohoo hoooooo. Sometimes at night they sense our frustration and only let out tiny warning blasts to try and not wake us. But now it is only late afternoon here, so we are getting full blast. This one sounds higher pitched than usual, but its hard to tell without something to compare it to. One long blast, a long pause, another. It is silent.

But the rumble is worse than the hooting. The rails strain against the boards in the ground. The trains cars shake against their bindings as the wheels rattle and squeak. It is only just approaching. The rail road crossing guards begin to flash and ring as they lower. I can see the crossing from my bed where I type. The train is lazily flowing past the stopped traffic now. Three engines, so it will be long. Its a grain train. We have three sorts of trains here, grain, coal and lumber. Occasionally we will see something peculiar destined for who knows where. Train cars filled with sparkling new automobiles, sometimes the engines drag empty cars with their doors open so drifters can jump in at the stock yard.

Missoula has always been a way point for travelers. They stay over the winter sometimes, but in the summer their populations explode. Tents appear behind the brush in Greenough Park where a man will live for a day or a week, reminding me that the squeal and scream of a train is a mild inconvenience, and to some, it is a luxury.

But those men in the park have the creek to whisper in their ears just as I do and the train never wakes me up anymore. It might keep me up, if Im having a hard night already. But the highway, the stream and the train all have a slot in my subconscious now. I can ignore them as I choose and I never hear them unless I try to. Those sounds are just another subconscious sensation, like the rims of my glasses and the weight of my clothes on my shoulders.

The highway, the stream, the train. Each sound has a different intensity, a different consistency, a different connotation, but all of them together will always bring this place back to me when I hear them. I am leaving in less than a month. And so I am filing this in with all the sights and sounds and smells and memories of the other places I have lived. Each file calls a different weight to my brain. I will not know the weight of this place until I am gone from it.

I am giving this place over to my past, and I will never desire to live so close to a highway or rail line again. And while I happily rid myself of them with this move, I cannot and would not lose the weight of this place. That weight will always find me as I recall the sounds and smells and laughter and tears of the newest parts of my life. This places unique weight will settle in on me soon after I am gone in a moment of peace as I recall the sounds of my world flowing over concrete, steel, and stone.

Posted by: Hank on Saturday, May 01, 2004 - 11:41 PM

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20040513101048/http://www.ifyouseekay.org/

The Sound of Home

By Feathers of Hope (Numenius)

A note for the Ecotone Wiki topic on sound of place.

This morning there was a black-headed grosbeak singing in the yard from the treetops, and a Swainson's thrush singing from lower down. Both species are migrating through the Central Valley, and won't be here in the summertime. The song of the grosbeak is bright, cheery, and resonant. The Swainson's thrush has a beautiful flute-like song that cascades up through the octaves.

They remind me of home. There is a little canyon below the house where I grew up, just north of Berkeley. Both species nest in the canyon, and their songs would resonate through the canyon splendidly. I'd occasionally see the grosbeaks in nearby treetops, but the thrushes would always be singing from the bottom of the canyon, far out of sight.

Posted by Numenius at May 2, 2004 11:19 PM | TrackBack

Comments

I'll never forget the first time I saw a grosbeak. He was rose-breasted, and had staked a claim in a small tray of seed I had left on the deck here in the mountains of North Carolina. It began to snow. He settled into the middle of the tray until it was covered with snow. When I had to leave my observation post, he was still there. Now we have several permanent families of them right here. What a gift.

Posted by: Beth W. at May 3, 2004 04:36 AM

I just discovered your blog from Ecotone. I love your posts about birds. Living in Florida, we have our own special bird population, and I often write about them under the categories of Florida Life and Florida Garden. I look forward to more visits!

Posted by: Denny at May 4, 2004 08:09 AM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/05/02/the_sound_of_hom.html

Hear and there

By Hoarded Ordinaries

Yesterday morning I heard the year's first house wren. We moved to Keene last July, and I can't recall if I heard house wrens then, but I know that one of the biggest differences between our old and present houses was the change in birdsong. When we lived in Hillsboro, our house was nestled on the edge of Fox State Forest, so I was in summer-time surrounded by the songs of woodland birds: vireos, ovenbirds, black-throated blue and black-throated green warblers, several kinds of thrushes (veery, hermit, and wood), scarlet tanagers, and, in winter, an occasional barred owl. On spring evenings, we could hear peepers calling from the bog across the street, and on spring mornings, an obstreperous male sapsucker would hammer his brains against our useless old rooftop TV antenna, the sound of loudly resonant metal reverberating like machine-gun taps through the entire house.

Every year our house in Hillsboro sported its own pair of nesting phoebes. The overhang from our screened back porch provided a perfect nook for nesting, so each spring and summer we were heralded by the sound of phoebes–first the adult pair, then their fledged young–calling back

and forth, their sharp, clipped calls nearly as emphatic as their incessantly bobbing tails. On warm summer Sundays, our meditation group would sometime sit on the porch meditating to the sounds of calling woodpeckers and warblers and those resilient phoebes. At first the adults would hang back, perching pertly on our garden fence, tails bobbing, considering if they could safely fly to and from their nest with so many *people* sitting nearby. Eventually, though, the pair realized we weren't moving, or at least we weren't moving toward their nest, so they flew to and from their hidden nestlings with bills crammed full of insects and grubs, the babies' shrill, thin shrieking silenced only when their mouths were similarly full.

We have phoebes here in Keene, but we don't seem to have any nesting right around our house. Instead, this morning as I write I hear the sound of blue jays and traffic, cars passing to and fro on their way to work. Last summer we caught the tail-end of the mockingbird's breeding season: although I don't know whether they had nested near our house, I do know that we had several fledglings hopping about the yard in late summer, their petulant clucks for their food-laden parents echoing through our back hallway and into the kitchen where the dog paced and whined. Mockingbirds, of course, are hugely vocal: although only the males sing during breeding, both members of a bonded pair will defend their feeding territory come fall. On warm summer nights some particularly ambitious males will sing loudly in the darkness, perched on the highest spot they can find (like, for instance, a useless old rooftop TV antenna).

Yesterday's wrens were courting. The male was singing his boisterously bubbling song; the female was inching about coying, chattering and wisping shrilly from the tops of our backyard shed. The male was both singing and displaying, landing on some eminence like a pruned tree-limb, our neighbors' parked trailer, or a free-standing basketball hoop and then deftly raising and quivering his wings in a move that is supposed to drive Lady Wren wild. Lady Wren, alas, was unimpressed: the true proof of any manly wren is the nest sites he provides, for Lady Wren is choosy and will pair only with a male who has prepared several sites for her consideration. Our yard, it seems, has no prominent nest holes, no nest boxes, no rotted tree cavities: today, that male wren and his coyly calling lady have apparently moved on in search of more promising real estate, leaving in their wake a sad silence interrupted only by the chirping of house sparrows and the clucking of robins.

This is my contribution to the Ecotone biweekly topic, Sound of Place.

Comments

Denny Says:
May 3, 2004 at 10:31 am

They're back! Enjoyed your bird news.

Lorianne Says:
May 6, 2004 at 12:05 pm

Denny, the house wrens haven't been back in our yard since that first day, but I've heard them elsewhere. And the other day I heard the first catbird of the season, and today I thought I might have heard the first Carolina wren…

So yes, they're definitely back!

Source: http://hoardedordinaries.wordpress.com/2004/05/03/hear-and-there/

Winding Down the Weathered Road

By Laughing Knees

http://web.archive.org/web/20040517013026/http://www.butuki.com/gallery/spring-rain/cherry_blossums_lite_600

Playing with the light around a cherry tree in bloom, Nogawa River, Tokyo, Japan, 2004 (It is well past the cherry blossom season, but I've only this weekend had any time to sit down and work on my spring photographs)

This is the 23rd installment of the ongoing place-based essay series at Ecotone. This week's topic is Time and Place. Please feel free to drop by and read what others have written, and if you'd like, to contribute your own essay.

The white wagtail scurried ahead and stopped, to glance back at us, bobbing his tail and wheezing his shrill chirrup, urging us to "Hurry, hurry! Come, right this way! It's just a little further! Hurry!" When our bicycles neared just enough to loom over him, the loaded panniers brushing the grass at the edge of the asphalt, he popped up into the air and darted further up ahead, to repeat his encouragements. For more than 2500 kilometers it seemed he led the way, the same wagtail, forever ahead of us, like the second hands of a clock.

That was the warmer half of 1995, the year my wife and I got married and decided to set off for a six month honeymoon by bicycle across the northern circle of Europe. We left our jobs, packed away all our belongings, drew wads of traveler's checks from our bank accounts, rolled out our heavily laden bicycles, and flew over the expanse of Eurasia to Holland, where the wind waited for us outside the alleyways and canals of Amsterdam.

Neither of us had ever taken off 6 months to just follow our whims and the first few weeks tailed us with the worries of Tokyo, and the Bullet Train accuracy of speed timed to within seconds. That first day pushing the pedals beyond the sign for the city limits of Amsterdam felt like being flung out the door into the cold; the hardness of the road under our tires seems to present a vast horizontal wall beyond which we could not perceive. In a kind of reverse deadline panic we raced from town to town, urging each other to make the kilometers count, tallying up the numbers on our cycle computers, and feeling unsettled when, because we were still out of shape and exhausted from the wedding preparations, the average day's distance added up to no more than 30 or 40 kilometers. We shouted at Holland's seething winds, holding us back, and bickered when darkness fell too soon in the campsites. The weight of unenclosed hours and days, and when we paused to accept them, weeks and months, whispered for us to hurry, not waste any time, and make up for the guilt we felt from taking so much unproductive time off.

Under a stand of dark leaved chestnut trees on the western edge of Germany we threw our bicycles down and threatened to each return to Japan, alone. It seemed the trip would be over before it had even started.

On the road, cocking its black capped head, stood the wagtail, tsk-tsking. It left us to stand silently gazing out over a field of flowering yellow rapeweed, the heads billowing like waves in the breeze and the slow whale bellies of clouds overhead dragging their shadows across the rolling hills. We munched on bread rolls with gouda cheese, and in chewing calmed down enough to look at each other again.

"It hasn't entered our heads yet, has it?" I offered.

"What hasn't?"

"We've got six months. Six whole months! What are we hurrying for?"

"I don't know. You're the one in a hurry!"

That almost stoked the fire again, but I nodded. "You're right. I don't know what got into me."

"Ever since we arrived you've been racing to finish the day. I can barely keep up."

"I guess I don't know how to get my mind around this. How do you plan for six months?"

My wife had a way with time. She always turned toward the sun and closed her eyes. "We've got six months. We can take our time." A gust of wind brought the fragrance of some distant flowers. My wife inhaled deeply, smiling, and then opened her eyes again. "Didn't we come here to look around? Isn't that why we chose to go by bicycle?"

I sat silent a long time, just seeing the fields and the swallows swooping through the air. A damselfly alighted on my bicycle handlebar and slowly relaxed its wings. I felt something deflate inside myself, replaced by a quiet beating.

"I think I was scared," I said.

"Of what?" inquired my wife.

"Of frayed ends."

She looked at me with a frown, but said nothing. She brightened and picked up her bicycle. "First we have to get rid of a lot of this weight."

Everything changed that day. The whole journey. We slowed down to the point where moving forward invoked less headwind and trees and passersby fell behind with less sharp reduction. We stopped when something nicked the corners of our eyes or the sky swung us into stillness under its great pendulum. The kilometers rolled by day after day, week after week, more as expressions of movement in the scrolling panorama than as signposts. Much of the journey hovered above the bicycle handlebars, each of us lost in long reveries during the spells between towns, and much of that time as partners in a silent traverse of newness, leaving unanswered questions in our wake.

Our perception of time and our participation in the revolving of the globe reflected in the mornings and evenings, when we woke with the calling of the hooded crows, jackdaws, and

robins, and with the first light filtering through the walls of the tent, and when we retired to books held up in the coolness of the evening air and the stirring of hedgehogs and shrews in the bushes, before turning out our lights and sleeping with the whole night wheeling through our minds. At times we happened upon a place that so merged the inner stories we bore with its character of wonder that we lingered for a week or more, tasting the place to its very fruits and vegetables and getting to know its hoary old inhabitants. The bicycles moulted into wings that flew between rest stops for our eyes and feet. We became like the wagtail, landing somewhere to root around among its rocks then flitting a few pedal strokes to the next sunny vantage point.

By the time we reached the Shetland Islands and the Orkneys our muscles took us without protest to where we pointed our front wheels, the rhythm one with our bicycles. Our breathing seemed to exhale from the soil, and we headed on and beyond in all weathers, thoroughly entranced by the light of the sky. We walked for hours, sometimes alone, and returned to the tent with sprigs of flowers or seashells that we handed to each other as if they replaced the money that we used now only for food and occasional transportation. At the campsites other long term travelers joined us over hissing camp stoves to converse and relate tales until deep in the night. Our time and their times brushed together like passing veils, always with the light glimmering through.

We had ceased to exist wholly in the modern world.

So when it came time to return to Japan and back to jobs and four walls and alarm clocks, we floundered along the highways and took every opportunity to escape them. The last days of the journey wound down in the copper light of late autumn, among the wet country hills of Northumberland, England, and the gray tangle of backroads in Belgian town outskirts. Neither of us could find words to protect the dream we had just woken from. Six months had passed and it all seemed like a single instant, like shaking loose summer leaves from a tree.

Japan crashed into our ears, cut into our eyes. We slept for two months with the apartment windows thrown wide open, welcoming the bite of winter air, feeling our breath stoppered in our chests, our muscles aching for resistance. And gradually, insidiously, the clocks ticked louder and the television screen held our gazes longer, and that lone figure tramping along the sandy lanes retreating further and further down the road.

It's been nine years. My beard has sprouted white hair. The bicycles stand furled in the kitchen by the window. Days pass when the sun creeps past the curtain. Sometimes I wake at dawn, after a evening laboring at some other person's dream and falling into dreamless sleep, and hear the wagtail calling. He bobs his tail, like a finger beckoning. "Hurry! Hurry! No time to lose. It's out here where the heart beats like thunder." Like a storm moving across an endless field, and the road leading straight into the dark, gathering clouds.

Posted by butuki at 10:09 PM in Nature and Place | Permalink **Comments**

That was beautiful!

Posted by dave at May 17, 2004 04:12 AM

That is a great story.

Posted by Denny at May 17, 2004 05:30 AM

I admire your courage, and your prose. Have you been following Cassandra's posts?

Posted by P. at May 17, 2004 11:49 AM

Taking time out, slowing down - then going back and having to pick up speed again. the price of creating freedoms for oneself. Sometimes I wonder if it really would be easier never to stray from the path. Years ago a coleague I was close to left the profession we were in to retrain and kept telling me to jump. I didn't but carried on while also going to art school. I'd like to have that kind of time out. But I also worry it would do my head in coming back.

Posted by Coup de Vent at May 18, 2004 06:43 AM

A beautiful piece that leaves me with a deep sense of yearning for those dreams I've turned away.

Posted by Penny at May 18, 2004 08:38 AM

Beautiful writing……..

Posted by Dottie at May 19, 2004 10:22 AM

Yes, beautiful writing. And that photo of the cherry blossoms against the white sky is stunning! I thought it was snow until I enlarged it and looked closer.

Posted by leslee at May 20, 2004 11:41 AM

Beautiful. Thank you for sharing…

Posted by Thomas Sturm at May 20, 2004 04:16 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040517013026/http://www.butuki.com/archives/2004_05.html

Sounds Of Place

By O'DonnellWeb

I haven't contributed to Ecotone in a few months. I blame this all on Fred. He hasn't been writing Ecotones either, and the only time I ever think about it is when he posts his first.

This week's subject is Sounds of Place. As is my habit, I write these based on the first thought that comes to mind. I read "sounds of place", and I immediately thought "military jet aircraft."

I'm an Air Force brat. The sound of an USAF fighter plane streaking low overhead is about the most comforting sound I can imagine. This must relate back to growing up on USAF bases where the sound was just part of the everyday fabric of life. A few specific remembrances that come to mind…

Playing baseball in the field at the end of our block on Grissom AFB, IN and hearing the "crack" as jets broke the sound barrier overhead. This was 1976ish so I'm going to guess they were F-101's? Another specific instance in 1997, we are on Shell Island just across the bay from Tyndall AFB. F-16's start practicing touch and go takeoffs on the runway not more than a mile or so

across the water, and they roar directly over our heads at very low altitude. It was a parade of jets, so loud the ground shook, so low you could almost feel the exhaust. I was enthralled, as was my then 3 year old son. I also remember running to the window in our condo every time I heard a jet that whole week.

That sound just makes me happy. I can't really explain it any other way.

Our current home sits directly between the Quantico Marine Base and Fort AP Hill. We don't get many jets, but the low flying squadrons of military helicopters are a suitable substitute. And yes, I race to the window or out on the deck for a look anytime I hear them coming. My son is usually already there.

Posted in Ecotone |

Comments

1. *on 06 May 2004 at 12:02 am Stephanie*

2. Air Force brat here, too, and that sound has the same effect on me. It's comforting.

3. *on 06 May 2004 at 6:08 pm P*

4. My wife tells a similar story of living in NCO quarters on a SAC base, Offutt, as a child. Directly across from the family apartment was the ready line, where bombers were lined up with their engines running 24/7 all the while she lived there.

5. I grew up with a sense of imminent apocalypse as a child in the quiet Catskills. I shudder to think what I would have thought had I lived there — but then, maybe if I were an Air Force brat, my perspective would have been entirely different.

6. *on 09 May 2004 at 6:03 am fredf*

7. The training F16's that flash over Goose Creek followed momentarily by their gut-thudding sounds are not so comforting in this setting. Last week one hit a flock of birds and crashed (both pilots ejected) over the county to the south– about fifty air miles and 20 seconds away from here.

Source: http://www.odonnellweb.com/?p=995

Speaking out

By P

I hear voices.

No, not *those* voices -- the ones from the other side of your head, or God or whoever -- they never say anything but *"Hey, bum! Mow the lawn!"* and *"If you weren't a slob you would have*

put the laundry away by now!" Those voices must have a direct line to my mother, and I don't pay much attention to them.

The voices I hear are much rarer. They are the ordinary voices of adults chatting in the street out front.

Now, if you don't live in suburban America, you might not have noticed the phenomenon. There's plenty of noise here, but never the sound of talk. Over the hiss of the wind in the pine tree and the rumble of the washer's spin cycle, there's a lawnmower out there somewhere, chewing up leaves and small branches by the sound of it. Now and again, a small plane passes overhead. The sparrows are chattering about some midday prodigy; a starling disagrees. A dog barks: Woof!, pause, Woof! -- happy enough to hear its own echo, I guess.

Somewhere in this green and insulated neighborhood, mothers are talking to their kids. Somewhere, kids are talking to each other, but I can't hear them. Somewhere people are washing dishes and talking on the phone, I suppose, and everywhere, the damn tube is talking, but that's not the same thing. It's extraordinary to hear adult conversations outdoors, and I have to control the urge to rush to a window and find out what they're talking about.

Oh. It was my neighbor's maid service, packing their buckets and saying goodbye to their customer.

Maybe this is why people hang out in bars, for the chatter. With so much to talk about, you'd think we Americans would be blathering nonstop, on buses and in elevators, to grocery clerks and mailmen and over the back fence to our neighbors, for heaven's sake. Polite people don't do that, and it embarrasses others when they do. I shocked the heck out of some folks on an elevator last month by asking the woman closest to the buttons which two floors were missing from the panel.

Feet shuffled. Eyes, hitherto glued to the readout over the door, met and glanced away. Folks edged away from me, one of those idiot conventionnaires -- drunk, probably (quite dry, in fact); dangerous, possibly. A thousand miles from home, I just didn't care. I debated whether to leave them counting and told them, as I stepped off, that the missing floors were 13 and 5. Give 'em something to think about as they ride the rest of the way up. Why 5?

I wondered what would have happened if I had muttered something about foreign policy. Likely they would have decided that I, not the president, was insane, and phoned Security about the deranged person on the sixth floor.

The sound of voices brings a lump to my throat. Now and again you hear it. Outside the pool or the ballgame, it means something's going on, and I feel impelled to go be a part of it.

Source: http://my.core.com/~pzicari/text/Voices.html

Time and Place

Bi-Weekly Topics for May 15, 2004

In the month of small flies

By Via Negativa

In the month of small flies and the sharp & bitter leaves of wild mustard, a hair fell from heaven & flipped & spun & turned by stages into the first hornbeam tree. But not right away: for a time it slipped in & out of small clearings, walking with a bit of a limp. The people at that time were living in lean-tos made from hemlock boughs & old, yellowed newpapers. *Easy come, easy go,* they used to whisper whenever a hard rain brought the roof down on their heads. Half-forgetful of his origins, the old man took to carrying stones from the creek, mixing grayish mud with sand. He had fallen in love with the song of a sparrow no one had ever noticed before, and had decided to devote the rest of his life to its study. Meanwhile, pink lady's slipper orchids in mossy thickets exposed themselves to deluded bees. Black cherries bloomed with a scent as cloying as prom queens. Wherever one stepped, something hopped out of the way & looked back over its shoulder with a reproachful gaze. One heard the peepers down by the pond, the toads around the spring & up on the hill the solitary tree frogs, trilling as if it meant something.

Around this time somebody noticed that none of the calendars showed the days of the week the way they always had. It was as if a long-ago ramp festival-cum-revival meeting took off like a hundred helicopters and swept every last Monday into the forgotten corners where only children playing hide-and-seek ever go. Unless, in fact, the calendars had simply begun to look a great deal like weathered boulders, all decked out in clubmoss and rock tripe. The old man's skinny arms grew hard as antlers, and his skin turned gray because he shunned direct sunlight. The sparrow - if that's what it was - had taken to nesting behind his left ear, because it was warm there & out of the wind. There was an almost inaudible rhythm, a pulse that could've been the sound of the surf or a woodpecker thinking about his next composition.

Ultimately, the decision to put down roots is more than mere decision, said the hornbeam tree as its nondescript buds unfurled nondescript leaves. We would all do well to heed such a sense of urgency more wordless than love. A true spirit guide never says what you want to hear, & sooner or later leaves you on the lurch. That night, they say, will be a dark one. But is it too much to ask for, this feeling of intimate involvement in the unfolding of others' destinies? You wake up from a dream in which the only two women you have ever loved have found each other, lose themselves like mirrors turned face to face with nothing, not a speck of dust to come between them: that bottomless ocean.

You wake up & it's all true, tears of joy - if that's the word - run down your cheeks. And you remember how every hundred years a mischievous bodhisattva brushes the side of the mountain with a fly whisk, anticipating its ultimate disintegration into the everythingness of Nevermind. We might well expect a different kind of measure to drive the mountain's own slow symphonies.

The old man's unfinished house should serve in the meantime - not that anyone needs very much where founding myths are concerned. A sharp digging stick & the ears of a night watchman, little else. But this day that used to be a day of rest has brought the finest weather we've seen in a month of Sundays. There's no time, no time for this foolishness! The pancakes will be on in two minutes!

Submitted for the Ecotone Wiki *topic, "Time and Place"*

permalink posted by Dave @ 5/16/2004 08:02:23 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040702184432/neithernor.blogspot.com/2004_05_01_neithernor_archive.html#108470913503899314

Tempus fugitive

By P.

Long before I made a career of meeting deadlines, I learned to count seconds. Lazy as I am, I learned a game early on that I called "five more minutes," in which I would check the clock, close my eyes and go back to my daydream, or my snooze, or just resume reading for five minutes. When I looked up again, I'd either have hit it close and have to get up, or I'd have missed, and then I could authorize myself to wait for another five, or until someone yelled at me to get a move on.

If you think about it, the odds of my missing are pretty good, which is why it was a rewarding game.

As an adult, I find that I steal a lot of my time. Twenty minutes is enough to sit and turn a few pages; 30 will get the kitchen clean; an hour will pay the bills; 40 minutes will mow the lawn. In between are moments to read or snack or work a lick on some small project or other. Sometimes it's enough to just loaf. Eventually, I have to go to work, after all.

I like to imagine a place without time.

Years ago, I liked to climb hills and look across the valleys I had left and imagine how they were for long centuries before we began to shave and carve mountains for highways, before our great-grandparents stripped them of trees and let them grow up with trees again, when there were chestnuts and elms in among the maples and hemlocks. The reverie usually made me more conscious of time, not less.

The sea is timeless, and yet it isn't. The pulse of the planet beats in the steady crash of the swells, and the bits of land eroded away are changed forever, even if they've been eroded away before and will someday rise to be eroded again. I supposed that if you distance yourself from the process, the dynamic itself is unchanging. From orbit, the Earth is always itself, big and round and blue. But the white patches won't sit still -- and who would want them to? And to be in orbit at all, you have to have achieved enormous speeds.

I've known a few moments in the woods, when the wind falls quiet and the stillness endorses my decision to pause on a hike or after the campground chores, when the minutes don't tick so loudly. But, chronophile that I am, I can't stop noticing for long: That shadow has grown; the sky's not the same color; that industrious beetle is actually EATING that fungus.

Maybe I think too much. Here in the back yard are my maple tree, 80 years old and still apparently hale; the flower and herb gardens planted by some ambitious amateur landscaper, age indeterminate; a fox squirrel, less than 3 years old, certainly; a juvenile robin with white patches on its wings; shabbily kept heirloom roses; lilacs and honeysuckle in great profusion, blossoming a week or so early to celebrate the sudden hot weather; a second story of trees and barely visible beyond them, the sheltering walls and roofs of my neighbors' homes. In this green and quiet spot, if anywhere, I should be able to hold still and let go.

Or maybe not. It's 2 o'clock, and the laundry is waiting ...

Source: http://my.core.com/~pzicari/text/Time.html

Timing Planetary Light Shows

By Feathers of Hope (Numenius)

A post for the Ecotone Wiki topic on time and place.

When you think about it, we don't need to know the exact time for the vast majority of events. If you have a 10 AM meeting, it's okay if you enter at 10 o'clock and 47 seconds. Baseball games never begin exactly at 7:05 PM in the evening (make it 7:06 or even 7:11), and movies always have trailers when they begin. Oddly, the class of events that I've encountered in the course of my life that requires the most precise time lies not in human affairs, but in nature.

Celestial mechanics is one of those amazing triumphs of science, and the ability to precisely predict where solar system bodies will be when is what makes solar system observational astronomy a lot of fun. Is tonight the night when three of Jupiter's moons will be eclipsing the giant planet? Time to set up the telescope then. And solar eclipse chasers know exactly when to book their special cruise ship on the other side of the world. But there is a solar system observational game that though a bit more obscure, is quite entertaining in its own right.

I refer to occultations. An occultation occurs when a solar system body moves through the line directly between an observer on Earth and another solar system body or a star. The easiest of these to observe is a lunar occultation. As the moon orbits, it changes its position with respect to the fixed stars. Sometimes it even moves directly in front of a fairly bright star.

It's an amazing event to watch through a telescope, especially if the side of the moon that eclipses the star is not illuminated at the time. The moon slowly, but as steady as anything, creeps up on the star. The moon gets closer and closer to the star, then all of a sudden, within a tenth of a second or so, the star just winks out.

Not all occultations are as quite as dramatic, and these call for more effort on the part of the observer. Sometimes an asteroid invisible in a small telescope will occult a faint star. What happens then is that the star will dim measurably for a bit, and then return to full brightness.

It turns there's good amateur science to be done here, because with precise measurements of exactly when these occultations take place, we can improve our knowledge of the orbits of these solar system bodies. The International Occultation Timing Association coordinates the activities of the relatively small band of amateurs interested in this activity. By precise I mean on the order of 0.1 to 0.01 seconds, but this is achievable with a camcorder and a precise time signal.

And where does one get this precise time signal? The easiest way is via shortwave radio. In the U.S., the station WWV broadcasts time signals on frequencies of 2.5, 5, 10, 15, and 20 Mhz 24 hours a day.

Posted by Numenius at May 14, 2004 11:05 PM | TrackBack

Comments

That's all interesting. It gives rise to many questions which I find hard to formulate such as the consequences of choosing lunar over solar time. And what kind of telescope you'd recommend for a beginner. We get some great clear skies here in Yorkshire though not as desert clear as I think I'd like for star gazing.

Posted by: Coup de Vent at May 17, 2004 02:14 PM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/05/14/timing_planetary.html

Foundations

By Fragments from Floyd

The first time we saw this old house here on Goose Creek it looked as if it would soon be overtaken by forest, would become a home to growing things, melting into the hillside where it sits. Trees emerged from the foundation; poplar and maple sprouts bristled from an ancient brick walkway barely visible in the moss and mud, the white poplar of its outer walls weathered the color of the dirt road below it. Birds nested on the lintels and black snakes and bats formed a closed ecosystem in the attic.

Five years ago this month, we began to "reclaim" this house from a fate that comes naturally when man-made order is left to the slow but certain forces of nature. Where there was random growth and decay, we engineered structure, design and utility. At great expense of human effort we imposed our will on the workings of the natural way of things, moving against the universal

flow toward chaos: a coat of paint; a new foundation; new windows; a fire-safe chimney to keep the inside dry and warm; a water-tight metal roof. And we invited the snakes over to the barn.

From the end of the pasture--the flat floodplain of the creek where five years ago there was a rangy crowded phalanx of pine trees--we stand and look back at this house now in its early summer vestures, dappled in the cool shade of the five maple trees planted so long ago for this very purpose. The grass is green and mowed; the forsythias and bleeding heart have come and gone, Hostas border the new walkway. In the open windows the curtains gently sway. With the changes we've made, the house is tight and dry now, a solid, permanent and vital part of this landscape. It is built--rebuilt--to last. But we know that it will not.

Some day--it may be a hundred years, but some day--this artificial habitation, this solid, comfortable and familiar home place will have weathered its last winter with warm caretakers inside. No smoke will rise from the chimney in December. The yard that takes so much care will not get it, will grow wild, neglected and unkempt. The paint will crack and peel. Poplar and maple seeds that fall in abundance around the house will sprout closer and closer to it's dull sides, will rise and branch and block the drying sun. Their roots eventually will breach the foundation wall and water will find its way to the oak timbers cut from this land and first set in place in the 1870's. The studs and joists will become a slow meal for the ubiquitous organisms that simplify and recycle this edible shelter that once was our home, then the home of others we cannot guess, then their childrens' home.

Meanwhile, in that far-off time, the wind will blow down this narrow valley stirring the tops of the poplars just as it is doing out my window now. The same wildflowers I've watched bloom and fruit over my few years here will grow under forest that ages in the way undisturbed forest will do. In that day when only ruble and twining vines remain where the house once stood, someone will stand on the this little knoll where our front porch used to be and look out across the bottomland. By then, the pasture may have reverted back to forest. The forest will have long since healed from the savage logging of the 90's. The two creeks--Goose Creek and the one I have often written of as Nameless Creek--may have cut new channels with the floods of years, but will still meet each other in this quiet valley as they have for a thousand years.

Through the conservation easement process, we have taken steps to protect this small part of God's green earth so that nature can do what it does so well without the help of man's industries or ambitions. This old house will inevitably go through the processes of change incumbent on manmade things (and other homes may come along here to replace it). Meanwhile, this natural preserve on which the present house stands will see the cycles of growth and repair, diversity and succession that is the way of things in this living world. This house we've renovated is a legacy perhaps for decades to come. This valley watershed sheltered from excessive development--for others to enjoy as we have--is a bequest to the future for generations.

A larger version of the image above is available here.

Posted by fred1st at 07:11 AM | Comments (5)

Comments

And again the sin of envy overcomes me. Pictures and words connecting as intended. Mission accomplished Fred. Well done, and appreciated.

Posted by Darrell at May 11, 2004 09:49 AM

appreciated here too, pop. Maybe more than you guess. Here's to a hundred years...

Posted by nathan at May 11, 2004 11:26 PM

I love the picture Fred. It speaks volumes if one has an ear to hear.

Is that the wheel of a horse-drawn mowing machine? It certainly looks familiar.

Posted by Clarence at May 12, 2004 07:45 AM

That looks like it might have been a plow to me.

So many old house succumb to fire, but I have seen, even explored, some that just fell to rack and ruin. The best demise for a house I ever saw, though, was ice.

Some ingenious soul in Fleischmann's, N.Y., led a garden hose to the roof of a derelict house during a cold winter in the '80s, turned on the tap and let it spray from Thanksgiving through March. The resulting cascade of ice was spectacular, especially with lights at Christmastime.

The weight was supposed to bring the structure down, but I think they had to finish the job with machinery later.

Posted by P. at May 15, 2004 07:20 PM

Very moving.

Posted by Rob at May 15, 2004 08:46 PM

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20040623003336/http://www.fragmentsfromfloyd.com/archives/2004_05.html

As Time Goes By

By Feathers of Hope (Pica)

I'm visiting DocRoc at the famous Tin Chateau this weekend. On the way down here I mapped out our friendship: meeting at MLA in San Francisco one year, where she read a book I had made about a trip to Venice; her moving to Cambridge, Mass, where I lived at the time; her supporting my move to Santa Barbara; her own move to Idyllwild nearby and then Los Angeles; our move north to Davis; her move out here to the Lower Sonora Desert.

Timing is everything, they say. Maybe it isn't everything, but it's a lot. And it gets locked into place. Venice, or Cambridge, or Davis. And in the TC.

For the Ecotone Wiki's Time and Place entry

Posted by Pica at May 15, 2004 11:10 PM | TrackBack

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/05/15/as_time_goes_by.html

Winding Down the Weathered Road

By Laughing Knees

http://web.archive.org/web/20040606052150/http://www.butuki.com/gallery/spring-rain/cherry_blossums_lite_600

Playing with the light around a cherry tree in bloom, Nogawa River, Tokyo, Japan, 2004 (It is well past the cherry blossom season, but I've only this weekend had any time to sit down and work on my spring photographs)

This is the 23rd installment of the ongoing place-based essay series at Ecotone. This week's topic is Time and Place. Please feel free to drop by and read what others have written, and if you'd like, to contribute your own essay.

The white wagtail scurried ahead and stopped, to glance back at us, bobbing his tail and wheezing his shrill chirrup, urging us to "Hurry, hurry! Come, right this way! It's just a little further! Hurry!" When our bicycles neared just enough to loom over him, the loaded panniers brushing the grass at the edge of the asphalt, he popped up into the air and darted further up ahead, to repeat his encouragements. For more than 2500 kilometers it seemed he led the way, the same wagtail, forever ahead of us, like the second hands of a clock.

That was the warmer half of 1995, the year my wife and I got married and decided to set off for a six month honeymoon by bicycle across the northern circle of Europe. We left our jobs, packed away all our belongings, drew wads of traveler's checks from our bank accounts, rolled out our heavily laden bicycles, and flew over the expanse of Eurasia to Holland, where the wind waited for us outside the alleyways and canals of Amsterdam.

Neither of us had ever taken off 6 months to just follow our whims and the first few weeks tailed us with the worries of Tokyo, and the Bullet Train accuracy of speed timed to within seconds. That first day pushing the pedals beyond the sign for the city limits of Amsterdam felt like being flung out the door into the cold; the hardness of the road under our tires seems to present a vast horizontal wall beyond which we could not perceive. In a kind of reverse deadline panic we raced from town to town, urging each other to make the kilometers count, tallying up the numbers on our cycle computers, and feeling unsettled when, because we were still out of shape and exhausted from the wedding preparations, the average day's distance added up to no more than 30 or 40 kilometers. We shouted at Holland's seething winds, holding us back, and bickered when darkness fell too soon in the campsites. The weight of unenclosed hours and days, and when we paused to accept them, weeks and months, whispered for us to hurry, not waste any time, and make up for the guilt we felt from taking so much unproductive time off.

Under a stand of dark leaved chestnut trees on the western edge of Germany we threw our bicycles down and threatened to each return to Japan, alone. It seemed the trip would be over before it had even started.

On the road, cocking its black capped head, stood the wagtail, tsk-tsking. It left us to stand silently gazing out over a field of flowering yellow rapeweed, the heads billowing like waves in the breeze and the slow whale bellies of clouds overhead dragging their shadows across the rolling hills. We munched on bread rolls with gouda cheese, and in chewing calmed down enough to look at each other again.

"It hasn't entered our heads yet, has it?" I offered.

"What hasn't?"

"We've got six months. Six whole months! What are we hurrying for?"

"I don't know. You're the one in a hurry!"

That almost stoked the fire again, but I nodded. "You're right. I don't know what got into me."

"Ever since we arrived you've been racing to finish the day. I can barely keep up."

"I guess I don't know how to get my mind around this. How do you plan for six months?"

My wife had a way with time. She always turned toward the sun and closed her eyes. "We've got six months. We can take our time." A gust of wind brought the fragrance of some distant flowers. My wife inhaled deeply, smiling, and then opened her eyes again. "Didn't we come here to look around? Isn't that why we chose to go by bicycle?"

I sat silent a long time, just seeing the fields and the swallows swooping through the air. A damselfly alighted on my bicycle handlebar and slowly relaxed its wings. I felt something deflate inside myself, replaced by a quiet beating.

"I think I was scared," I said.

"Of what?" inquired my wife.

"Of frayed ends."

She looked at me with a frown, but said nothing. She brightened and picked up her bicycle. "First we have to get rid of a lot of this weight."

Everything changed that day. The whole journey. We slowed down to the point where moving forward invoked less headwind and trees and passersby fell behind with less sharp reduction. We stopped when something nicked the corners of our eyes or the sky swung us into stillness under its great pendulum. The kilometers rolled by day after day, week after week, more as expressions of movement in the scrolling panorama than as signposts. Much of the journey hovered above the bicycle handlebars, each of us lost in long reveries during the spells between towns, and much of that time as partners in a silent traverse of newness, leaving unanswered questions in our wake.

Our perception of time and our participation in the revolving of the globe reflected in the mornings and evenings, when we woke with the calling of the hooded crows, jackdaws, and robins, and with the first light filtering through the walls of the tent, and when we retired to books held up in the coolness of the evening air and the stirring of hedgehogs and shrews in the bushes, before turning out our lights and sleeping with the whole night wheeling through our minds. At times we happened upon a place that so merged the inner stories we bore with its

character of wonder that we lingered for a week or more, tasting the place to its very fruits and vegetables and getting to know its hoary old inhabitants. The bicycles moulted into wings that flew between rest stops for our eyes and feet. We became like the wagtail, landing somewhere to root around among its rocks then flitting a few pedal strokes to the next sunny vantage point.

By the time we reached the Shetland Islands and the Orkneys our muscles took us without protest to where we pointed our front wheels, the rhythm one with our bicycles. Our breathing seemed to exhale from the soil, and we headed on and beyond in all weathers, thoroughly entranced by the light of the sky. We walked for hours, sometimes alone, and returned to the tent with sprigs of flowers or seashells that we handed to each other as if they replaced the money that we used now only for food and occasional transportation. At the campsites other long term travelers joined us over hissing camp stoves to converse and relate tales until deep in the night. Our time and their times brushed together like passing veils, always with the light glimmering through.

We had ceased to exist wholly in the modern world.

So when it came time to return to Japan and back to jobs and four walls and alarm clocks, we floundered along the highways and took every opportunity to escape them. The last days of the journey wound down in the copper light of late autumn, among the wet country hills of Northumberland, England, and the gray tangle of backroads in Belgian town outskirts. Neither of us could find words to protect the dream we had just woken from. Six months had passed and it all seemed like a single instant, like shaking loose summer leaves from a tree.

Japan crashed into our ears, cut into our eyes. We slept for two months with the apartment windows thrown wide open, welcoming the bite of winter air, feeling our breath stoppered in our chests, our muscles aching for resistance. And gradually, insidiously, the clocks ticked louder and the television screen held our gazes longer, and that lone figure tramping along the sandy lanes retreating further and further down the road.

It's been nine years. My beard has sprouted white hair. The bicycles stand furled in the kitchen by the window. Days pass when the sun creeps past the curtain. Sometimes I wake at dawn, after a evening laboring at some other person's dream and falling into dreamless sleep, and hear the wagtail calling. He bobs his tail, like a finger beckoning. "Hurry! Hurry! No time to lose. It's out here where the heart beats like thunder." Like a storm moving across an endless field, and the road leading straight into the dark, gathering clouds.

Posted by butuki at 10:09 PM in Nature and Place | Permalink | Comments (8) Comments: Winding Down the Weathered Road

That was beautiful!

Posted by dave at May 17, 2004 04:12 AM

That is a great story.

Posted by Denny at May 17, 2004 05:30 AM

I admire your courage, and your prose. Have you been following Cassandra's posts?

Posted by P. at May 17, 2004 11:49 AM

Taking time out, slowing down - then going back and having to pick up speed again. the price of creating freedoms for oneself. Sometimes I wonder if it really would be easier never to stray from the path. Years ago a coleague I was close to left the profession we were in to retrain and kept telling me to jump. I didn't but carried on while also going to art school. I'd like to have that kind of time out. But I also worry it would do my head in coming back.

Posted by Coup de Vent at May 18, 2004 06:43 AM

A beautiful piece that leaves me with a deep sense of yearning for those dreams I've turned away.

Posted by Penny at May 18, 2004 08:38 AM

Beautiful writing……..

Posted by Dottie at May 19, 2004 10:22 AM

Yes, beautiful writing. And that photo of the cherry blossoms against the white sky is stunning! I thought it was snow until I enlarged it and looked closer.

Posted by leslee at May 20, 2004 11:41 AM

Beautiful. Thank you for sharing…

Posted by Thomas Sturm at May 20, 2004 04:16 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040606052150/www.butuki.com/archives/2004_05.html#000164

Parts

By Hoarded Ordinaries

We got back from Ohio last night while it was still light; the lawn had been freshly mown and everything was wet from late afternoon showers. This morning the dog and I reacclimated ourselves to Keene by doing our usual walkabout the yard, as I've described before. Coming home after visiting with family for nearly a week is a welcome sensation, like settling into a pair of old, broken-in shoes: comfort. The house was just as we'd left it, but the yard was greener and lusher: the lilacs bloomed while we were gone, as did the irises and some unnamed white-flowering shrub in the dooryard.

Out behind the house where we rent a first-floor apartment stands a wood storage shed where our landlord stores, I assume, yard tools and other household implements. Behind this shed is an assortment of random stuff: boards, a rusty barrel, a bag of garden mulch, a water-soaked tarpelin. These parts, I'm sure, are merely the pieces of a larger work-in-project, something started then abandoned or something never yet begun. These parts, then, can represent either failed dreams or the hope of a promise yet fulfilled, a dream deferred but not abandoned. Like anything, how you see these parts depends in large part on how you look at them, whether you view the glass as being half empty or half full.

Call me an eternal optimist or merely a slob, but I love this old shed and its sprawling arrangement of stuff, a sentiment I feel as well for our back porch with its motley assortment of castoff kitchen chairs. Although Chris's Germanic nature would straighten, clean, and tidy-up everything in sight, I have a soft-spot for the random and the ragtag: I prefer the sight of chipped paint on old wood to the pristine perfection of new siding or a pre-fab storage unit newly purchased from the likes of Home Depot.

As I've said before in reference to my fondness for old abandoned buildings, I have a strong aesthetic ken for the Japanese notion of *wabi-sabi*, the "beauty of things imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete." Abandoned buildings, old weathered sheds, and cast-off project parts all point to the passage of time; perfectly homogenous houses with "vinyl is final" siding do not. Gradually, those boards out back will return to the earth as will the shed that props them up; so too will the hands that made them as well as the hands that placed them. In winter-time, these parts were covered with snow; today, they lay dappled with damp and shrouded in green, looking entirely different from even a week ago when the yard was browner, colder, and less lush. Viewed from above, as a whole, Keene shows only slowly the passage of time, but when viewed

up close, on the level of backyard storage sheds and screened porches, time's hand comes into sharp focus, its passage and effect looming large amid minutiae.

As I mentioned above, the lilacs bloomed while we were gone this week: their buds had been bursting when we left, and now on our homecoming they are in full flower. Lilac is my mother's favorite color, lilacs her favorite flower; I remember from childhood a lilac bush that blossomed in the backyard of a house where my parents no longer live, having moved into the house across the alley when I was about eleven. When we were visiting my folks in Columbus this week, I don't remember whether that lilac bush was blooming, but certainly it must have been: in fact, I can't even remember seeing that lilac bush even though it surely must still be there in my parents' old backyard, a yard visible from the rear kitchen window of that house across the alley where they still reside.

In my mind, I remember that blooming lilac bush as being the backdrop of much of my childhood; I remember my mother looking forward to its blooming every year. In my mind, I have a vivid memory of a photo taken beside that lilac bush: after my First Communion, I posed there in a long pink dress with my mother in a long green dress and my father in a shirt and tie. Looking back on that picture now that I'm back in Keene, I am shocked to see that there is no

lilac bush in it: in the background instead is the maple tree that grew in the middle of the courtyard between our house and the house next door. The tree that I considered my closest childhood friend, that maple is older and larger today but still flourishing, a new crop of neighbors having put a bench swing under its crowning shade.

In theory at least, it should be possible to date both time and place by the blooming of lilacs and other plants: here in Keene, the lilacs bloomed in mid-May whereas in Walt Whitman's New York, lilacs were in bloom when President Lincoln was shot in mid-April, 1965. Psychologists say that smell is the most evocative of the five senses: in Whitman's case, the smell of lilacs always reminded him of Lincoln's death and the procession of his flower-draped casket across America. In his masterful elegy to Lincoln, Whitman used the image of the flowering, heart-leaved lilac, a western fallen star, and the mournful song of a hermit thrush to represent the tragic loss of a man cut down in the prime of a noble life: a flower-draped casket is the ultimate statement of *wabi-sabi*, a touch of care that points to life's impermanence, the way that life continues even though its parts fall prey to time.

Whitman's New York is several hours south of New Hampshire, as is the Ohio of my childhood: the lilacs in both places will inevitably bloom earlier than those here in Keene. Thus a trip that

transgresses latitude will also transcend time: visiting Ohio brings me back to the scenes of my past while submerging me for a time in a natural world several weeks more advanced toward summer than that here at home. Again, these subtle temporal shifts are not visible from a far: they cannot be mapped on any satellite photo or radar scan. But when the parts themselves are viewed apart from the whole, time's movement across the seasons and across the years is revealed, an unmappable motion that none of our grandest projects or storage sheds can track or ignore.

This is a double-duty blog-entry, serving as my contribution to the Photo Friday weekly challenge, "Parts," as well as the Ecotone biweekly topic, "Time and Place."

Comments

Kevin Kim Says:
May 16, 2004 at 11:25 am

If I'm not mistaken, lilac is also Gilderoy Lockhart's favorite color.

Kevin

Loretta Says:
May 16, 2004 at 1:35 pm

The lilacs are in bloom right now in southern New York, right outside the city. I have a white lilac bush by the front door that is very scraggly. I am going to replace it this year, but with white again as I have a fondness for white in the garden.

We used to have a home with two sheds in the back. One even had windows and a Dutch door. I used to fantasize that the original owners kept a tiny pony in it, or sold honey from it. We always planned to put a new floor in it and turn it into a potting shed instead of just the shed where we shoved all the gardening stuff.

I was sad to see that over the last ten years, the former owner took it down and replaced it with a prefab plastic unit from a warehouse store.

Kathleen Says:
May 16, 2004 at 9:55 pm

glad to hear you had a nice trip and a nice return.

Tom Montag Says:
May 17, 2004 at 11:47 am

If I remember correctly, lilacs were blooming in Columbus, OH, when we were there April 9-11th, so the blossoms might have been spent already by the time you were in town.

Lorianne Says:
May 20, 2004 at 7:56 am

Kevin, I'd be willing to bet my mother has *no idea* who GL is. I've always preferred *lavender* over *lilac*: lilac is more on the pink side of the spectrum, lavender's more blue. And I prefer a good deep violet to either one: both lilac & lavender are a bit too pastel for my

taste, but to each his own!
Loretta, your comment perfectly sums up my thoughts on old vs. new sheds. That plastic prefab shed has no stories inside it: it's antiseptic. Give me a little grunge and grit anyday!

Kathleen, as is always true of familial visits, the return was more relaxing than the trip itself, as I'm sure you can understand!
Tom, it makes sense that Columbus lilacs would bloom significantly earlier than those here in NH…and your date goes along with Whitman's observations, too.

Source: http://hoardedordinaries.wordpress.com/2004/05/page/2/

So Many Shades Of Blue

By London and the North

This pic is called A Bad Day Ends Well.

Is everyone else getting spam to their comments? I can't always keep up with deleting it. Even with updating through the MT Blacklist. I'll have a look around - someone's bound to be having a good rant about it!

I'm in cyberisolation at present. I confess to only fleetingly visiting a couple of weblogs recently. It is not hard to feel that one has fallen off the flat planet. I miss the sanity of my cyberchums. I think I'll go visiting later tonight!

I am having some tough days and yet, after a break, I look at it all and wonder why I am letting such ridiculous goings on get to me. Fortunately we are having some wonderful Spring days. The valley is so green and lush. The skies are staggeringly broad and blue. I spent the afternoon yesterday planting up all the pots on the terrace and then spent ages watering everything. I love watering plants. When I was a student I used to get up at the crack of dawn and cycle over to my part time job at Clifton Nurseries in Warwick Avenue and water the plants. The smell of pelargoniums at 6am under running water. Heaven! And the solitude of greenhouses. I really enjoyed removing the dead leaves off the plants. Then onto one of the first institutions I worked in - at that time as a student social worker. I was good at it and innovative. I wanted to be a therapist. On reflection I was too steeped in psychoanalytical ideology at the time to be able to practice with a political awareness which I place value on now.

In 1989, after a decade of institutions, I decided, with such loving encouragement from my friends who believed in me, to jump ship and practise out of a less institutional setting. I enjoyed all the part time bits of work which I did: lots of teaching, being a surgery counsellor, working with staff teams who were struggling, working with people who made such incredible leaps of faith whom I will never forget. Really, I am a very privileged person. The people I have worked with, do work with are braver and most likely stronger people that I may ever be. People are amazing.

I guess it's knowing that so keenly, my belief in human beings' ability - given the opportuinity - to take hold and turn things around and make their world work for them. I have been there for so many people. In ways even many other therapists cannot know.

Institutions, on the other hand, take their toll. They take and do not give back. They attempt to control and stifle committment and innovation. I have to remind myself that the bloke who I want to supervise my PhD is himself a reject of academia. Anyway, the story goes that six years ago after moving Up North I thought that the household income required my doing a part time job as well as the other. So one came along and for three and half years it was fine. Then there were structural changes and a helluva lot of crap from all directions. It's like a relationship: how long do you keep working at the problems before jacking it in.

Me, these days, I'm a long term relationship kinda person. Work through stuff. Speak to it or don't speak to it - whatever seems like the most productive.

The good news is that while I keep getting knock-backs from a nervous and confused institution, I have produced a quality paper for publication and have made arrangements to do a clinical doctorate. Which may involve resigning if my agency still does not give its blessing. But, many buts. I won't call it burn out. It's agency fatigue. What a bugger.

Thanks to Susan who, when I walked out of work at lunchtime today, sent me a text saying C (the baby) AND I ARE PROUD OF YOU. NOW GO AND BUY A MAGNUM. (An ice cream!)

I don't know why but I made this my contribution to Ecotone's special on Time and Place. Maybe that's all it's about... time and place.

Posted by Coup de Vent at 07:30 PM | Comments (4) London and the North Comments: So Many Shades Of Blue

Congratulations are in order for that article and the clinical doctorate track. Here is a toast, to which I am raising this glass of Syrah, to wish you all the best with the academic plans!

Posted by maria at May 18, 2004 03:47 AM

CdV: I think this was a GREAT Time and Place topic. I am full of admiration for your choice of path--I have a friend whose degree was in Law with French from Brum and he went on to do social work in Glasgow--but when you're good they promote you out of practising and into management, and who wants THAT? -- So I think he's going through similar thoughts. Hope this leads you where you want to be, but for the moment it's good to mark the occasion with a raised glass. (Or cup of tea in my case, it being 6:50 am.)

Posted by Pica at May 18, 2004 02:50 PM

I guess it's all time and place, isn't it? To say that only certain "natural" events are moments to be relished is to deny that our own everyday existance, with all the good and the bad, is not part of nature. So your piece would, as Pica pointed out, definitely be considered part of time and place. It's where you are after all, isn't it? You're not any place else...

Posted by butuki at May 18, 2004 06:43 PM

PS... I've been getting so much comment spam lately that I have to take a deep breath and stop myself from destroying the computer. MT-Blacklist is barely doing it any more. I've even got spam visually lodged in my referrer's list, leaving an advertisement at the bottom of the page. I may just have to get rid of the list just to get the advertisement off. What a pain in the ass....

Posted by butuki at May 18, 2004 06:46 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040612180007/www.airenet.co.uk/alife/2004_05.html#000490

Time and Place

By The Whereproject

After much lurking and hanging back, I've decided that it's time to post something for this week's Ecotone topic, "Time And Place." Even as I've fallen behind on writing in my own place blog, I've been thinking about the affect the practice of place blogging can have on perceptual pace. If a weblog has been defined as a "website organized by time," then it makes sense to define a place blog as a weblog organized by place. What this offers is a writing medium that encourages a regular encounter with the ordinary places we inhabit.

As Mitchell Thomashow has pointed out in his book Bringing the Biosphere Home: Learning to Perceive Global Environmental Change, it's difficult for us to develop a deep sense of place when we don't modulate the pace of our perception, if we only experience places at the pace of a car or an airplane and not at the pace of walking or biking. It would appear that the Internet also seems to be part of the problem; as the "information superhighway," it tends to provides us with vast amounts of information in a very short time.

So if the web is going to help us develop a deeper sense of place, it seems we need to find ways to use in such a way that we can modulate our perceptual pace; instead of settling only for the metaphor of the information superhighway, we need to cultivate "information walkways" on the web, ways of using that web that counteract the furious pace and disorienting vastness of cyberspace. Does place blogging provide way of being online that slows us down perceptually and fosters more attention to place? Or is it like attempting to walk or bike on an interstate: it will either get you run over or arrested?

If the writing of Ecotone bloggers is any indication, it appears that place blogging creates a rhetorical rhythm between life online and life in places. The ease of publishing that characterizes the weblog facilitates daily writing, and by extension, daily observation, and because weblogs are online, the production of local knowledge can be shared either with those next door or those in the next country.

Of course, blogging about place does not necessarily or automatically alter our perceptual pace, but its seemingly built-in focus on both place and time does seem to help those of us trying to pay closer attention to where we are.

Source: http://www.whereproject.org/node/92

Time and Place

By Beginner's Mind

It seems like wilderness is defined as a place where no humans live. But here in Vermont, much of what is now wilderness was once the living space of shepherds and farmers. In human history terms, that occurred not so long ago.

At the turn of the 20th century much of Vermont was cleared and used for farming. There was a thriving culture of raising sheep, and there were a number of mills turning wool into cloth.

So, today there aren't many areas of old growth forest. But, you can hike through seldom visited areas and come across the remains of old stone walls. When clearing the land, the settlers would remove the stones from a field and build walls along the edge of the property. There is a stone wall in the woods behind my house that is close to being the property line between me and our southern neighbor.

But now the state is something like 80% forested. When exploring the forest now, not only can you find stone walls, but also cellar holes and even the occasional stone chimney. The chimneys look especially odd, sometimes, because, other that it and the fireplace it surrounds, there is almost no evidence that anyone ever lived there. You can also occasionally run across the rusted remains of an old plow or other farm implement.

So, time here seems to run in circles. The wilderness still holds clues of the mystery lives of dreamers and schemers who came to conquer the Northern Forest. But though it was knocked back, in the blink of a geological eye the woods have gotten back up and is now thriving.

posted by Robert @ 2:21 PM | Comment (1)

Comments

John Elder's book, Reading the Mountains of Home, talks about this very thing. When we were in Sweden a few years ago, where the forests are thick and seem ancient, you could come across old remains of farmhouses deep in the spruces and know that someone once tried to eke out a living from the poor, rocky soil...
Pica | Homepage | 05.21.04 - 10:06 am | #

Source: http://beginnermind.blogspot.com/2004_05_01_archive.html#108490536540155549

impalpable habitations

By alembic

This post is my response to ecotone's (May 15, 2004) biweekly topic: Time And Place

Tim Lingdren of the Where Project is writing his dissertation on the relationship between literacy, place, and the Web. He is a student of Composition and Rhetoric, so the 'place' he is exploring, the way I understand it, is the one in which our senses make themselves at home. This is not an imagined place; it is a space bound and shaped and colored by the habits of our perception ' and the ways in which inhabit the world with our words.

So now I am getting a bit carried away here with the rhythm of my own rhetoric. Lindgren's fine prose put me in the mood to meander through the tiny mazes of my small plot of homegrown discourse.... So let's get back into the clearing, then:

Lindgren's call for exploring the perceptual spaces of the Web (of blogs) as 'information walkways' to help us deepen our experiences of real places reminds me of a contradiction I have been mulling over for a while. This one has to do with the idea that the more space there is for my senses to take in, the less time I have for inhabiting it ' or feeling as if I could know it, in the sense in which knowledge about place is communication about difference. But I am getting into abstractions again:

A couple of years ago, when I was still running my small, homemade blogging system, with few links and few visitors to my site, I used to walk the hills of my neighborhood regularly, as well as spend a considerable time tending my garden. Back in those times, I felt privy to all sorts of information about my neighborhood that can come only from the engagement of all senses: from full presence in both place and time.

When I wrote about my walks or my garden in those days, be it on my old blog, in poems, or essays, my focus seemed to be on the 'plain sense of things' (Wallace Stevens reference), all in an effort to record as closely as words would allow me, the immediate world which I inhabited as much with my senses as with my words.

Once I migrated my blog to Movable Type and people started to stop by, and I, turn, started to travel farther in the worlds of blogs, my walks in my physical neighborhood became less frequent and I spent a lot less time in my garden, or even caring about it. My focus shifted to worlds that came to me first in words only. At first, it was intoxicating to find out about the state of certain flowers in some other blogger's garden in Vermont, for example ' even as my own rose bushes, just out of view of my office, began to fail. To know where in London one can have good Lebanese food, to take another example, made me feel, somehow, a bit more worldly ' or rather, a bit more as if my neighborhood just got bigger, even as I was eating leftovers from my fridge because I didn't have the time to go exploring restaurants or grocery stores within a wider circle of my physical neighborhood....

With my longer daily walks across blogs, which were now part of my expanded 'neighborhood,' the perimeters of my focus grew wider too. I was still trying to take in the 'plain sense of things' and record as closely as words would allow me, the immediate world that I inhabited as much with my senses as with my words. But where is the plain sense in things in a world of blogs that came to me as 'recent imaginings of reality" (another Wallace Stevens reference), day in day out?

It wasn't until very recently, when necessity 'forced' me to spend days on end by a lakeside, talking with a great number of people from my physical neighborhood, that I realized just how disconnected I have become from the place I call home. Because of my blog walks, I am beginning to know more about the subtle changes in downtown Keene, NH, for example, than about those that are taking place in Larkspur, CA, which is visible to my eyes from my window ' though obviously not as clearly, and as particularly framed for me, as Keene is.

So where am I? Good question ' in more sense than one, or even two. A crossroads of sorts, in which, if I take the road that leads into the ever-widening neighborhood of the blogosphere, I will get to know bits and pieces of the wider world, as reflected in shards of images and impressions. But, I will also get know less about the physical world in which I live in a web of relations, and which sustains me ... not only in my daily needs, but also in my creative explorations ' in the more perilous webs of the imagination.

For me, without a focus on the physical neighborhood, without that pace in which all the senses can take their turn in roaming the 'walkways,' there is no beat or heart in writing ' only the 'shadowless moon wholly composed of shade/Women with other lives in their hair...' (Wallace Stevens, 'Study of Images II').

Time and place in the blogosphere, seem to be working against each other for the me who is the writer. Blogging about place takes time, not only to write with an informed and informative perspective, but also to inhabit, with all senses, a place that, in the end, resists all description. Perhaps this is too oblique (maybe because I need more time to understand its relation to what I am saying) but here is Wallace Stevens again, as one take on literacy, place, and time from 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven':

II

Suppose these houses are composed of ourselves,
So that they become an impalpable town, full of
Impalpable bells, transparencies of sound,

Sounding in transparent dwellings of the self,
Impalpable habitations that seem to move
In the movement of the colors of the mind,

The far-fire flowing and the dim-coned bells
Coming together in a sense in which we are poised,
Without regard to time or where we are,

In the perpetual reference, object
Of the perpetual mediation, point
Of the enduring, visionary love,

Obscure, in colors whether of the sun
Or mind, uncertain in the clearest bells,
The spirit's speeches, the indefinite,

Confused illuminations and sonorities,
So much ourselves, we cannot tell apart
The idea and the bearer-being of the idea.

Posted by maria at May 24, 2004 12:01 PM | TrackBack

Comments

Maria: some great stuff here. You're making me want to think through some old Ecotone posts and write again on the same topics.

What is valuable to me about visiting other blogs (and reading books) is how they function as windows onto a world I can't see--from my kitchen counter in Davis or from the limits of my own experience or knowledge (or perception). The danger, I think, is when that starts to susbtitute for the effort to expand my perceptions and experience of the place I'm in. I should walk more; impossible to ignore my surroundings when I'm walking.

Posted by: Pica on May 25, 2004 07:05 AM

Maria:

This is a rich post, and I really appreciate the way it articulates a tension that I feel all the time.

As I mulled it over, I began wondering how this tension is different from the problem nature writers face, namely the tension between spending time in nature versus sitting down to write about nature? When does the mediating role of writing become an end in itself, something that obstructs meaningful engagement with actual environments? Conversely, to what extent does the practice of writing enable a deeper engagement than we would otherwise have?

While it seems like place blogging shares some of these tensions, there also are important differences that emerge when we read and write online, but I think we still have a hard time assessing the gains and losses of allowing online technologies to mediate our engagements to place.

As you read other place blogs, do you ever feel like they inspire you to explore your own places more? Did they ever give you a new lens through which to observe your own locale? It sounds like, looking back, they tended to be more of a distraction. Do you think this has anything to do how they were written? Perhaps one measure of a successful place blog should be how well it inspires readers to explore their on places. When we write about place, is part of our "job" to persuade our readers to leave our sites and get outside? I don't really know what this would look like, but it seems like it's worth talking about.

Tim

Posted by: Tim on May 27, 2004 07:02 AM

Tim:

Your first set of questions about the role writing plays in the mediation of our relation to place is a thought-provoking one, indeed. I don't have the answers, which, of course, would have to be teased out with the help of a research methodology that could measure engagement, meaning and their effects on changes in the environment.

I like your observation that blogging displays important differences from the more traditional ways people have been writing about place. You are right to point to that balance sheet of losses

and gains that come from allowing technology to mediate both our relationship to writing and the places in which we live and write about. Of course, the tricky question is (and that's why you are writing a dissertation on this, since there are no clear answers) what goes into the gain column, and what ends up in the losses column.

Finally, to answer some of the more direct questions you posed about how reading place blogs affects both my relation to my place and blogging ' all excellent questions that many of us place bloggers should ask ourselves periodically:

Yes, other place blogs have inspired me to explore my 'place' more. But that exploration has been -- how to put this in a concise (blog-style discourse)? ' mediated or framed by both the discourse of blogging (short and frequent posts, peppered with relevant photos) and also by the kind of 'local' issues and blogworthy places other bloggers considered relevant to share To exaggerate a bit, so that I can make my point, it's almost as if I tried to present 'my' literal place in my literary blog in text and images that would fit the 'popular discourse on place' ' and that's a framework that has questionable roots (or, to follow in the analogy, wood pieces) in the local culture.

I think that the 'aha' moment that, for me, bridged traditional ways of writing about place and place blogs came when I first read the work of W.G. Sebald. His 'The Emigrants' made time into place, and it did so in a way in which blogs work: passages on different topics and seemingly random photos, a shadowy narrator of sorts, but all of it, over the course of reading, cohering into a discernible narrative. His 'The Rings of Saturn,' did the opposite: made place into time for me and inspired me to undertake my then walks in my own neighborhood with more care ... as well as to write differently, not only on my blog, but also in my offline work.

Anyway, I could go on and on about this ' but it would make bad form, in the sense of blog etiquette, wouldn't it?

Posted by: maria on May 27, 2004 12:15 PM

You've articulated for me the conflict that I have felt since I started blogging six months ago. I write considerably about art and writing and the creative process, and I am acutely aware of how much time the blog takes out of my limited "free time" when I would be writing fiction and creating art.

At the same time, I am very aware of the degree to which my writing and art has been inspired by the blogs I read and the web sites I surf. The connections I have made with other artists and writers have enriched my real time life as much as my virtual reality.

It is a question of balance. Unfortunately, it is too easy for me to sit with my laptop and blow an evening when I could have been writing, creating art, or reading. Or in the morning, I'm scrambling to get out the door on time because I spent an hour composing and polishing a post.

I can't imagine turning away from the Internet altogether. You can't shut the barn door once the cows are in the pasture! Danny Gregory goes on "electron fasts" when he does not post for a week and plunges into his projects and life. I think it is a fine way to handle the conflict.

Posted by: Loretta on May 28, 2004 04:40 AM

Balance is indeed the key, Loretta ... and I like the idea of an "electron fast" in the wake of a bout with information indigestion problems....

Posted by: maria on May 28, 2004 09:54 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040706135824/www.ashladle.org/archives/000358.html#000358

A Place for This Time

By Switched At Birth

He was drawn to the window wall and stood there, gazing out toward the far mountains, hands clasped behind his back. He and Buck went out on the deck, while his wife and I sat on stools at the island bar in the kitchen, she asking questions and me providing answers for the mundane but essential details of life in this house.

I could see her husband talking with Buck, his shoulders slumping into his chest and belly swaying out a bit over his pants, in that way of too-long deskbound newly retired executives. Short, blondish hair, he reminded me vaguely of the actor, Brian Dennehy, hands carving the air as he spoke. Every moment or two, he turned back to the view, resting his elbows on the deck rail.

In the kitchen, his wife of more than forty years, watched him, too. "It's always been his dream to have a glass house in the mountains," she said, a trace of *something* in her voice. Wistfulness? Worry? "He had better live at least ten years, because I don't plan to move again. They're going to have to carry me out of here in a box, or down the hill to the old folks home."

We all walked around the house together, Buck and I demonstrating what the various light switches turned on, how the fancy faucet in the kitchen sink works, the quirk in closing the dishwasher door, where the satellite dish wiring enters the house, and all the various other small details any of us could think of. Then it was time for them to go, to return to their home several states away, pack up and return to move in on June 11. By then, the house will be empty and ready for them, only a bottle of champagne and a fresh bag of Smoky Mountain Roasters coffee beans left to greet them.

We gathered at the top of the steps near my desk, looking through a French door to the tree-lined ridge. There was a moment of quiet. Then he spoke: "I had a bout with non-Hodgkins lymphoma about four years ago. Went through a round of chemotherapy." Thud. I felt it in my belly. I could see Buck tighten, too. We waited. "Last month, a spot of *something* turned up on the Cat scan. I may need to go through another round." He hit the subject lightly, and with considerable grace, but there it was.

They came the next day in the early evening to meet with a contractor to talk about adding another set of exterior stairs and a garage. We went out to visit with them for a few minutes and wish them safe journey. Just before leaving, he shook our hands, and this man, who I suspect is considered by many to be undemonstrative, hung onto Buck's hand an extra beat and, looking at us both intensely, said "You've just given us everything -- everything. Thank you."

Back upstairs, alone again, Buck poured a scotch for me and made himself a Manhattan. We stood in the kitchen, quietly, looking at each other. Finally, I spoke. "This man needs some time here, looking out over these mountains."

"Yes," Buck agreed. "They need this place at this time more than we do."

This is my submission to Ecotone's *May 15 topic: Time and Place. Better late than never, I hope!*

07:12 AM in Permalink

Comments

That's really, really, beautifully done.

Posted by: dale | May 27, 2004 06:08 PM

"You've just given us everything -- everything. Thank you."

Those words brought tears.

Posted by: Penny | May 27, 2004 06:56 PM

Nicely told, again. Thanks.

Posted by: Tom Montag | May 27, 2004 09:59 PM

This is one of those rare posts that has become a story, intact. And a signature moment in your lives. I love the beautiful simplicity of your writing. Of the hundreds of writers I have enjoyed over the years, I love this sort of thing best.

Posted by: Denny | May 28, 2004 07:56 AM

Oh Beth, I have felt very sad knowing I will never visit this beautiful place anymore. This post made me feel so much better. I know these people will find much comfort and joy in that magnificent place. I'm so glad you could share it with them.

Posted by: Ann | May 28, 2004 08:27 PM

Beautiful story.

It's easier to let go knowing that it will be a peace-giver for the next family.

Posted by: Kathleen | May 29, 2004 04:37 PM

A very poignant piece and so beautifully written.

Posted by: susanne | May 30, 2004 03:55 AM

Hey, Beth, this was an incredible piece. Why not submit this one to Sun Magazine? Do you read Sun?

Posted by: Fran | May 30, 2004 05:39 PM

Your thoughtful words and sensitivity brought tears to my eyes: "They need this place at this time more than we do."

You are such good people. You deserve the very best in your new life in Florida.

Posted by: David St Lawrence | June 2, 2004 07:55 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040707122618/longleaf.typepad.com/switched_at_birth/2004/05/_he_was_drawn_t.html

Imaginary Places

Bi-Weekly Topic for June 1, 2004

Just As He Pictured It

By Fragments from Floyd

Imagination is a peculiar place of the mind: a balmy desert island; a glowing cavern deep in the earth where dragons live; a jungle populated with talking animals. These places exist in childhood when our imaginations form much more of our understanding of how things could be than later experience informs us of how things, in fact, really are. Life is either much better or much worse in imagined places than the place where we live. Places that are worse than where we live make us happy for our own warm beds and even for our scolding mothers who are much more to be desired than the green-complected witches who lives beyond the dark forest in that other land. Better places--even if in a land far, far away--allow us to tolerate the annoying younger brother and the bully who lives at the end of the block, because someday, we'll be kings or knights or super-heroes; we'll find chests brimming with rubies and doubloons in a land of eternal sunshine and perpetual desert. Maybe then, we'll live in those imagined places, happily ever after.

Imaginary places are future places we have never been--beyond, above, below, or within other realities. We place our greatest hopes and greatest fears in imaginary places. Then we grow up, grow old and perhaps, lose our imagination, and too often, our hopes.

Once upon a time, after the boy had grown up, moved away and learned what science said the world was really like; after he had a family and a house--had lived in many houses, really, in many different places--he began a new job in an empty office. They told him about the warehouse where cast-off things were stored; he should go there to see if there was a desk or chair or goose-neck lamp he could use.

In a far, dark corner of the dingy old warehouse, covered in dust and obscured by filing cabinets and tall bookcases, was a picture on the dull water-stained wall. It was unlike any other picture the man had ever seen. In it were trees and sky and water--ordinary things, to be sure--but the man swore that he could see himself in the picture. Not really see himself as much in it as from it. He could enter the picture and look all around him--up at the sky, down into the water, at the plants in the forest that he knew by name. He remembered as a boy, in the land of his imagination, he knew of a place just like this one. The creek was full of fish. Under every log, a brightly colored salamander lived. Brilliant birds sang in the trees. And it was always different, each time he went there. The light shimmered in the leaves overhead--first leaves of spring, then late summer. At one moment it was sunny and fair, the next cloudy, threatening, smelling of rain.

And he knew he must have this imaginary place, inside its frame, above his desk in his new office.
It remained there on his wall for him to see, every day--good days and bad: days he was happy to be where he was and days he longed to find his place, out and far away from the jangled congestion and unpleasantness of noise and clutter; away from cities, hiways and shopping malls. He hoped someday to find this place where he spent so much time each day in imagination--on the banks of the silver creek under golden trees with the ever-changing sky overhead.

In time, he moved again. "One last time" he told his wife. And they moved into a small cabin in a beautiful country place. But it was not yet home to him. While he enjoyed his walks along the peaceful lane down to the edge of the mountain where he could see forever, there was not a trace

of his beautiful creek with the silver sky that he knew from the picture. It now hung on the wall of their modest cabin. They had almost given up hope of finding the home they longed for. And just when they gave up struggling to find it, it found them.

At first glance, it was not a place the man even wanted to stop and inspect. The old house looked as if it might fall in from neglect. The land had been beautiful at one time, but the most uncaring of loggers had left behind little of that beauty. "No, No!" insisted the wife. "This is the place". She brought the man back many times over the next few days to see what it was there that called to her. One day they walked on the land through briars and tangles along a grassy road that had seen few if any travelers in many years. It followed the slender valley further and further back where the valley grew narrow. At last, they rounded a bend where the forest had grown tall and escaped the logger's axe. The trees arched over the creek. The creek full of bright fish glistened as if it were made of polished aluminum. Shadows dappled the dark earth under the grand old trees. And all at once, he knew.

"This is the place in the picture. This is the forest and creek I have dreamed of since I was a small boy. This is the country place I longed for all these years while the picture hung on my office wall, both taunting me and giving me hope that there was indeed just such a place." They moved to the place and they live there to this day. The picture is there, too, across from the hearth, above the old piano where its travels have come to a pleasant ending.

The man wondered the day he first saw the creek of his dreams--wonders still--had he not held this image in his mind and in his heart so tightly and with such hope all these years, would such a place as this have become real at all? Would this peaceful valley along the silver creeks even have existed for him to find? Did this place come into being by the power of imagination? This is a thing that he almost believes, and something that he will never know for sure.

"Imaginary Places" is the biweekly topic at Ecotone this time around. This is a true story where imagination finds reality. The picture above hangs over our piano.

Posted by fred1st on June 1, 2004 5:38 AM | Permalink

Comments

THAT piece of writing was beautiful! I am going to print it out and have my youngest son{9} read it. He needs to read it. He is your first paragraph and I am his keeper of dreams. Sometimes he loses hold of what dreams are. Life is about hope and imagination. If we loose that part of us we grow old and soon die. Thank-you for making the beginning of my Monday(oops)Tuesday a special one.

Posted by: Sallie | June 1, 2004 6:40 AM

You showed us your beating heart here, Fred. Not only showed us, but let us hold it in our own hands. Entrusted it.

Thanks for a memorable story.

Posted by: Beth W. | June 1, 2004 7:27 AM

Thanks, Fred for a beautiful piece of writing! This strongly shows the power of imagery and how it supports our hopes and dreams.

Posted by: Gretchen | June 1, 2004 7:58 AM

Wonderful! This reminds me of the film *Shadowlands,* about C.S. Lewis and his wife Joy Davidman. The title comes from a picture in Lewis's study that he & his brother always dreamed about, a place they called the Shadowlands. When Joy is diagnosed with cancer & knows she is dying, she & Lewis go on a honeymoon to the place depicted in the picture. It's a beautiful but heartbreaking movie. Part of the poignancy of imaginary places is the fear that you'll never find them (or you'll find them too late). Thank goodness you found yours, and thank goodness you've shared it with us.

Posted by: Lorianne | June 1, 2004 8:05 AM

I'm glad you followed your dream to a happy conclusion. Thanks for sharing it with all of us.

Posted by: David St Lawrence | June 1, 2004 11:16 PM

Source: http://www.fragmentsfromfloyd.com/fragments/2004/06/just_as_he_pictured_it.html

By Switched At Birth] "Looking at this old photograph I found of myself while packing up the picture albums, I am struck by this young girl's clear-eyed serenity. She is me. I am she. What did she know, I wonder, and when did she know it?"

By World of Pure Imagination]

I seek a certain place¡ªnot so much imaginary as imagination itself. Days on which I write, I hope to sidle in unseen, as a backwards glance in a reflective window reveals a movement, a stream of sunlight¡ªa glimpse of memory. (Also featuring lyrics from Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory!)

By My Head and Welcome To It] Why I would write that there's an echo in there beats me, but there it is. -- P.

Conjuring place

By Via Negativa

The bi-weekly topic at Ecotone Wiki *is "Imaginary Places."* Go there.

All places are imaginary.* It's how we imagine them that makes all the difference. Do we come in peace?

Do we come to conquer, to colonize, to pioneer, to inhabit, to celebrate, to lose ourselves, to find ourselves?

When we move, do we move as the Amish do, following careful investigation and in full consideration of the needs of the community that will move with us?

If we move in answer to the demands of job or family, do we look for places that remind us of the last place we lived? Do we seek a new version of the first place we ever knew, having perhaps imprinted upon it like a newly hatched chick upon its mother?

When we arrive, do we test and taste the air, the soil, the water? Do we come to a place with all our old dreams intact, convinced that if we can find our own quiet little corner, all our unhappiness and anxieties will melt away?

Are we passionate, casual, indifferent? Surely the places we inhabit will reflect the level of intensity we bring to them. Do we arrive in a new place like a suitor looking for his one true love, or like someone on a quest for the ultimate orgasm? When we fantasize about getting away from it all, do we picture a tent or a cabin in the midst of the perfect, airbrushed, Sierra Club calendar pin-up? Do we come like a hermit or a monastic community, looking for the right combination of sublimity and enchantment to lead our minds away from more worldly temptations?

Do we imagine the land as a stage for individual or divine action, as an environment, as an ambience? Do we pledge ourselves to the cherished wild only to domesticate it, like the stereotypical Southern woman marrying a rogue? Are we seeking a powerful or distinguished father- or mother-figure, or a charismatic teacher who will know just what to do with the confusion of desires that follow us around?

Do we seek a laboratory for scientific, spiritual or aesthetic experimentation? Do we seek symphony or silence? Natural complexity? A blank slate?

If we concede to places the right to elude human control, can we be comfortable with the uneasiness, the sense of permanent homelessness this might inspire? Can we preserve open spaces within our own hearts?

Can we become, as Aldo Leopold suggested we must, just plain citizens of the land community?

Can we imagine the land finally as its own person, imagining and inhabiting each of us in turn?

Do we dare?

---

*That is, spaces can be delimited and described at varying scales in a theoretically endless number of ways, within the limits of human observational skills, sign systems and/or trans-human revelations.

For related discussions, see Ten Thoughts About Possession, Learning language, learning poetry, and Holding forth (among others).

permalink posted by Dave @ 6/2/2004 09:50:29 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040701052528/http://neithernor.blogspot.com/2004_06_01_neithernor_archive.html

Foul Weather or Natural Causes

By g r a p e z

In New Hampshire the Old Man of the Mountain is emperor. Its image is on everything from license plates to road signs, and even supplied the title of a Nathaniel Hawthorne story. The Old Man was made of five slabs of Conway granite balanced atop one another high on a cliff on Cannon Mountain in the Franconia Notch. It took no imagination to see that Old Man when viewed from the north; he was real. Last May 2003, he came tumbling down. My daughter and I viewed the scene of the crime for the first time this weekend.

The autopsy reported that there "was a cavern, about four feet wide, behind the Old Man's chin that ran almost the entire width of the Old Man's face. About 80 percent of the chin block hung out over the cliff… Thus, just about two feet of the chin was anchored to the cliff, held there only by the weight of the four slabs above it. Amazingly, the other four slabs were positioned just so, so that the center of gravity of the chin block was within that two-foot span, allowing the entire Old Man to balance on its chin for centuries."

Supposedly the death was caused by "the physical and chemical damage to the Old Man's granite through the years, especially in the cavern, eventually [wearing] away enough rock just behind the chin that the center of gravity of that block moved slightly forward, past the cliff face. When that happened… the chin tumbled down the cliff, and the rest of the Old man quickly followed."

Oh sure. The fact that an interstate rolls through the Notch now had nothing to do with it. Acid rain through the years was not a contributing factor. And the fact that it all happened during the spring Iraq War was just coincidence.

Marge Bruchac, a Missisquoi Abenaki, wrote:

When you inhabit a place for thousands of years, you learn that change, even in great earth formations, is inevitable. Some traditions call it a good sign when certain of the old rock people decide to move around. Many of my kin believe that the spirit of the old chief embodied in the rock face has been freed from his modern imprisonment, and is walking the land again. On Sunday, May 4, an Abenaki drum group, including members of the New Hampshire Intertribal Council, gathered by the lake, at the foot of the mountain, to sing honoring songs. Some of us wrote poems for the Old Man.

Nanibosad, the night walker, whispered to him that night

when the caretakers were looking away,

the turnbuckles and chains and braces broke

the Old Man yawned, and smiled, and dove, headfirst, into the lake

ah, kadosmida,

he is saying,

wligonebi, the water feels good

the people need me

Enjoy your swim Old Man.

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20050317004806/grapez.blogspot.com/2004/06/foul-weather-or-natural-causes.html

Imagined Places

By Feathers of Hope (Pica)]

Lilliput and Brobdingnag. Earthsea. Wonderland. Middle Earth. Eden. Imaginary places have shaped our culture since before it was a culture. Idyllic or otherwise, imagining a place with specific topography and characteristics allows writers to tell stories that couldn't be told if they were set, say, in Watford.

For a time I was hooked on Star Trek, where a different imaginary world appeared each week. How will this new place affect our heroes? Sometimes the places were there only by inference--the Borg collective is more of a psychogrouping than a physical locale--but every new setting allows the writers to play creator of the universe, week after week after week.

Stomping around the Salton Sea this weekend, where the salt and heavy metal smell combines with the pink algae that can only survive in such extreme conditions, put me in mind of Mordor (or its comical offspring, Terry Pratchett's city of Ankh Morpork). For some reason it's easy enough to imagine dystopias; it's having the courage to imagine a future where there's no poverty, no environmental crises, no hatred that seems really tough.

Why is this? And, more to the point, what happens if we can't?

This is a contribution to the Ecotone Wiki's *joint topic of* Imaginary Places

Posted by Pica at June 2, 2004 10:11 PM

Comments

You should read some of the later entries in Terry Pratchett's "Discworld" series; the dystopia becomes a mere background to well-rounded characters and lively adventure. But you're right that science fiction and fantasy have lost their optimism. I like to imagine it's a fashion thing, but I suspect it isn't...

Posted by: P at June 3, 2004 03:51 PM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/06/02/imagined_places.html

carless in marin

By alembic

This post is my response to ecotone's (June 1, 2004) biweekly topic: Imaginary Places

I drive on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard in Marin every day, sometimes five or six times a day. My car is one of the many that hurl relentlessly through the blocks traffic permitting at high noon or past the full moon, in wind or rain, and through the seasons. The stretch of the road that I travel on daily has sidewalks, but not on both sides. These vestigial paths are extremely narrow, protected by metal barriers in places where the turn in the road could easily propel the car of a careless driver to careen up and crash into the long line of uniform fencing that separates the backyards of houses from this main road.

I rarely see anyone walking on these sidewalks. Occasionally, when I am not too lost in my own thought processes behind the wheel as I drive along this stretch of the road, I will see a Hispanic woman walk toward the bus station. At other times, I might catch the odd bicyclist pedal by, as well as kids going to and fro from school though there arent that many of them walking (which is one of the reasons why there is so much traffic on the road; all those parents ferrying the kids from school to home and from home to activities).

Well, today I was forced to walk that stretch of road myself. My car broke down yesterday and is undergoing some very expensive surgery at the moment. So, I set out, on foot, around 9:00 a.m. in order to deliver my work that was due at the office thats less than 2 miles from my house. It was already past the time for rush hour traffic around here, what with some of the schools out already. Still, there was a constant stream of cars that generated a mighty wind that carried generous wafts of exhaust fumes, delivering a range of acrid smells I didnt think was possible for a nose to register.

As I trudged along, straining to hear in the din of traffic Roy Orbison on my iPod, I also found myself struggling through what almost felt as wild brush the vegetation that seeped from gardens past the fence spilling every which way on the sidewalk, this no-gardeners land. There were straggling remnants of perennials that were seeded from packets handed out by the homeowners association some time ago, and there were aggressive branches of what looked to me like some kind of a bamboo, all of this green bounty making it difficult to negotiate this tight path between the river of cars and the wall of fence.

So here it was, I thought, this part of Marin, the untended narrow sidewalk that falls between imaginary lives. There is that constructed life on the other side of the wall of fence: the landscaped gardens, however small, surrounding the houses, that realm of the private life. There is that imagined freedom that is associated with mobility: the drivers of those cars whizzing past the sidewalk, lost in thought or reveries about the great chain of schedules that tied them into a parallel (and imaginary) road to and imagined success of sorts.

And there I was, between the fence sheltering all that was private and the road, where without wheels the destination seemed unimaginably far, hoping for a ride or an opening through the fence anything to get me out of the middle, that place that seemed so hostile to both the imaginary and the real that surrounded it.

Posted by maria at June 09, 2004 04:58 PM

Comments

Spaces like this where the constructed environments don't quite meet up with each other are interesting. Nobody really sees them or takes responsibility for them.

Posted by: bill on June 10, 2004 06:14 AM

I'm particularly interested in the volunteer vegetation. I suppose it's only a matter of time before someone is dispatched with a container of Roundup.

Once when I was visiting my brother when he lived in Los Angeles I asked whether there was a bus from A to B. He looked at me, uncomprehending. (This was the little squirt I used to ride the number 72 on to school, the number 40 to downtown, the number 27 all the way down the Castellana in Madrid.) The response: only poor people ride the bus. Meaning, I assume, that it's not done, or it's not safe, or whatever other realms his imagination as a temporary Angelino could conjure up.

Posted by: Pica on June 10, 2004 07:01 AM

This reminded me of Castaneda's "crack between the worlds," the path a warrior walks that is not defined by anyone's conventional wisdom. A warrior, I presume, because it is such a dangerous place...

Posted by: Denny on June 12, 2004 07:50 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20041014095223/http://www.ashladle.org/archives/000365.html

In Search Of Snouters

An entry for the Ecotone Wiki *topic on* imaginary places.

On an island in the remote and unexplored South Seas archipelago of Hy-yi-yi, a fleeing Swedish prisoner-of-war in 1941 made a discovery that startled the zoological world. This was the existence of an entirely unknown order of mammals, the Rhinogradentia. This group of about 150 species is remarkable for the adaptations of the snout, the nose being modified to serve an amazing variety of functions ranging from fishing lures to aerial locomotion.

Unfortunately, the entire archipelago was destroyed in 1957 in an earthquake accidentally set off by an atomic test some 125 miles distant. The only surviving record of the rhinogrades was a publication by a scientist, Harald Stümpke, also lost in the earthquake, entitled *Bau und Leben der Rhinogradentia* (republished as *The Snouters: Form and Life of the Rhinogrades*, 1981, U. Chicago Press).

Happily, a recent expedition to the deep forests and caves of Slovenia produced evidence that members of this order still survive, taking a remarkable photograph in July of 1999.

Posted by Numenius at June 3, 2004 11:04 PM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/06/03/in_search_of_sno.html

Anniversary Place

Bi-Weekly Topic for June 15, 2004

It has been 13 months since Ecotone: Writing about Place began collecting essays on places, people and the ideas that make them real. Has consciously writing this way changed your thinking? Were there "Aha!" moments when you read, or when you wrote, something? (P.)

Happy Birthday, Ecotone!

By Fragments from Floyd

"How did you start thinking about 'place", and why did you start writing (or blogging) about it?"

One year ago on June 15, an energetic and eclectic group of bloggers, LiveJournalers and other web writers united to turn our words to the topic above--the first of what has come to be the "biweekly" opportunity to write about place. The online site bears the dysphonic but appropriate name from the field of ecology-- **Ecotone**: "a place where two natural communities meet and in which there is greater diversity than in either of the component habitats by itself".

Here is a list of the biweeklies to date, responses all totalled including several hundred essays, rants, lamentations, expositions and narratives somehow, loosely or tightly bound to place.

I think back over the names of people I've come to know as friends through the Ecotone in this year. It includes many of the place bloggers at Ecotone and also many readers--bloggers and non-bloggers alike--who have found Fragments via Ecotone postings or blogrolls of Ecotone writers. I'm not sure any of us could put our fingers accurately on what it is that binds us together loosely as a community of writers and readers. Maybe, in another year, we'll better understand our connectedness to place and to each other. I can say, there is something here that warrants digging deeper.

I tried to express my own motives and hopes a year ago by using the analogies of maps and lenses. I didn't say it very well but I still think I agree in principle with what I wrote in response to the very first Ecotone biweekly topic. My map is dotted now with pins marking the places of writers in the northeast, the middle-west, the southeast, the Left Coast and across the world--so many places I could travel to now and feel like "I've already been here because I read what he says about the countryside, where she goes with her camera, how they come back from their local haunts with word pictures from those mountains, towns or fields." And I gather many of you feel in some small way the same about Goose Creek and the Blue Ridge.

I'd like to think there is much more to say and many more writers to become involved in the Ecotone its offspring someday. It has become a resource for more than a few. The Ecotone writings have found a role in the dissertation topic described at Tim Lindgren's Where Project--

an "experiment in place-based blogging." Who knows what other things are working behind the scenes.

And so ends the first year of Ecotone. Thanks especially to Numenius and Pica at **Feathers of Hope** for setting up and administering the wiki that houses the site. I look forward to getting to know more writers about place in the coming year; and there at one point, there was even some talk of a gathering some day for a face-to-face place-writer's weekend. Hmmmm.

Posted by fred1st on June 15, 2004 4:59 AM | Permalink

Comments

I've been lurking and enjoying for a long time...at this juncture, I'll join in...Congratulations on a wonderful project.

Posted by: Denny | June 15, 2004 1:57 PM

Source: http://www.fragmentsfromfloyd.com/fragments/2004/06/happy_birthday_ecotone.html

Tuesday, June 15, 2004

ELEPHANT EAR in my back yard

This is a contribution to the June 15th ECOTONE wiki topic, Anniversary Place.

Happy Birthday, Ecotone Wiki! It's hard to believe that we launched this experiment in writing about place a whole year ago, but it is not difficult to remember the wealth of fine posts that have been written, the friends and connections made, the warm commentaries, and the hours spent contemplating the topics and trying to write something worthwhile in response. The Ecotone has, in the process, changed from an address in the ether to its own virtual place. It feels tangible because it is where I have encounterd real people who inhabit real places and imagine others, and it's a place where we have hashed out a new form of essay-writing in the blogosphere.

However it evolves or dissolves in the future, the Ecotone will always remain fondly in my writer's memory because it has prodded me into writing down many formerly inchoate thoughts about my own relationship to place. Much of my writing is about this topic anyway, but the Ecotone topics, with both broadly-sketched parameters or more specific focii, have forced a sharpened concentration into how I felt about, and remembered, different aspects of place - and that has been valuable to me, both as person and writer. They've given me an excuse to explore my childhood haunts in central New York, and contrast them with my adult home in northern New England, finding in the process new aspects of the girl who grew up somewhere inbetween. And now, finding myself drawn to a new, urban environment, I think a year of writing and thinking about place is helping me understand what's going on in our lives, and to sort through the emotional, as well as physical, ways that different places affect and change me.

But the most important gift I am grateful for on this Anniversary is the gift of so many new friendships. Good heavens, I can hardly imagine life before I knew Pica and Fred, Lisa and Chris and Jenny and Geoff, Numenius, Coup de Vent, Butuki, and Nancy, to name just a few of the place-oriented people I met first through the Ecotone Wiki. It has been a huge joy to see my old friend and correspondent "P." writing regularly here. And as the list of contributors has grown, I've been so happy to read new takes on place, and to encounter new parts of the globe through your eyes and your words.

What do we want to do in the next year? How can we increase our readership? I've been less regular in responding to topics lately because of other commitments, but I am no less enthusiastic than I was when we began. I hope other readers will suggest more topics, and that new ideas will emerge that will inspire us all.

8:36 PM

Source:
http://cassandrapages.blogspot.com/2004_06_01_cassandrapages_archive.html#108734750945665292#10873475094566529

Ecotone, One Year On

By Feathers of Hope (Pica)

On this day last year, a group of us tried to answer the question "How I Started Thinking About Place - And Why I Started Writing About It." My answer was, then, and remains now, Venice: Venice where Coup de Vent is making all kinds of her own discoveries as I write, she of the interesting camera angle.

Going somewhere SPECIAL triggered in me the impulse to explore place, but what keeps me looking, and sketching, and writing is the mundane, the far more prosaic space around me now. I think it would be a stretch to imagine that I could feel nurtured enough by ANY place to feel moved to write about it in a protracted way (like Beth, I find my mind goes dead in suburbia), but the routine, mundane holds my attention for now, following it through the seasons. Which plant. Which bird. Which pathway.

Which journey, really. There are so many, and we have so few days.

I'd like to thank all the other explorers of place whose sites I read daily for their own part in nurturing this particular journey of mine.

Posted by Pica at June 15, 2004 05:27 PM | TrackBack

Comments

I wouldn't have ventured the Ecotone would survive its first year. But here we are! Many thanks to you and Numenius for seeing to the daily workings of the wiki ("wikings?") and for keeping us focused and challenged.

Posted by: fredf at June 16, 2004 01:59 PM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/06/15/ecotone_one_year.html

The place of place

By Hoarded Ordinarie

This past Tuesday, Ecotone celebrated its one year anniversary. For those of you not familiar with Ecotone, it describes itself as “a portal for those who are interested in learning and writing about place. It came about as a meeting spot for a number of webloggers who write extensively about place in their own blogs and were wishing to work more collaboratively, as well as raise awareness to this genre of weblogs.”

This time last year, I wasn't keeping a weblog; this time last year, in fact, I wasn't writing at all. If I remember correctly, I was burned out on teaching; although I managed to muster the energy to teach a two-day-a-week Summer School class, I was mired in my dissertation and going nowhere with any sort of writing deemed "creative." I certainly wasn't "writing about place" in any sort of real way; instead, I was procrastinating on a dissertation that was supposed to focus on "spirituality of place" in American nature writing but instead was focusing on not much in particular. In a word, I was lost, tired, depressed, burned out: although I wanted to be writing, I didn't know how or where to begin.

When I started writing my "Pedestrian Thoughts" essays last August, I started with a simple rule: start where you are. As a way of dealing with the burnout I felt writing scholarly prose about other people's places, I decided to start writing essays about Keene, NH, essays I'd send via email to anyone who expressed even a remote interest in my corner of the world. "You have to start somewhere," I thought to myself. "Why not start here?" My very first contact with Ecotone happened because one of my "Pedestrian" readers–a friend of a friend, a person I've never met–emailed me the link to Lisa Thompson's field notes. He figured I'd find much of interest on Lisa's site, and I did. Not only was she writing about her own neck of the woods, she linked to a slew of other writers–and an online meeting place for these writers–who wrote from the conviction that place matters and place starts at home.

My first contribution to Ecotone happened before I myself kept a weblog: on December 17, 2003, I posted an excerpt of my handwritten journal focusing on "Mythic Place." (If you follow that link, mine is the 3rd entry down, under posts from Fred First's Fragments from Floyd and a writer known as "P"). In that post, I came to the same conclusion as I had in my "Pedestrian" essays: place matters, and place starts at home. In my writing about "nature writing," I always seemed to define "nature" as being somewhere else: surely Keene isn't "wild" in the way that Henry Beston's Cape Cod or Jack Kerouac's Desolation Peak or John Muir's Sierra Mountains are "wild." But when you switch from "writing about nature" to "writing about place," anything is possible. Place happens in cities, suburbs, rural towns…in a word, place happens wherever you find yourself. So place-blogging is simply about waking up and noticing, recording, and then sharing the mundane stuff that happens in your own backyard. When you think about it, how is that any different from what Thoreau himself did?

Although we Ecotoners have latched onto this term "place-blogging" to describe what it is that we do, I think many bloggers who wouldn't attach that label to themselves do something very similar. Whenever Shane posts photos of the signs he sees in Los Angeles, I feel right at home: separated by an entire continent, we share similar eyes even though we find ourselves in distinctively different places. To my ear, Shane perfectly sums up the practice of place-blogging when he notes that he's begun taking his digital camera everywhere and snapping pictures even though he claims to know nothing about photography. "I'm just fucking around," he remarks, "and these images here are the ones I like and they're from LA." That, ladies and gentlemen, is place-blogging (or at least place-photoblogging) in a nutshell: stroll your neighborhood, fuck around, and share that fucking-around with the rest of cyberspace. Those of us in Keene find it oddly interesting that there are strip-joints in L.A. strip-malls: it looks like we're not in Kansas anymore, Toto.

So, why blog about place–why does place matter? For me there's this constant desire to feel at home in a place, to feel at home wherever I find myself by noticing, recording, and remembering tiny details as they manifest themselves. Looking back to my childhood years, I vividly remember a particular picture book in which a child took a walk through a strange neighborhood filled with oddly shaped buildings in fantastical colors. When the child turned toward home, then, that walk was a retracing of the same buildings, shapes, and colors. Thus as a child I learned a valuable lesson: it is by noticing and remembering the sights, colors, and shapes around us that we become inhabitants of a place and thereby find our way home. Walking becomes a metaphor for paying attention and for remembrance, and even a strange neighborhood offers more delight than danger if you keep your eyes open.

I'd love to think that if any of you ever came to Keene, you'd recognize some of these sights: "There's the corner with the lawn sprinklers!" "There's that parking sign!" "There's the building that was built in 1913!" These pictures, you see, map out a simple path to school and back: anyone looking for a scavenger hunt could look at these pictures and retrace my precise route. But ultimately, of course, these pictures and this blog–and this whole phenomenon known as place-blogging–aren't about Keene: you needn't come here and find the places I've seen. Instead, place-blogging is about going out your own front door and seeing the signs that greet you close to home. Blogging about place isn't about extolling the superior benefits of any one locale: it's about finding and noticing the particular charms of all places. Seeing what signs sprout spontaneously, like mushrooms, all over both L.A. and Keene, now you'll find signs sprouting in your own neighborhood, some of them like mine, some not.

There are colorful people, memorable scenes, in all the world's cities, in the country, in suburbs, and in various spots in between. Wherever there are people, there are eyes who have grown to ignore these details, thinking they're a forgettable, second-rate opening act for the Real Thing. So when Mortality steps onstage, tuxedoed and top-hatted, to announce that this, ladies and gentlemen, has been the Main Event, there are gasps of shock and anger: is that all? Yes, ladies and gentlemen, this is all there is: this is your Featured Presentation, and you're seeing it from within as it continues to unfold, no moment like any other. And since there is no way for you to petition Mortality for your money back–the ticket called Birth being nonrefundable–we might as well settle in to enjoy the show.

- *This is my contribution for the anniversary of Ecotone. Ecotone is a wiki, which means it's a website where anyone can add content, weblinks, etc. You don't have to be a "place-blogger" to participate, so feel welcome to contribute to one of Ecotone's biweekly topics (the one for July 1st is courage and place). Place, of course, is where you find it, and Ecotone's a great virtual-place where you can meet and mingle with folks from around the world. Stop on by and make yourself at home.*

Comments

A wise and beautiful post. We would all do well to appreciate our current place and moment.

Posted by: Tim Burns at June 18, 2004 10:13 AM

Thank you for a thoughtful post (again!) So important to recognise that this is what we've got, all we've got; that we have to make the most of it. Your celebration resonates with all of us.

Posted by: anne at June 18, 2004 06:30 PM

All so true. I especially like the Penuche's Ale House picture. I'm glad nobody was around to photo-blog some of the nights I lost in there back in the 90s. ;-) I remember the Launderette sign too. I think I knew someone who lived in an apartment right where that old sign points. Perhaps my memories are caving in on each other. It's right down the street from Penuche's, no?

Posted by: shane at June 18, 2004 09:10 PM

Tim & Anne, thank you for your kind words. If sharing a glimpse of my corner of the world inspires you to look again at yours, I will have accomplished what I set out to do. Thanks for reading!

Shane, I *figured* the Penuche's sign might bring back a (foggy!) memory or two! Although we live very close to "the 'nooch," I'm hestitant to frequent it for fear of running into my students! ;-) And yes, you remembered correctly: the Marlboro Street Launderette is right down the street from Penuche's.

Posted by: Lorianne at June 20, 2004 11:16 AM

Great post. I was getting bored with taking pictures on my usual walks, but you're absolutely right - there's much more to notice. Next time I'll look at things differently, inspired.

Posted by: leslee at June 21, 2004 09:41 PM

Leslee, I'm glad you enjoyed this post! I too sometimes get bored walking the "same old streets." I've learned that there are two ways to deal with this boredom. One approach is to make slight variations in my route: explore a different street, or simply try walking the same sites in a different direction in order to view them from a different angle. The other approach is the exact opposite: walk the exact route, but pay detailed attention to the familiar but overlooked things you see everyday. Sometimes I imagine that I'm leaving: if this were my goodbye walk, what would I notice & cherish? I always seem to find something new.

Posted by: Lorianne at June 23, 2004 07:53 AM

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20040708183125/http://www.schaub.com/lori/blog/archives/000204.html

Anniversary Place

By Via Negativa

More than once, in the six months since I started blogging, I've written something quite by accident that seemed to comport with the current Ecotone topic - though until last month, I refrained from going so far as to actually enter a link here. In response to the above questions: for me, if I didn't regularly experience "Aha!" moments, I wouldn't bother to write - about anything. Place usually creeps in without my noticing.

spacing out on place

By Feathers of Hope (Numenius)

This post is my response to ecotone's (June 15, 2004) biweekly topic: Anniversary Place

About two years ago, I was reading The Rings of Saturn by W.G. Sebald. For those who know his work, it comes as no news that Sebald's approach to writing has much in common with the best of blog writing about place. It's not just that his seemingly autobiographical narrator wonders through the most amazing landscapes in England, Europe, or China, or other parts of Asia. It's also how he makes history itself into a landscape in which place is a map.

Consider this brief passage that concludes a section in which thenarrator' describes a great storm that destroyed the last of the great elm trees (the ones not succumbed to disease) near his house:

Where a short while ago the dawn chorus had at times reached such a pitch that we had to close the bedroom windows, where larks had risen on the morning air above the fields and where, in the evenings, we occasionally even heard a nightingale in the thicket, its pure and penetrating sound punctuated by theatrical silences, there was not a living sound.

For me, in this passage, like in all of his writings, there is a sense in which Sebald takes absence and restores itscurrency,' its sensory life, its immediacy, in a landscape that's been wiped clean of all traces of that life so that what was missing is found again, and what is plainly in view, such as the devastated landscape, for example, is masked and marked again by the life it once contained. Perhaps this is too dense, but what I am trying to say is that reading Sebald I got the sense that he made place into history, and history into place.

And it was that aspect of his work, as well as the style of his books that mixed curious passages from historical works, scientific theories, poetical musings, and photographs interspersed throughout, that made me think that he wasblogging,' and it was possible to write a blog in this fashion in which one writes about both time and place as the necessary halves of a whole experience.

So, I tried to write about my daily walks in my neighborhood with Sebald in mind, but somehow I couldn't quite manage talking about place or its history. The daily distractions of my life and my parade of responses to reading other blogs had me posting in spurts and in a hurry as to not miss some perceived timeliness to make into the lines around the hottest spots in blogaria. Within a year, I forgot all about my resolve to blog about place and time a la Sebald.

Then a review of Paul Carter's Repressed Spaces: The Poetics of Agoraphobia had me waxing on about blogs and the blogosphere in general, and this post got me noticed by a few of the newly minted ecotone community ... and the rest is, well, not exactly history, but an effort still to come to grips with what exactly am I trying to do when I blog about place.

Perhaps this occasion, the ecotone anniversary, should serve as a reminder to me to bring back the focus on writing about place -- and with time in mind.

The funny thing is that, apparently, Sebald was a technophobe of sorts (he died in 2001). He did not like using computers, but one wonders if the many fine blogs that make faraway and foreign spaces into intimate places for us would have changed his mind about technology. One (at least this particularone') wonders if Sebald would have appreciated the ways in which technology, such as the ecotone wiki, can help make space timely and map its living history not in absences, but in the many voices that inhabit it in a continuous present.

So, here I am, 10 months into participating in the ecotone community with my posts, and yet, when you look back at most of my writing for ecotone, you will find that there is very little in it that describes or even gives a sense of the physical place in which I actually live. Most of what I have written has mapped memory and absences; but unlike in the work of Sebald, in my posts, these lacunae have remained more memorials than opportunities for resurrection.

Posted by maria at June 19, 2004 09:55 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20041014094829/http://www.ashladle.org/archives/000373.html

Anniversary and Place

By London and the North

These thoughts are part of the collection of writings for Ecotone: Writing About Place - Anniversary and Place which is itself having an anniversay after a year up and running as a wiki. I was lucky enough to participate in the first batch of writings: How I Started Thinking About Place - And Why I Started Writing About It

A strange thing happened to me once at the end of a holiday in Madeira. It had been a good holiday, great scenery, air and food. As the plane started to take off I started to weep, bucketfulls. Paris, who was not able to be sitting next to me was alarmed. I guess other passengers must have thought I was a bit mad or something. After a while, things fell into place.

My dad died in 1974 in Florida where he had been living with his new wife since my parents divorced five years before that. We had not been close for years and and eventually I got a copy of his death certificate from Dade County or something. As I got into my twenties I tried to find out where he was buried. I managed to find out that he had been cremated (a rather unJewish thing) and thatfriends' took the ashes to be dispersed. I did not find out who these friends were and got no response from his ex wife.

Back further in time:
In 1966 my mother took my brother and me on a plane to Madeira. At that time, Madeira could lay claim to having the shortest commercial runway in the world which was built into the sea! But the reason we went there was because my father's career had at this point extended into crooning and song writing and he was singing in the casino in Madeira. He had written a song which mentioned the local airline and had got in exchange a number of free air tickets. We travelled there on the understanding that the flights were covered but after we got there we found out that my mother had to pay for them as he had used up all the free flights. We had a good enough holiday but there were tensions about money. My mother was the sensible bread winner and she felt very let down by his inattention to our basic needs. He loved new suits and hand made shoes and performing wealth but she struggled to find us school shoes.

So on again to that time in the late eighties when Paris and I went to walk the levadas:
High up on the volcanic island, on the Paul da Serra, I found a rock which I designated as my father's resting place.

This rock, like all other aspects of my father's death anniversary have felt quite arbitrary - dates, places, rituals. But then he was elusive in life too".

Posted by Coup de Vent at 05:47 PM

Comments:

CdV, your lack of sentimentality in writing this small memoir made it even more poignant. What an enigma certain people are - my mother-in-law was like that too, even though I knew her "well". Her ashes are here in our house, in a blue box, awaiting distribution. I say hello every now and then. It's very strange.

I'm so glad you've been writing for the Ecotone and that I was fortunate enough to meet you through it.

Posted by beth at June 23, 2004 02:56 AM

Most poignant and moving, CdV. Of course, you would be catapulted into the wellspring of the grief that never ceases. Congrats on allowing yourself just to open up to it.

Here's a very long Eulogy that describes my very similarly estranged relationship with my Father, who died about six months ahead of my plan to be at his side during his final days, weeks, months . . .

Posted by thomas brinson at June 23, 2004 05:49 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040624144818/http://www.airenet.co.uk/alife/2004_06.html

Anniversary Place

By P.

Not a blogger per se, I saw the Ecotone last year as an opportunity to do something I really needed to do, write, and a chance to do a little creative thinking within a loose structure. I was greatly flattered to be invited to share. What I didn't expect was that the others here would write so spectacularly well, and from so many creative perspectives! What I have read is more satisfying than the writing, and I can only say ... thanks.

Courage and Place

Bi-Weekly Topic for July 1, 2004

True Grit...

By Older and Growing

It's been quite a while since I posted anything for Ecotone. This offering is for the July 1st topic of "Courage and Place".

We sat uncomfortably on whatever horizontal surfaces we could find - mostly hard, angular, and the wrong shape and height - or stood and fidgeted uneasily. A dozen or so of us had taken the lift to the twelfth floor, then through a normally locked door and up a single flight of stairs to the very top level of the building, picking our way along unfrequented corridors, past office flotsam and jetsam abandoned and tossed here on the waves of successive office rearrangements. Through a heavy metal door we found ourselves in this confined space surrounded by machinery that from time to time would spring unexpectedly into whirring, clanking life - the lift machine room.

This particular odyssey had begun several weeks earlier. Posters had appeared in shop windows and public places around town, advertising a charity abseil event. Raise a minimum of £100 in sponsorship by daring to abseil from the top of the town's only high-rise building. At thirteen storeys including the uppermost services level, it may be a mere stump by city standards, but it's by far the tallest building in our little town and a well known landmark, sat squarely on the highest piece of land for miles around.

Those posters stirred different feelings in different people. For me, I'll own up that my prime motivation wasn't to raise money for charity, or to face a personal challenge, it was simply to have fun and to see the town from a novel and usually inaccessible viewpoint. Others' feelings though may have been very different. The poster that appeared one day in the canteen at a small local factory attracted only limited casual interest. Bill, late middle aged but wiry and energetic, was attracted by the challenge, but it never occurred to Lottie, his colleague and close friend, that she might take part in such a daring event. At first she scoffed at the idea, but Bill was persistent; maybe he saw something in Lottie that she couldn't see herself, or maybe he was just throwing down a friendly gauntlet. But whatever was behind his challenge, to her own surprise, once she actually stopped to consider it Lottie found herself accepting, and as word spread around the factory her sponsorship total shot way past the minimum necessary, eventually reaching many times that amount.

We heard this story sitting together packed into that tiny room, breaking off every now and again as, behind it's safety cage, the lift machinery whirred into action. Lottie was full of excitement - nervous excitement to be sure; her words tumbled out, tripping over each other; a simple, almost superficial description of events in that canteen and the subsequent disbelief - shock almost - of her colleagues. But in her eyes was something much deeper and clearer - a pride in herself for what she was doing. Almost hidden under the words that seemed to be expressing fear and doubt was a voice also saying "Yes! I CAN do this!" Hearing her talk, seeing her determination and

sensing the drive which propelled her, I had the impression of someone who was able to face this apparent adventure into the unknown because she saw that, beneath the alien paraphernalia of abseiling, really this was no more - and no less - of a challenge than those she faced daily as a mother, and as carer for her own ageing mother.

In the corner of the room a fixed ladder led up through a trapdoor onto the roof. Lottie struggled rather with the unfamiliar dependence on hand and arm strength needed to climb the vertical ladder and with the awkward sideways step off the ladder, over the high rim edging the void of the large trapdoor opening, down onto the roof. There were two abseil ropes fixed, allowing two people to descend at once. The instructors had asked her and Bill if they wanted to go down together but Lottie was adamant she didn't want that - I guess she was worried in case she flunked it, and felt she'd rather not have anyone she knew watching her that closely. So it happened that I followed Lottie out onto the roof. The view was stunning; unlike the flat two-dimensional view you'd get from a window at a similar height, the three-sixty degree panorama was intensely vivid, something real and present and involving. However there was little time to admire it - the organisers had several dozen people to get down during the morning, and there wasn't time to hang around, metaphorically or literally.

I had to wait for the person ahead to reach the ground, so Lottie was already some way down when I started down the rope a few feet to the side of her. She was letting herself down very slowly, inch by inch. As I caught up with her I could see the tension in her body – her shoulders hunched, arms drawn in, hands in heavy protective gloves gripping the rope tightly, the upper half of her body curled almost into a foetal crouch whilst her legs stretched straight out to maintain contact with the wall in front of her – the nearest equivalent in this vertical world of terra firma. I don’t think I’ve ever seen such a look of intense concentration and determination on anyone’s face, every part of her being focused on following the instructions she'd been given when we practised on the ground. Eyes wide and staring intently at her hands on the rope inches from her face, lips drawn tight, illustrating perfectly why the adjective “grim” so often precedes “determination”. If she saw me at all as I drew level with her, she gave no sign, and I said nothing, sensing that any intrusion would be at best unwelcome, and at worst might destroy the focus on which she was probably depending to take her mind off the drop beneath her.

I reached the ground long before her and had to move out of the way to make room for the next participant, so I missed seeing her expression when she finally landed. In any case there were many of her friends and colleagues waiting to congratulate her, and a pat on the back from me, a stranger, would have gone unnoticed amongst so many. So I looked up, silently saluted her courage, and went on my way.

// posted by andy @ 2:59 PM permalink Source: http://olderandgrowing.blogspot.com/2004/07/true-grit.html

Courage and Place

By Hoarded Ordinaries http://www.flickr.com/photos/zenmama/676914866/

Thursday on my way to other business, I stopped for a short walk at the Minute Man National Historical Park in Lexington, Massachusetts. For all the years we lived in an around Boston and Cambridge, I'd never actually set foot on this protected portion of the "Battle Road" where American militia clashed with British soldiers on April 19, 1775. I didn't have enough time to walk the five-mile Battle Road Trail, but I did take a quick stroll around Hartwell Tavern, the 18th-century home of Ephraim and Elizabeth Hartwell. The Hartwells' home and tavern are surrounded by rolling pastureland snaked with stone walls and wide-spreading maples: quintessential New England countryside that makes for good sun-dappled walking.

In high school, I was never interested in history: in fact, I think I slept through most of my American history classes. But walking the dusty road leading to Hartwell Tavern gave me a different perspective on the events that preserved its place in history. This, as I mentioned, is quintessential New England country, just about the prettiest and most peaceful place you'd ever imagine. Walking this road in 2004, you can clearly imagine what it might have been like to drive cattle along this same road in 1775; the pastured sheep I saw as I drove down Route 2A could just as well been grazing there centuries ago. This sun-dappled path with its fringe of trees and rock walls seems to exist outside of time: it's a place where you'd feel content to live the rest of your days and then ultimately, in the fullness of time, come to lie down beneath a different sort of stone.

Realizing how peaceful and literally pastoral this landscape is, I began to realize what it was that those early militia, the so-called Minute Men, must have been fighting for. The Revolution surely wasn't about abstractions such as taxes and tea; instead, the Revolution was about this lovely land that those long-dead fighters had come to call their own. Walking down that quiet sun-dappled path, I couldn't imagine it beaten by the tramp of British soldiers' boots; for an army to despoil this quiet would have been an abomination. The men who raised their hand from the plow to take up arms were fighting for "country" in its most primitive sense: they were fighting so the tramp of British boots would no longer haunt the dreams of their sleeping babies or startle the cows who lay chewing their mid-summer cud in tree-fringed pastures.

It took great courage, I suspect, for farmers, merchants, and common laborers to take up arms against an organized army of their native countrymen. And yet strolling these paths among towering trees and snaking stone walls, I realize where they found such courage: they found it in these rocks, these trees, and these rolling hills which had stood for so long, even then, in mute testimony to nature's all-enduring power. Like a mountain that can't be moved, those Minute Men stood firm, rooted in their adopted country, defending their right to home and hearth with a persistence that could not be denied. Some things (and some places) are worth fighting for: a peaceful home, a humble hearth, and one's own quiet corner of God's green earth being among them.

This entry is my contribution to the Ecotone biweekly topic Courage and Place.

Comments

leslee Says:
Jul 2, 2004 at 12:38 pm

This is a bit off-track, if not off-color, but your post reminded me of a card I gave a girlfriend that had an image of a Minute Man on the front and on the inside it said something like, "Back in 1776, a Minute Man was supposedly considered to be a good thing."

This morning on NPR (or maybe the local station), there was a report on someone who recently wrote a book on Nathaniel Hawthorne's writing during the time he lived in The Old Manse in Concord. I've been there a number of times when I've been bicycling or canoeing nearby. It

embarrassed me to realize I had no idea about the historical/ literary significance of the Old Manse since I only ever went in to use the bathroom!

Doc Rock Says:
Jul 2, 2004 at 2:29 pm

Leslee's loss! because elsewhere in The Old Manse is Sophia's Window, where Sophia Hawthorne cut her name (and, if I remember right, the year) into the glass with the diamond in her wedding ring. I never saw the Tavern, though, Lorianne–where is it, exactly? How did I miss it, I wonder.

dale Says:
Jul 2, 2004 at 5:51 pm

That park is, yes, a weird experience because it's such a very peaceful pretty place. I've been to battlefields — Little Big Horn, especially — that feel like battlefields. But Lexington feels like the nicest kind of Sunday picnic park, and despite the exhibits and what not I just couldn't grasp that people ever shot at each other there.

Lorianne Says:
Jul 2, 2004 at 8:17 pm

Leslee, although I didn't mention it in this post, I *do* usually chuckle with a knowing grin whenever I hear the term "Minute Man." The fact that *every* quaint New England town has a monument to local Minute Men (each wielding a mighty gun, no less) makes the bawdy association all but unavoidable.

I've actually never set foot in the Old Manse, so you've experienced it more than I have by simply using the restroom there. I've been to Author's Ridge in Concord's Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, though, and I've visited the North Bridge in Concord (site of the "shot heard 'round the world"), so I'm not completely out-of-the-historical loop, just mostly!
Doc Rock, I've heard of the famous window etching, but I've never been into the Old Manse (nor Emerson's house, which I believe you can tour). If I'm remembering correctly, Thoreau helped design the vegetable garden at the Old Manse: it was his practical, down & dirty wedding present to the newlywed Hawthornes when they moved in!

Whereas the Old Manse is in Concord, the Hartwell Tavern is on Route 2A in Lexington, near the Lexington/Lincoln border. It's one of several parking areas along Route 2A just down from the Minute Man visitor center: you could conceivably walk from site to site, or you can drive

along 2A to see each of the "Battle Road" sites individually (in true National Park fashion, there's plenty of parking!)

Dale, I've never visited other battlegrounds, but even pictures of places like Gettysburg *look* serious & impressive: the site of epic struggle. But Lexington feels a little like the Shire from Lord of the Rings: you half expect to see hobbits walking around (especially around that tavern!) You can certainly see where "Concord" got its name at least.

leslee Says:
Jul 2, 2004 at 9:52 pm

The grounds of the Old Manse are gorgeous - terraced and landscaped. I've picnicked there. And you can see the Old North Bridge from the grounds. Next time you're in Concord check it out. They also have a good restroom. 😉

Sylvia Says:

Jul 5, 2004 at 6:56 pm

It is so different to hear the British portrayed as oppressors. We Canadians can barely contain our smugness when we say that we achieved independence without violence (unless you count parliamentary debates…)

Lorianne Says:
Jul 6, 2004 at 7:07 pm

Leslee, I (like you) always seemed to end up in Concord while doing something else: going to/from Walden, visiting Great Meadows, stopping by Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, etc. I passed by the Old Manse, though, the one time I stopped (years ago) at the North Bridge, but I'll definitely have to go back. Now that we live in NH and my trips to Concord are more rare, I'll have to make a point of taking a day trip to see *all* the highlights (restrooms included!) 😉

Sylvia, how interesting that Canadians are proud of their non-violent revolution whereas we Yanks are proud of our quickness to take up arms: a deep cultural difference, I'm sure. As I wrote this post I was mindful that Native Americans would see this site in yet another entirely different way: *all* the Euro-Americans on *both* sides of the conflict were "oppressors" from a Native American perspective. That land didn't belong to the Minute Men, after all: they'd foisted it off the Native Americans not many years before.

Source: http://hoardedordinaries.wordpress.com/2004/07/page/3/

Misplaced courage

By Via Negativa

Before the monitor's blank screen I bow my head, waiting for the words to come. The hum of this machine of mine keeps me steady, like the upper cable of a makeshift bridge across a river. And I'm picturing that time on the cable bridge across Hammersley Fork, at the end of a long day's hike.

Perhaps those watching from the bank were thinking, "How brave!" But it's much more likely they were saying to themselves, "Better him than me!" And they each took off their shoes & rolled up their pants' legs, grabbing sticks to steady themselves against the current.

If you take a close look at bravery, it almost always turns out to be something else. Firemen enter the burning building out of a sense of duty, out of love. Soldiers rush into battle to save their comrades. A woman gives birth because she has to, because she wants a child. People do what they have to do. It's their actions that are courageous; their hearts are full of trepidation.

I have never been brave like that. I'm lazy. I want to stay dry.

The others made their way downstream and crossed at the ford, shouting and laughing. I kept the lower cable tight against the heels of my boots and crab-walked slowly across. At its highest point the drop was less than ten feet, I said to myself, so what's the big deal? But right in the middle I looked down and my heart skipped a beat.

The water looked so inviting, all of a sudden!

Submitted for the July 1 Ecotone *topic* Courage and Place*. Hammersley Fork is both the name of a large stream and a State Forest Wild Area in northern Pennsylvania, over 30,000 acres of virtually roadless, recovering second-growth forest.*

posted by Dave Bonta @ 7/3/2004 09:40:03 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20050223090118/http://neithernor.blogspot.com/2004_07_01_neithernor_archive.html

ecotone topic: courage and place

by alembic

This post is my response to ecotone's (July 1, 2004) biweekly topic: Courage And Place

I suppose with Canada Day and Independence Day looming so large on North American calendars at this point in the summer, it seemed only natural, if not exactly inevitable, that the topic for the July 1 ecotone pieces should be courage and place.

July 1 has come and gone, and the same will be true of July 4 in a day or so, and I still can't seem to get a grip on this topic. I have three drafts already for this post, each trying to work itself into the discovery of that perfect fit of narrative and description that will give a unique picture of how some courageous act or person came to be shaped or ended up shaping some place.

I grew up in a place where you couldn't take a step without being reminded of some grand historical act or other inscribed in the ruins that spanned across a wide arc of centuries. You would think it would be easy for me start rhapsodizing about a pile of stones on a bucolic hill in Transylvania and how once it was house and home to a fearless (and megalomaniac) knight or count (I forget what he was) who fought off the Tartars. But I don't live there anymore ' and haven't for what amounts to a lifetime now. What I would write about that place of ruins would be descriptive of the province of memory.

What about this place then ' what of Marin, where I now live? Where are the ruins or the monuments that act as bookmarks in the process of the history that shaped this place? The people who lived here for centuries, the Coastal Miwoks, have left no buildings, nor ruins. Nor did they mark the landscape in irreversible ways. It is as if they had never been here. It wasn't until this ecotone topic came up that I was reminded, once again ' this time more consciously ' that the name of this county, Marin, is a vestige of courage from a man who once lived here and whose people have called this place home for centuries.

I wonder how many people who live here in Marin realize that their county is named after a Miwok Indian chief who resisted the Spanish back in the days when the Missions set the standards of what could be called courageous behavior? Or, that the prison, in which executions go on regularly to this day and which is less than a mile away from a shopping center with a hopping singles bar, and upscale shops, and movie theaters, and yoga and hair studios is named after another Miwok 'troublemaker' from the past? This one, Qintin, was captured at what is now called San Quentin Point, home to San Quentin prison.

I am not sure what passes for courage nowadays here in Marin. So many of us here spend most of our energies insulating ourselves from the troubles beyond the ridges of our hills that shape the larger world out there. We are too busy landscaping or remodeling, or redecorating to consider acts of courage as somehow if not redemptive, at least capable of shaping the place we call home in ways undreamed of by architects and regional development committees.

So what of courage and place then ' here and now? The portrait of courage and place that follows may not be as historically grand as fighting Tartar mercenaries of old or the Spanish missionaries of more recent centuries, but it is, in some sense, in the fine tradition that marks July 4 as the celebration of Independence Day in that peculiar and indomitable way Americans have made liberty not just an individual right, but also a universal and transcendent value for so many of us in the world.

The place is Marin, where BMW stands for 'Basic Marin Wheels.' Incredible as this may sound, it takes courage not to drive a BMW (or Porsche, or Hummer, or ... you get my drift) when you have the means to buy one, or even two, provided you don't want the latest model. So, I want to dedicate this ecotone post to the two Marin men I know who drive, without a care and with indifferent pride, their 1980s Volvos, which are decorated with scratches and dents, like so many badges attesting to their owners' conviction that cars are a means of transportation, and not a vehicle that is meant to transport their image across class lines.

Believe me, I am not trying to be funny here. Driving old cars may not seem to posses the same level of historical significance that holding back Tartar invaders deserves. Nor does it emanate that aura of courage it took to resist the notions of salvation the Spanish missionaries forced upon a population that was obviously in no need of it. Still, it takes a particular courage ' and a mind of steel ' to resist the invasion of images that tease desires of every kind and promise fresh salvation through the possession of commodities, but which, in the end deliver neither satisfaction nor change.

So, when you understand how dangerous it may be to view cars as, well, nothing more then, cars, you will realize just how courageous these men really are!

Posted by maria at July 04, 2004 11:30 AM

Comments

By the time I got to the end of this post, I could see why it had been difficult to draw together. Courage is a complicated thing - place, time and what people choose to focus on - or blank out. Interesting. Food for thought. Hope you are okay, by the way.

Posted by: Coup de Vent on July 4, 2004 05:13 PM

Coup de Vent: Oops.... I forgot to paste in the last few paragraphs of the post. No wonder it wasn't coming together at the end!

By the way, I am better, though still not clear about what happened. Tests and doctors' appointments next week should address that issue, let's hope.

Posted by: maria on July 4, 2004 06:20 PM

Good to hear that you are better!

Posted by: Tish on July 5, 2004 10:06 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040921224656/http://www.ashladle.org/archives/000379.html

Nerve

By P.

Even in bright sunlight, Cleveland's Civil War memorial looks ominous. Bolt upright, it stands on the southwest corner of Public Square with the air of an obsessive grandparent lecturing a child about how it was in the old days.

Today -- July 4, 2004 -- it is 110 years old. It has outlived almost all its neighbors on the square, and its elaborate, symbolic decorations have been blackened by soot into a permanent, antique mourning. It's a unique expression of Victorian sentimentality, Cleveland's 19th-century prosperity and of veterans' political power -- for it was largely built with tax money, according to the Encyclopedia of Cleveland History.

Its four major sculpture groups depict the hottest moments of warfare -- close-up fighting around an artillery piece, for example; a horse going down in a calvary fight. The committee that built it consciously chose to depict realistic action instead of the stilted figures of the day. Unconsciously, perhaps, they emphasized the soldiers' courage by stressing the horror of what they survived.

The men themselves are named in the central building, where bronze doors guard a cool, tomblike quiet against the noise of the modern street. The monument is the polar opposite of the Vietnam War memorial in Washington, where men and women, not drama, are the focus; the names are outdoors and there is no ornament at all. Even the statuary off to one side that veterans insisted on is subdued.

The Vietnam monument doesn't stress courage, but I think it's taken for granted there.

I have no right to write about courage, not when reservists close to my own age risk their lives to do what they need to under fire in Iraq or Afghanistan. Lucky in my draft number 30 years ago, I have never had to worry about someone trying to kill me, at least not in the immediate sense of the heated scenes on the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial downtown. Indeed, I don't claim to have courage. I think too much. I avoid heights and confrontations, and if my capacity for outrage had

anything behind it, I would be working, in poverty, on petitions to send to Washington. Instead I work, in insecure comfort, to send my daughter to college someday.

I think it's interesting to consider that we respect the courage of people with good intentions, even if we don't agree with what they're doing, but not the courage of people with bad or foolish aims. It took courage for a boater to leap to the aid of his friend in the water today, for example, but likely no one will look past the fact that he left his boat to drift away from him, and didn't bring a life preserver. I don't understand why condemned prisoners don't fight tooth and nail as they're taken to the death chamber. Does it take more courage to resist, or not to? And why should anyone care? At least some of them are innocent.

Most likely the bravest thing my wife and I have done was to decide to have a child, after years of insisting we wouldn't. And that leads back to a place, University Hospitals. I will long remember our first experience there, a premature-labor scare in a birthing room decorated like a '70s Holiday Inn suite -- just sitting amid the hardware, sitting, and trying to be calm, and waiting for developments. At one point, down the hall, a young woman started screaming, in a voice that suggested she didn't have any idea what was happening to her or why. But waiting didn't take any courage on my part, really; that was all my wife's, who had to endure the drug they used to calm her uterus. Later, she said she felt as if an elephant had sat on her chest -- and I realized the same drug, potassium chloride, is used in executions.

Still, I know now from experience, it does take some determination to say "no" as needed. And letting go, now -- that will take courage, for sure.

Source: http://my.core.com/~pzicari/text/Courage.html

Secret Places

Bi-Weekly Topics for July 15, 2004

The Secret Garden

By Feathers of Hope (Pica)

Well, it's not really so secret: this vaguely illegal garden sits at the corner of J and Second Streets in Davis, right next to the railway lines. It changes with the seasons; it's bedecked with plastic pumpkins around halloween, which morph into poinsettias in time for Christmas; full of pastels for easter.

This garden is tended by someone who--like Al of the 71--doesn't have a whole lot in the way of possessions. But he (I'll call him Arthur, though that's not his name) is of the world, perhaps more than you or I. Because he just decided, one day, to make this little corner of Davis more beautiful so that a benefactor might be able to see it on his way to work by bike. Just like that. (He waters it copiously with a hose from across the street.)

The garden that started out with a couple of potted plants is growing, and now has a second section to the right of the photo. Nobody can really see it from a moving train, and many people who head down 2nd Street barely give it a thought. There is nowhere in Davis quite so colorful.

Which just goes to show. Our gardener friend is colorblind. (It's a secret.)

This post is for the Ecotone Wiki's *joint blogging topic,* Secret Places*, for July 15. The wiki has recently been vandalized by spammers; we're trying to keep it up and running but it's a bit of a battle.*

Posted by Pica at July 15, 2004 07:51 PM

Comments

Hey, thank you for you efforts at keeping the spammers under control! I think it's worthwhile, but I know it's a lot of work. Maybe they'll give up eventually.

And thank you for your thoughtful writings, too.

P.

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/07/15/the_secret_garde.html

Terra incognita

By P.

It was sometime in March when my daughter came to me and demanded seeds to plant in a garden. She was quite vague about where it was, but after I handed her a handful of birdseed I noticed she was rooting around in the mud of a dank corner of the backyard, where a pine tree, our honeysuckle and some sparse wisteria shade a low spot nearly to blackness.

That "garden" was her second. The first was also out of sight, beyond the trunk of our maple tree. Planted in November, it didn't have much future, either, but several of her mother's herbs were abstracted from the herb garden. The part that got to me was the ring of rocks around the tiny plot -- in the middle of the lawn.

It may be she hid them because I had told her several times that you can't plant a garden in wintertime. Her reply was always, "Don't ever say 'impossible.' " I think she got that from "Barney," where they exhort kids never to give up -- on learning games, skills, cleaning their room. (The Stepford children on "Barney" never do mischief).

I suppose all real kids keep secrets, and that all kids hide things. We found little caches of hidden candy in my daughter's bedroom when she was as young as 3. We told her she didn't have to hide things, that she only needed to ask for decent food and sweets, but of course, we lied: Even at 3, she knew that we sometimes say no. Especially before dinner. It could have been worse; one of my daughter's friends, then still struggling over using the toilet, left a dry glob of something unspeakable under our couch one day.

I had my own secret places when I was a kid, though they were rentlessly turned out by my mother. Sometime in high school, when we learn so many lessons about adapting to the world, I read "The Purloined Letter" and discovered that the best way to hide something is to learn something about the psychology of whoever might be looking and then hide your secret in plain sight. Thereinafter, a lot of my private mail was merely interleaved with old homework papers, where I could find it but no one else would bother to look.

But by then I had liberty to roam, so I could look for other secret places, too. I loved topographic and historical maps that could point me to obscure hollows and old structures. I enjoyed poking around under bridges, too, though all I ever found there were waterbugs and graffiti. Once, hiking in the woods, I found a rough cabin some kids had built. It had a reeking mattress, cardboard on the walls and graffiti. And there was derelict house, its upper floors already collapsing, where I poked about for artifacts. I mostly found carpenter ants and graffiti. In my small town, there were few secret places that no one else knew.

Now that I am an adult, I can have privacy for the asking -- mostly, for with a child around you can never be sure. But I still take a half-guilty pleasure in glimpsing the interior of others' houses when the lights go on at dusk, and I love looking deep into the nooks and crannies of woodlands when they're just out of the snow and haven't had time to robe themselves again in leaves. Not that I ever see anything in the woods but junk and occasional graffiti.

Here in the big city, there really are secret places where ragged people go, and where I, as an overfed suburbanite, don't. (And the graffiti there is really thick.) A good deal of history lies down there, though, in the disused culverts and fenced-off wastelands. I've read that the ruins of a whole ghost town exists out behind a shopping area on the north side of town. I could probably trace the history of the lakes near my home if I would clamber down in the gorge they fill.

Poking into places is a boy's game, though, and I would merely be trespassing. Instead, I can defend my whole house as a secret place -- one, at least, where official intruders are unwelcome -- and insist that information about me is mine, and not a tool for someone else's marketing. But that's not place, it's politics.

Source: http://my.core.com/%7Epzicari/text/Secret.html

Cats And Nooks

By Feathers of Hope (Numenius)

This is a note for the Ecotone Wiki topic on secret places.

One of the things that has been amazing to watch while fostering our kittens is how cats have such a wonderful instinct for finding secret nooks. Last week I was clearing some space in one of our bookshelves on the floor, and it took the kittens about fifteen seconds to go across the room and be inside the newly created bookshelf space. And of course closet doors are notorious difficult to open without attracting the attention of a kitty or two. It's a very different world than ours to explore if you're about eight inches tall, sleek, and graceful.

Here's a photo of Charlie retreating under our bed, the space under our bed being a very defensible position.

Posted by Numenius at July 16, 2004 10:14 PM

Comments

Yes, I guess it's that predator instinct. I like the thought - don't know if it's the dominant paradigm among physical anthropologists yet - that human beings are scavengers "designed" to be able to walk about in the heat of noon (hence this ridiculous and inefficient bipedalism).

Posted by: Dave at July 17, 2004 06:40 AM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/07/16/cats_and_nooks.html

Truth teller

By Via Negativa

The komo is thirsty; the power grid could go at any moment. Where can we get more juice?

Ah, go ask the dawn's griot, that rooster. If he didn't crow, the sky would never redden. He flaps up to the roof and looks all around. He waits. Feels the eyes of the night spirits greedy on the teeth of his comb.

Who among men could be so unafraid? The four-legged stool in the courtyard is silent; it hoards its stories. The granary guard dog's nose twitches with fear, though the faintest rustle of his chain makes the nighttime walker soil his pants.

Without the right words, no action can bear fruit. We shrink into thin shadows, moonlit things. Who gave this scrawny bird such power?

Ringed in gardens, shaded by kapok trees, the village seems a cozy place. But secret jealousies crouch in the rafters of a dozen huts. Buried hatreds come alive at night, grow fur and fangs - no joke. Even the Christians know better than to leave nail clippings or the hair from their combs lying around where someone might pick them up.

But ah, the rooster! If he cares, he doesn't show it. His eyes at midnight still sparkle with the light of noon.

Call then, bring the dawn! Sing, and I will say *namu* for you. Tell the truth.

He stretches out his neck, flapping his wings like a blacksmith's helper pumping at the bellows. *Kambu kaaru, kambu kambu kaaru! Wanjuburung, wanjabarang!**

Friend rooster, even if you knew this dawn would be your last, would you do anything differently? Let the first line of white streak the sky. Let feet feel for sandals, let pestles grope about for mortars. Let no one hear how, hidden in the rafters of the komo house, buried in jars under the floor, the secret generators are sputtering, thirsty for fuel.

Nothing is free in this world. For order and reason to prevail, everyone must give up some cherished thing: a flap of skin, perhaps. A favorite food. A fortnight's worth of company with women. To every being, God has given the power of some gift.

The white band grows. A splash of red. The rooster crows as if his life depended on it.

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* Mandinka onomatopoeia, lifted from *Hunters and Crocodiles: Narratives of a Hunter's Bard*, by Bakari Kamara (edited and translated by Gordon Innes with Bakari Sibide, Paul Norbury Publications, 1990).

Komo is the pre-eminent secret society among the Mande people. Here, I have applied the term to its power objects as well.

This is my contribution to Ecotone wiki's *July 15 topic,* Secret Places*. Be sure to check out the others. At the end of* her own entry*, Pica notes that "the wiki has recently been vandalized by spammers; we're trying to keep it up and running but it's a bit of a battle." So, see it while it lasts.*

posted by Dave Bonta @ 7/17/2004 09:25:45 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20050223090118/http://neithernor.blogspot.com/2004_07_01_neithernor_archive.html

in other words I find different worlds

By alembic

This post is a late addition for the Ecotone Wiki's joint blogging topic, Secret Places:

One person's public place is another's secret space. In a distant past, when there were vast territories still unmapped, there were secret places everywhere, though, I imagine, few of them held nostalgic charms for those who stumbled on them accidentally on their way to somewhere else.

Nowadays, we spend most of our waking hours in public places and spaces, from the physical, where we jostle in the crowds, to the more subliminal, like the blogosphere, for example, where we jostle for attention. These days, too, we talk endlessly ... which makes the idea of secrets almost moot.

And yet, in the ceaseless conversation that bares and expands both the visible and the invisible places and spaces we inhabit, there are still plenty of secret places to be had. If the definition of secret depends on stealth, then you need not look any further than your eyes can see, for right here, or anywhere you happen to be, there are all sorts of secret spaces hiding in plain view.

For example, the bus stop at the corner of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard and Barry Way in Greenbrae is as public as it gets, with cars streaming by from all directions at all hours. And yet, at odd times of the day, the perfectly groomed young woman, with great sense of color in her choice of vestments, stands there, wildly gesticulating without so much a cursory nod to public decorum. She calls on god mostly, but lately, I caught her campaigning for Bush with that same abandon she had formerly reserved for the almighty. I presume, and maybe incorrectly, that her appearances at this bus stop have something to do with her haphazard intake of her meds.

I am in no position to tell where this young woman thinks she really is when she takes up her post at the bus stop. It seems to me that as far as we are concerned, for those of us who drive by (or walk past her, as I sometimes do), she is in a secret place ' in a space in which there is little room for any of us. I don't know if she thinks of that bus stop as her secret place. Maybe she knows exactly where she is, but she doesn't give a fig about decorum. Or, maybe this is her secret place, the one and only place where the sacred is visibly manifest to her. Her sense of purpose, which lights up her face as she flails her arms, certainly would suggest this.

There are less obvious ways to retreat into a secret space in a public place. And I should know, for I have my own secret places in plain public view ' though, thanks to less malfunction in my brain chemistry, I don't have to flail my arms to get there....

If words had dimensions (and for those with synesthesia, they may well have), the geography of secret places is increased exponentially. There is a sense in which my love of languages is a substitute for adventure ' for travel and all those other ways that get you out of yourself and into the world in which you can find secret places by the dozen.

Uttering the word for something as mundane as apple in the languages I know can transport me ' if not literally, at least *literarily* ' into different realms. One word, like some magical incantation, can place me in a space where the sun shines differently, or the stars' crewelwork makes the night sky as foreign as I suddenly feel in the very place in which I am standing and thinking in that other language.

I may not be gesticulating and engaging in loud debates with imaginary people, as the girl does on the corner of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard and Barry Way, but I am pretty much in another world myself whenever I opt to switch languages in that silent babble that fills echo chambers deep within each of our skulls.

Posted by maria at August 15, 2004 04:24 PM

Comments

Maria, I think you're really on to something here. I tried your "apple" trick and got transported to various European markets with their associated smells, colors, bustle... might this be another reason to teach languages to those whose ability to travel is limited in some way? Though for me that would lose the associations I have with the places I've been, which to me are tied inherently to the languages spoken there. But through books, as you suggest... I'm not sure you have to have been to France to get the full madeleine/tisane experience in Proust, but it definitely is different in translation.

I keep thinking about Temple Grandin and her famous ability to visualize something as a composite of many things she's seen in the past, and then render that on paper. I wonder what happens when a visual thinker (I mean visual thinker off the charts like Grandin) thinks visually in different languages?

Posted by: Pica on August 16, 2004 06:33 AM

Beautiful post, Maria. And Pica, your experiment prompted me to attempt my own. You're right: it's incredibly evocative, and different, to try out different languages in the hunt for a re-seeing of

old places and old things. And this reminded me of that old practice of abandoning language entirely, and looking - experiencing - an apple as if one had never heard or see of such a fruit.

But I'm meandering off topic, though. We all have secret places in our heads. Thank you, Maria, for the reminder.

Posted by: Siona on August 16, 2004 04:13 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20041014111052/http://www.ashladle.org/archives/000403.html

Weather and Place

Bi-Weekly Topic for Aug. 1, 2004

It's not just you and the scenery; whereever you go, there's something else ...

Heavy weather

By Hoarded Ordinaries

The problem with trying to describe a place is there's so much that falls beyond the limits of even the largest narrative and photographic frame. Those of you who are regular readers of this blog know my fondness for photographing *parts* of buildings. I like to take pictures of windowsills, doorways, and windows, and I particularly like to take pictures of the corners and edges of said apertures. Very rarely on this blog will you see an entire building; instead, you'll see various pieces and parts. (If you click on any of the above links, you'll want to scroll down to see the various images I'm talking about.)

My brother-in-law used to do architectural photography, meaning that firms would hire him to capture in images new construction or renovations to existing structures. When you think about it, it's a daunting task to capture the shape and structure of an entire building…how much more daunting is it to capture the mood, nuance, and *feel* of an entire town, word and image being your only tools?

These days here in New Hampshire it's been warm and humid. At any moment those of you reading this blog from far-flung sites on the globe can scroll down toward the bottom of my blog sidebar and see a weather graphic that gives a semi-current update on Keene's weather conditions. But does knowing that the temperature this morning at 3:15 am was a mild-sounding 71 degrees Fahrenheit (22 degrees Centigrade) tell you anything of what it felt like to be tossing and turning in a blanket-free bed at that hour of the morning? Would it help if I mentioned that the humidity at that ungodly hour was a whopping 83%, the air a euphemistic "calm"?

There are some of you reading this blog who live in hotter climes than what we here in southern New Hampshire face in the summertime. Since I complained so emphatically last winter when I walked the dog in unbearably sub-zero temperatures, I try not to bitch and moan too mightily now that the weather is warm, the air humid, and everyone's feeling sluggish. Many folks from

Massachusetts and other parts of New England vacation in New Hampshire; in this land of summer cottages and RV parks, we get a lot of snowbirds migrating up from their retirement homes in Florida and points south. But if you're vacationing in a lake-front cottage these days, you have recourse to said lake when things get too steamy. And even if you're sweating your way to the top of one of our heart-pounding mountain-tops, at least there's the promise of a cooling breeze at the summit.

When you live rather than vacation in a place like Keene, though, you have to tolerate her meteorological moods while dealing with the mundane details of daily life. I don't live next to a lake; I'm not spending my days (although perhaps I should) sitting on a beach with a margarita in one hand and a fan in the other. Those of you who live in hotter climes generally enjoy the benefit of nearly ubiquitous air conditioning. Our modest apartment here in Keene, on the other hand, is not air-conditioned, and the a/c in our 11-year-old, 227,000-mile trusty blue Subaru doesn't work. So if these days the humidity sometimes weighs heavily on our souls–if we dare to admit that some nights we lie abed naked on *top* of the sheets wishing that the perpetually humming window fan would please, please send some stagnant air this way, please–well, you have to spare us some sympathy. We're semi-arctic creatures, here in New Hampshire. We're

used to burrowing beneath layers of flannel and fleece and wool, not lying draped and semi-liquified under pressing acres of warm, heavy air.

Even a sunny California guy like Shane admits that New Hampshire is humid. Los Angeles and other near-the-ocean cities have the benefit of seabreezes, a phenomenon I once heard a San Diego weatherman refer to as "Mother Nature's air conditioning." Here in New Hampshire, again, the air has been calm, heavy, and inert. These days that mood is contagious, the option of going to an air-conditioned movie theatre feeling like both a blessing (ah, cool air!) and an act of exertion: man, that film was exhausting!

These days elck and several spiritually minded bloggers have started an email list for folks interested in Literary Approaches to the Unorthodox Pursuit of Enlightenment. One of the tantalizing ideas buzzing through the inboxes of said LAUPEs is the idea of holding a face-to-face retreat of like-minded bloggers. As various potential sites are being bandied about by members of this international and eclectic group, lovely Leslee suggested that humble Keene, NH be considered as a potential site for said meet-up "since Lorianne has been relentlessly describing her neck of the woods as heaven on earth." I must admit, I love it here in Keene, and the thought of such an illustrious group of bloggers descending upon my town is a delight: after

kicking myself for missing Shane's brief breeze through town, I relish the fantasy of hiking Mt. Monadnock, touring old cemeteries, visiting local pubs, and even packing the walls of our tiny Zen Group with the likes of Cassandra or Tish or Anne. If nothing else, imagine the joyous photos we'd take of sun-drenched windowsills, doorways, and windows, all of them filled with smiling-faced and enlightened Vernacular Bodies.

But before you pack your bags for a Keene retreat, keep in mind that the weight of heaven-on-earth can be heavy. Even celestial clouds can bake in summer's sun, and clouds themselves are mostly moisture, a polite euphemism for the the dreaded "humidity." The road to heaven–or to Keene, NH–can be uncomfortable at times: be sure the a/c in your car is working. Even if you can stomach the thought of withstanding the Zen Mama's voluminous outpourings of Hot Air, be forewarned that Keene gets her share of heavy weather.

This post is my contribution to the Ecotone biweekly topic Weather & Place. Anyone who feels like blogging their favorite place-based weather stories–and we all have them–should consider posting a link on Ecotone, another meeting place for cooler-than-cool like-minded bloggers.

Comments

Tish Says:
Aug 1, 2004 at 12:03 pm

I'm looking at that Help Wanted sign and thinking I might just move to Keene. Work in a photo shop. Yep.

Dave Says:
Aug 1, 2004 at 12:30 pm

Hey, I like the new picture of yourself, Lorianne. (New to me anyway - this is the first I've been here in a week.) Very professorial, in a low-key kind of way.

Kathleen Says:
Aug 1, 2004 at 7:24 pm

this. weather. sucks.

Siona Says:
Aug 1, 2004 at 7:58 pm

I just wanted to second Dale's compliment. It's a lovely photo.

But while I'm here, thank you for the reminder of the nuances (or extremes!) of East coast climates. I'm already getting complacent about the constant, mildly sunny, room-temperature days of California. How easy one forgets the humidity! I have to say, though, that New England is a wonderful place, weather-wise, if you're under the age of 10. Children have an appreciation - and an important carelessness about both sweat and snot - of extreme climates that fades with age. It's possible, I think, to luxuriate in any weather, from screaming through sprinklers to watching spit freeze. I don't know why it gets more difficult as we grow up.

P. Says:

Aug 1, 2004 at 8:01 pm

Bitching about the weather is a national pastime for Americans, at least — I don't know about the rest of the world. Early European visitors used to complain about the extremes, so maybe that's where the tradition started. In fact, early European visitors like Charles Dickens used to complain about everything, so maybe grousing became cool 150 years ago and never went away. Personally, I am so sick of having fans blow at me, I sometimes turn them off and just sit and sweat, but only when I don't have to interact with people who have a/c ….

~Unsettled~ Says:
Aug 1, 2004 at 8:32 pm

Oh We've Got Trouble, Right Here In River City

An untouched-up photo of tonight's tornado sky, which appeared after a brief period of downpours, and a long few days of crazy, yucky, hot and humid weather. Luckily, the tornadoes never came.

shane Says:
Aug 2, 2004 at 6:04 pm

I'm afraid I've become accustomed to the ocean air and lack of humidity; towels that actually dry when you hang them up after a shower; hair that dries before you've finished dressing; not having to change twice a day because the air is so saturated with moisture that the gallons of sweat don't have a place to evaporate to.

Oh, and I don't miss the mosquitos either. 😉

Mumun Says:

Aug 9, 2004 at 4:33 pm

Nice to find your site, Lori! Living in Los Angeles does not guarantee access to Mother Nature's air conditioning. Much of Los Angeles wallows in a basin which traps heat and - yes - moisture beneath a layer of fuel exhaust, heavy metals, and smoke. The humidity rarely reaches the levels I remember from the clammy New England summers of my past. The "Ozone Alert" days in Providence were worse than anything I've experienced, but in L.A. one wonders who is responsible for changing the filters on Momma Nature's air conditioner. Guaranteed relief can only be found on the coast - and you can even sit on the beach without being disturbed. (Although I have been photographed by tourists.)

Lorianne Says:
Aug 11, 2004 at 10:39 pm

Hey everyone! Sorry for the delay in responding to comments: I'm only now catching up from my week of blog-silence!

Tish, we'd love to have you in Keene…but if you come here, can I switch places with you & live in San Francisco for a while? I'm sure there are photo shops where *I* could work, too. 😉

Dave & Siona, I'm so glad to hear you like my new blog-picture: I was getting tired of seeing myself with short hair! We'll see how long I stick with this hairstyle & photo: so far, so good!

Siona, I'd never thought about the connection between weather and *age*, but you're right: children might complain about many things, but weather usually isn't one of them. I say "usually," though, since I think this is changing as kids become more high-tech & sedentary: on a hot day, I bet a lot of kids would prefer playing video games in an air-conditioned house to playing (and sweating) outside.

Kathleen, although it's been *warm* the past couple of days, I'm *so* glad the humidity has broken. At least now I'm not lying around the house like a dishrag!

P, your comment about turning the fans *off* reminds me of my experience sitting long retreats in Providence, RI in the summertime…in a polyester meditation robe! After a while you just relax *into* the sensation of being hot & sweaty: it's somehow more tolerable when you don't fight it.

Shane, I've not spent enough time in LA to say much about "your" weather, but spending a week in San Francisco was enough to make a believer out of me. Hiking in the virtual absence of biting insects was heavenly…although I did learn after hiking an entire day in sandals that putting sunblock on your *feet* is a good idea…

Mumun!!! So great to "see" you here! Ji Hyang's LA stories have given me the itch to visit you in your neck of the woods…but for now, I'm grounded here in NH. You're right, though, that city air is always hotter, heavier, and more oppressive than country air: pollution exacerbates heat. But even so, things were mighty steamy there for a while here in NH.

Source: http://hoardedordinaries.wordpress.com/2004/08/page/4/

Donner und Blitzen

By P.

One of the enduring mental images of my years in Central New York I saw as I was waiting

for a traffic light near my home. It was July 3 or 4 and the day was hot and oppressive. But as I sat, sweating in my hot car, I could see a thunderstorm building beyond the commercial buildings around me. It already blocked the sun, and an area of frightening black was spreading beneath the cloud.

Against that fearsome dark, there rose a Roman candle. It arced up, across the black, and popped squarely in the middle of my line of sight.

Wow, I thought. What a metaphor for defiance in the face of overwhelming might -- or else for human futility in the face of nature.

Where I come from in the Catskills, thunderstorms have a certain dignity. Half the time, a summer storm never makes it to your side of the mountain in the first place, but when it does, it savors each peal of thunder -- *FLASH/BOOM tick tick tick FLASH/BOOM tick tick tick*, as if to conserve its limited energies. And, given the effort involved in shoving a storm sideways across a range of hills and valleys, those energies are limited.

Central New York seemed to generate downpours -- a certain amount of thunder and lightning, but accompanied by gully-washers that seemed to be solid water. I spent my 30th birthday huddled under a dining fly in the midst of such a downpour -- messy but survivable.

Nothing in my New York experience prepared me for Ohio storms. They don't fool around out here.

The first time one caught us out of doors, my wife and I th

ought to settle into our car in a sheltered spot and watch it go by. By and by we noticed it seemed to have a halo of lightning. It was sparking away like a Van de Graaf generator, in all directions, and the noise from it was prodigal and continuous. It looked a bit like a Keystone Kops scene with the Kops coming on, hanging off all the sides of a car and waving their arms and nightsticks -- except lightning is not to be trifled with. We were spooked, and we drove away from there.

These energetic boomers rattle through Cleveland regularly. You can hear them far away at night -- *boom, boom, boombity boom, boombity, boombity boom*. If you've ever kicked, or imagined kicking, a garbage can down a long stretch of park stairs, you'll know what it sounds like. Doomed to wakefulness for the next hour, you lie in bed and wonder if you should close the windows, wonder if the cars are buttoned up, wonder if there will be damage. And all around you lies the close dark, giving no answers but *boombity, boombity*.

Local television tries to improve on these post-midnight wonderings. They're up to "triple Doppler" weather radar now, and with it, they can point to the spots where the storm is (gasp!) BEGINNING TO ROTATE (so kiss your roof, and your a--, goodbye!).

The fact is, thunderstorms often rotate. If the circle gets tight enough and the action intense enough, you can get a funnel cloud. If the funnel cloud gets big enough, you have a problem. The TV people, not unaware that tornadoes generate excitement, always want to be first to point them out -- so the hype quotient gets really high.

I do

n't have to listen to Channel 5 to know I'm not in the Catskills anymore. I can hear the proof itself rattling across the city on its way from somewhere to somewhere else.

But this year, I have twice seen something truly Midwestern, and unlike anything else I have ever seen elsewhere -- spent thunderstorms.

It stands to reason, of course, that thunderstorm cells would eventually wear out, lose their moisture and their energy and go back to being ordinary air -- just as an eddy in around the pilings of a pier might swirl and drag a little junk around before going back to being ordinary, calm water. But I had never seen it until I drove along Ohio's Interstate highways an hour after a front passed through.

Hanging in the moist air to one side of the road was a fluffy, disorganized cloud. Below it hung the veil of mist that indicated it was still raining -- but was it? The veil looked like an ice-cream scoop, hollow in the middle and curled to one side, and after staring a while (for what else do you have to do on an Interstate when the traffic is quiet?) I realized that the air in the center of the hollow was rising still, and gently pulling the mist, and probably any remaining rain, with it. Exhausted, the cloud had rained itself out and was waiting to be scooped up by some more energetic one.

A couple of months later, I saw the phenomenon again. This time, over the flat lands near Toledo, I could watch for miles as the setting sun picked out a couple of great circles of cloud. Golden in the last sunlight, with blue sky beyond them, they seemed utterly calm, but I thought they could only have been formed by considerable violence, and I guessed the circular strip must be at the edge of the dying eddy. Far beyond, the same sunlight caught the tops of new thunderheads rolling across the plains. The scene was majestic and vast, with the small, shiny traffic pouring along the highway, green fields and forests beyond, the blue and gold of the spent clouds leading the eye to the white and gray of the active ones far in the distance.

I'd like to say my spirit rose and expanded with the vision. Actually, my overtired daughter was melting down in the back seat and I was busy managing my self-control. If all that was God's way of protecting the girl from some dire punishment I never actually thought of, all I can say is that He went to a lot of trouble. I hope that someday she will appreciate it.

Source: http://my.core.com/~pzicari/text/T-Rex,thestorm.html

Over There

By Feathers of Hope (Pica)

The year after I finished my degree in England I went to work in Paris for a year. I had done a short secretarial course in Cambridge, England, which in those days invariably involved learning shorthand, which I got good at quite fast and then taught myself shorthand in French. (I can still remember the contraction for “Dans l’expression de mes sentiments distingus,” the equivalent of which is “Sincerely yours” in American business English.) I got a job in a French insurance agency. This was my first, and only, corporate job, apart from a translation gig in college for a Spanish agricultural engineering firm.

The unit I worked in at Faugre et Jutheau was reinsurance: a big game where the insurance companies themselves are insured by others. Lots of money; it’s like corporate Vegas. Anyway, many of the “jobs” the company reinsured were in the United States. And many of the US “jobs” that needed reinsuring were because of the weather. Why? L bas, c’est pas une blague, le temps. (The weather over there is no joke.)

Hurricanes and tornadoes. Hailstones the size of canteloupes. Freezing temperatures that would glue your hand to your car door if you were stupid enough to leave your gloves inside. Heat that rivals anything, most anywhere, including the Sahara.

For all this unjoking weather, I've fetched up in the California Central Valley, close enough to the Sacramento River Delta that we get a cooling breeze each night in summer, so that even if it's been well over 105 degrees Fahrenheit—over 40 centigrade—during the day, it almost always cools down at night. (We've lived here five years or so and have never turned on the air conditioner.) In winter occasionally it freezes but mostly we have to contend with the local version of purgatory, the Tule Fog, where you can barely see your hand if you stretch it out in front of you.

Subtle, this version of weather, once you weather it a bit. (We don't even really get earthquakes here, which are what other Americans claim keeps them from moving to California—though they seem perfectly happy to live in tornado country and the like).

I imagine the first inhabitants of the Sacramento Valley used all of this weather to help them survive. The fog is a powerful blind to a hunter; compelling thirst would drive prey to water. Lots of food grows in this climate. It was probably close to someone's version of paradise, long ago.

This post is for the Ecotone Wiki's *joint blogging topic,* Weather and Place.

Posted by Pica at 04:43 PM in Nature and Place | Link |

1. Mama says that the reason we moved to L.A. from Chicago in 1969 is that she just couldn't stand the weather anymore—intensely humid summers, intensely cold wintery winters, and then the wind… So L.A. with its limitless summers (that's the myth) ended up being the place where we spent most of our lives. Even though we did try to leave many times over the 30 years before I finally left, we, then I, always ended up returning… For the weather? So when I finally left Los Angeles for Davis four years ago, back in my mind, I asked myself if I would return there to live again as I had always done. How does one make a place home? Before I had ever even heard of Davis, I regarded the great Central Valley as that long hot boring drive we had to endure to get to lovely San Francisco. It was never a place I thought I would make home. But love changes things. And then there's the weather. Recently, some out-of-town visitors got me thinking about our weather here. Folks from as far as Anchorage and as near as Berkeley asked how we could stand the heat. Glibly, I replied, "I don't mind it." Now, a few days later, while doing some weeding around the base of our peach tree, I realized that living with a fruit tree has changed me. It, like all peach trees, produces fruit that only reaches its full sweetness when the heat really sets in. L.A. peaches never quite do it as well. These same out-of-town visitors enjoyed and praised the fruit from our tree to no end during their visit. So, complaining about the heat ends up being hypocritical, actualy, because luscious summer fruits like peaches, plums, apricots… and then the presagers of all that bounty (and my favorite) cherries.. all these rely on the same heat that all those juicy peach eaters so maligned. I have to admit now that I like the weather because it keeps me more attuned to the natural world. And that world keeps working on me as visions of returning to L.A. recede. There might be another lesson here. If I let the sun work on me, perhaps my full sweetness will emerge as well.

— virginia 2. August 2004, 06:46 Link

2. Folks, I just finished filing my 2004 tax return using Turbo Tax Online. Turbo Tax Online can be linked to from http://turbo-tax.service-net.eu.com. An alternative website for your 2004 tax return using TurboTax Online. TurboTax Online can be linked to from http://turbotax.service-net.eu.com Later.

— Turbo Girl 4. February 2005, 15:39 Link

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/479/over-there

Climbing Algonquin Peak

By Via Negativa

This is Via Negativa's 400th post. I think I'll also make it my submission for Ecotone Wiki's *bi-weekly topic,* Weather and Place*. I feel very fortunate that the day we picked (last Thursday) to climb Algonquin - the 2nd-highest peak in the Adirondacks - featured a mix of sun and low-hanging clouds. Views are best when not everything is revealed at once.*

The approach passes through alder swamp, sugar bush, hemlock stand. Here and there the rotting hulks of beeches, killed by the blight. A couple of rumbles usher in a brief rain shower. Afterwards, the scent of balsam seems even stronger than before. Sometimes you see it first, sometimes you just smell it.

*

From the base of the mountain all the way to the timberline, the one constant theme is paper birch. All else seems mere punctuation. Yet the guidebook claims this is a modern aberration, the legacy of fires that followed the clearcuts a hundred years ago. The short-lived birches rot as readily as they burn. Someday soon the conifers will reclaim all the upper slopes, and lightning won't be able to take any more than it can touch.

*

The trail maintenance workers have placed stepping stones through a slough of mud. I hop along awkwardly in my heavy boots. My daypack flaps against my back, canteen flops against my belly. I wouldn't remember any of this were it not for the soundtrack provided by a winter wren, its long and liquid air. I stop, taking in whole lungfuls at time.

*

Higher, climbing into the blossoming of plants in berry down below. Water trickles from the mountain's every pore.

*

Generations of hikers' boots have cut this mountain to the bone. We scramble up a bare granite

trough through the ever-more-compressed forest of birch and balsam and spruce. The rocks are scored with shallow scratches, too brief and random for a glacier. Very large dogs with unclipped toenails, I wonder? Just then two hikers round the bend wielding alpine hiking poles - imagine ski poles without the horizontal projections for grabbing the surface of the snow. I envy their superior footing, even as I wince at the metallic racket. On either side of the trail the moss and humus lie thick as a mattress under the tangle of krummholz.

*

The trees start to shrink at a most convenient elevation. Every pause for breath takes my breath away. I peer out over the tortured crowns at the grand sweep of lakes and mountains stretching off into the haze. My hiking companion gathers spruce needles for our noontime tea. Clouds and the shadows of clouds. The shimmering lakes. The dark mountains.

*

What's this, a black-capped chickadee singing in a foreign language? No, a separate species: the boreal chickadee. I had forgotten such a thing existed, if I had ever known. Strange to think they've been here all the time, with the equally unfamiliar Bicknell's thrushes and pine martens. And how must we appear to them, popping up out of the elfin forest in our brightly-colored gear? Like chickadees everywhere they can't resist coming in for a closer look.

*

For the last mile, a series of signs has warned sternly against the folly of proceeding any higher without the proper gear, and has exhorted us to protect the vegetation by staying on the trail. Now on the summit, we encounter an actual plant cop, on duty here all summer. "Hi, my name's Kristen, and I'm the summit steward today!" I resist the urge to ask for fresh ground pepper in my soup. The truth is, I'm envious of her job.

*

When the clouds roll in, one thinks: this could be the coast of Labrador. Those waxy, pointy leaves wearing thick coats of down on the side away from the sun - that's Labrador tea. Those yellow flowers like a child's crayon sun: alpine goldenrod. We spot three-toed cinquefoil, mountain sandwort, various branched and crustose lichens. Something very small that darts behind a pebble. Two bold juncos.

*

We find a shelf of rock facing east where we can sit and watch the clouds swirl past, ogling the iconic, landslide-scarred face of Mt. Colden whenever they clear. The lunch is as luxurious as I can manage; my only regret is the absence of a white linen tablecloth. After tea - Earl Grey steeped with spruce - I sit with my back against the stone. My companion lies supine for a while, and finally says, *I can feel the whole mountain underneath me.*

*

I do not need to be alone in the wilderness, though I do share King Cormac's view that one should speak quietly in it, if at all. I like watching the tiny figures of hikers moving around slowly on other, nearby summits, and imagining all the folks congregating on Mt. Marcy, still shrouded in clouds. And I'm impressed by how many people have carried stones to the summit. This smacks a bit of carrying coal to Newcastle, and I'm not entirely convinced it's needed, but it is a neat way to get people involved in "healing the wounds." The summit stewards are restoring the fragile vegetation one square foot at a time. Each rescued patch must be edged in stones to ward off careless boots. People who come here want to do right, most of them. The summit steward has a kind word for each hiker who eagerly tells her they've carried up a rock.

*

The way back down is slow, each step studied carefully in advance. The farther we descend, the more the massed mountain above us weighs down our feet and makes our legs tremble.

*

The return along the approach trail seems endless and unfamiliar. How could we have missed it on the way in, all this sameness?

*

After supper and a brief walk to the lake, I crawl into my tent and collapse. I lie sleepless on my back for hours, feeling the mountain in every bone and muscle. I don't remember my dreams.

8/2/2004 01:55:41 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20041129172208/neithernor.blogspot.com/2004_08_01_neithernor_archive.html#10914703506042924

The Sundowner

By Feathers of Hope (Numenius)

An entry for the Ecotone wiki *topic on* weather and place.

Art, Lynn, and their two kids passed through Davis today. We had a picnic lunch at the Village Homes green -- Art wanted to tour and photograph the development -- before they continued their trip north. Art is an ecological designer and on this trip was headed to a workshop on cob building techniques. It was fun seeing them today; it's been several years.

During 1997-1998, while I was still in grad school at UC Santa Barbara, we rented their house out while they spent a year living in Mexico. Their house is a funky cabin located in a canyon at an elevation about 1200 feet above the city of Santa Barbara in a small community called the

Trout Club. Their house has about 40 different types of fruit trees in their yard, solar hot water heating, and grey water irrigation. It was a magical place to live for a while.

We took advantage of the commute. It is 9 miles each way to the UCSB campus, and the way back involves a climb of about 1400 feet. Considering this a challenge, we rode our bikes to and from campus about three days each week. The ride up the hill (Old San Marcos Road) is long and steep in parts but it became a type of meditation.

Some days it would be a lot harder than others because of the strong sundowner winds that set up late in the afternoon occasionally in the region. These are fierce, hot, downslope winds that blow down the canyons of the Santa Ynez range, in part associated with a high-pressure cell over the Great Basin. The steepest bit of the ride, near the top, involves a set of hairpin turns. If there was a sundowner, we'd be in the lee of the hill until we left the final hairpin, at which point we'd almost be blown off our bikes!

Posted by Numenius at August 2, 2004 11:07 PM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/08/02/the_sundowner.html

fog's munificence

By alembic
Posted for the Ecotone Wiki's joint blogging topic, Weather and Place.

This is also my 400th post ... and marks (as of tomorrow) 2 years of blogging under the aegis of alembic..
* * *

I live on the edge of the cresting waves of fog that, during most of the summer, come in from the Pacific and rush over the ridges of Mt. Tamalpais, only to vanish mysteriously in the sunny world of my valley. Here, in this little valley, the sun strews the tide-driven waters of the Corte Madera Creek with glitter, even as a few miles to the south, the world over the ridge is washed of color in the antiseptic grey of the fog that had seized it.

I never tire of watching the shifting shape of this fog that's far enough for me to behold without my having to be caught up in its bone-chilling folds but close enough to keep the mornings and evenings cool enough to make me want start the day with a hot cup of tea and end it with blankets drawn up to my chin ' even if during the middle of the late summer days I often find myself looking for the shelter of shade, the breeze of fans ... anything to get away from the languorous heat of a noon that simply won't quit.

Can the concept of privilege be extended to weather? Because, for at least 10 months out of the year, I can say that, as far as the weather is concerned, I am truly spoiled. If I want to experience a touch of winter in July, all I have to do is to head south 12 miles or so, to San Francisco, where Mark Twain found 'the coldest winter one summer.' If I want to bask in the full heat of sun, well, I can head north about 30 miles, and I'll be in the wine country, that ersatz Italy that seems more Italian than Italy, which each passing season.

Of course, all it takes to upset this balance and unperch me from that comfortable position on the edge of all kinds of weather is one butterfly that flutters its wings ' and you know the rest: winds shift, oceans swell, climates change.... A preview of that comes every year with the end of summer, when the fog stops rolling in over the hills.

Already, as August moves on, the fog is thinning with each day. Come September and October, the sun, unencumbered by the whims of fog, will make up for lost time, bearing down with a hot vengeance that will wilt and wither gardens and fill the skies with haze. Some days, that haze will be thicker and more acrid from fires that will rage, as they do every year, to the north or west of us. Still, here at the border of sun and fog, where the winds patrol shifting borders, where strips of land shrink and grow with tides that mix the salty waters of the ocean with that of creeks from the mountains ... I feel in awe of so much bounty.

Posted by maria at August 09, 2004 12:04 PM

Comments

I'm leaving only a humbled, "me too."

And, of course, a congratulations on your 400th post! Hail alembic, long may she reign. (Or rain. We are talking weather, here.)

Posted by: Siona on August 9, 2004 03:52 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20041014103553/www.ashladle.org/archives/000400.html#000400

RePlace

Bi-Weekly Topics for Aug. 15, 2004

If you have a place you want to go back to ... if you have an idea you want to improve upon ... if you go, again and again, to the same place ... here, at the height of rerun season, is where to write about it (P).

RePlace

By Hoarded Ordinaries

This is the view from the summit of Lovewell Mountain in Washington, NH. Lovewell isn't a high peak: it's only 2,473 feet tall, well under the height of New Hampshire's famed 4,000 footers and substantially shorter than our own Mount Monadnock, whose 3,165 summit is, along with Mount Fuji, one of the most-climbed peaks in the world. (For the record, although I've climbed Monadnock several times, in the five years I've lived in New Hampshire, I've only climbed two 4,000 footers. I'm a great walker but not much of a climber.)

Although Lovewell Mountain isn't a challenge for true mountaineers, it's a wonderful day hike: the portion of the Monadnock-Sunapee Greenway that goes up and over its summit wends through lovely rock- and fern-dotted woods, and the trail is never crowded. On a beautiful Saturday when the parking lots at Mount Monadnock were probably brimming, the dog and I had the mountain to ourselves, the only other humans we saw being a threesome of incredibly fit, lycra-clad men who pedaled to the summit and then "interrupted" our solitary enjoyment of the mountain's southeastern vista. Although I encouraged these fellows to stay while I enjoyed the view (did I mention they were incredibly fit and lycra-clad?), they opted to head up to the southeastern summit before descending the mountain, and the dog and I saw nothing more of them after that. Alas.

After having visited Washington, NH on my own about a month ago, yesterday I decided to ReTurn with the dog in tow in order to ReVisit Lovewell, which Chris, the dog, and I had climbed with our friend X (of Boys' Weekend fame) a summer or two ago. I remembered Lovewell as being a moderately heart-pounding but not dauntingly strenuous hike with a vista (and accompanying solitude) that made it well worth the effort. It had been a while since the dog and I had been hiking, so the thought of ReVisiting a semi-familiar place was appealing.

When you ReTurn to a place you've been before, one thing you inevitably do is compare then and now. One of the most noticeable changes at Lovewell Mountain is a current real estate boom: not only are the cottages on Halfmoon Pond Road on the approach to Lovewell Mountain dotted with a striking abundance of "For Sale" signs, the woods bordering the fireroad at mountain's base sport realtors' signs as well. Although the summit of Lovewell Mountain itself lies within the protected jurisdiction of Pillsbury State Park, the base of the mountain does not: the Monadnock-Sunapee Greenway, like the Appalachian Trail, runs through a mix of public and private land. In light of my recent posts on human construction, I thought it only fair to post a picture of a scene that broke my heart: although people admittedly have the right to buy and build wherever the law allows, I'd much prefer that folks build and reclaim property within the already tampered with confines of cities and towns (even if that does translate into "urban blight") rather than clearing isolated plots of forest land. In the sake of fairness, Lovewell Mountain is crisscrossed by centuries' old stone walls: this used to be pastureland. But the landowners who ordered this land cleared are presumably looking to dwell in woodsy solitude, their own mountain version of Thoreau's pondside idyll. I'm sure these landowners "love nature": they love it so much they want to live right in the middle of it. But the sight of such "nature-loving" construction sobers me more than the bulldozing of some birches next to a factory: by yearning for country solitude, these folks are destroying tranquility in the process of acquiring it. In a word, the philosophy of "not in my backyard" begins only *after* you've built that backyard: once you've cleared your own 10 acre plot, then you can start telling others that they shouldn't clear theirs.

Once you've turned onto the Greenway trail from the fireroad that skirts the base of Lovewell Mountain, though, it feels like you've ReTurned to an older, more pristine land. It isn't accurate to call this "land that time forgot" since the signs of civilization are everywhere. The Greenway itself is well-marked with white blazes on trees and rocks. Small wooden signs point toward water sources and vistas, and at the summit itself there is a trail register where you can note the date and conditions of your hike along with any comments you'd like to immortalize. (The entry previous to mine was from a "Florida girl" who'd summitted the mountain several days before: "Just like Miami, but no *espanol*.") Although the desire to be the *first* or the *only* person to capture a summit seems as deeply pervasive as a toddler's unwillingness to share her favorite toy, the fact remains that Lovewell Mount has been loved, and loved well, by countless people both past and present. I'm sure every hand that touched the trail register loved their time on Lovewell; I'm sure the cattle and cattle-owners from the days when this land was grazed loved it well as well. You don't have to be the first to happen upon a place to love it as if it had never been loved before; you don't even have to be a first-time visitor to love it as if for the first and only time.

Instead of trying for "firsts," I think it's more fruitfull to try for ReCollection. What was the weather like the last time–the first time–I set eyes on this cairn: was the sun in a similar or different quadrant of the sky? Yesterday I saw a plump gartner snake sunning himself on the trail only to watch him retreat into piled rocks as I approached: how many snakes did I see the last time I walked here? Who was it who laid these summit-leading stones, and when; how many different hands have painted and ReTouched these countless white blazes? Every step we take on mountains and elsewhere is a new, never-before-taken step…yet every step we take is also a step into someone else's or even our own prior footsteps, every turn a ReTurn, every place a RePlace.

I think that instead of lusting after our own plot of "virgin" land, we should seek out and then love well those lands that are, like that '80s Madonna classic, *like* a virgin: lands that don't care whether you're their first or last or somewhere in between, but that love you well and unabashedly. Even mountains that have been tamed and then abandoned and then tamed again–even lands that have had an endless string of hikers and bikers and farmers and homebuilders and real estate agents loving and even abusing them in succession–can sometimes stun you into silence with the shocking green of new moss: surely this spot has never been seen or touched before! And yet I've walked this trail before…I'm sure I thought the same thing last year, and I'm sure that Florida girl felt the same thing–*en ingles o espanol*–only a few days ago. In a word it doesn't matter how many times (or how many lovers) Lovewell Mountain has loved, only that she loved me well when I needed her, and with an exuberance that suggests she never loved before and never will love again…until (of course) next time I or someone else happens to RePlace me.

This is my contribution to the Ecotone *topic,* RePlace.

Source: http://hoardedordinaries.wordpress.com/2004/08/page/2/

Replacing / Control

By London and the North

I have a feeling that I could have started with something a bit more deep and meaningful (for this contributition to Ecotone: Writing About Place on RePlace) than this nasty pink stuff but it's really on my mind - and in my sightline.

Pretty. My mum showed me a few innocent years ago how to may the seed pods jump out by touching the flower heads. I'm talking about Himalayan Balsam. Scurge of woods and river banks. Not enough walkers are pulling out the damn stuff so it is seeding and reseeding and taking over, covering banks where ground creeping plants grew and dominating forest floors where bluebells and other smaller plants have thrived. The bees love it. I guess they trigger the catapult mechanism of the seeds.

We live in a changing world. Some changes are just scarey to see happening so fast around you. It's also hard to know whcih changes to be philosophical about and say that's just life, and which are ones to jump out and stop.

Posted by Coup de Vent at 08:23 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040907201654/http://www.airenet.co.uk/alife/2004_08.html

Back to the complexities

By Via Negativa

This is my contribution for the Ecotone wiki *topic* RePlace.

A spot of poison ivy between the first and second knuckle of my left thumb has been lurking there since late May. I never knew exactly where or how I made contact with the plant, but by now, in mid-August, its berries must be ripening. In two weeks or less they will redden and the *leaflets three* will color up to match - signal flags for the small birds of passage who will drop from the sky each morning for a quick nosh. For them the first leaves turn: poison ivy and Virginia creeper along the woods' edge, fox grape and dogwood and a hundred acres of tupelo, red-orange-yellow right underneath the canopy's stalwart green. The migrants won't have much time and the banquet is overwhelming, so the foliage has to shout: *Get your high-fat berries here, at the drive-thru window!*

But Jesus, these birds! Only a fool could dismiss them as ordinary because frequently seen. Steering at night by the stars, their vision by day encompassing ultraviolet light and polarization caused by the earth's magnetic field, traveling thousands of miles through every kind of weather, year after year venturing everything to come and breed in woods like these, then leaving their nests and returning to the far more fecund South - the Indians were right about them. How could they not be messengers, couriers of the otherwise undeliverable hope to the otherwise unthinkable destination?

It is the time of year that approximates that late stage in an urban civilization when works of art and language start to give off a faint odor, bending under the weight of footnotes and allusions. Wasp nests bulge with larvae, Luftwaftes of termites take to the air. More moth species than lepidopterists have yet been able to catalogue, most of them naturally rare, seine the forest air for the exact scent of their shorter-than-a-needle mates in the landscape's haystack. Overlooked for their apparent sameness by generations of collectors, agog at polyphemous, the leaf-winged luna, the riddle-winged sphinx.

The last of the huckleberries are ripening, and the first of the apples. The peaches are at their height. The air we breathe teems with more life than most of us would even want to imagine. The soil in the woods gives off an odor so much a part of the general gestalt that the overwhelming majority of humans heading out for a week or two of camping have no clear notion of what it is that draws them, year after year, to the same spot in some park or national forest, relinquishing the hard-won comforts of home for the pleasure of sleeping on the ground, their nostrils just a couple layers of fabric away from the sweetly rotting earth. The sternest teetotalers are led around by their noses. The juice in its stoneware pitcher grows mutinous with yeast.

Winter is as far behind us as it can get, now, and the growing chorus of northern true katydids each night reminds us - those whose grandparents grew up on farms, and were full of such sayings - *six weeks till frost.* We're as far as we can get from February's spare forms, blue shadows and that crystal-clear air that always leads my mind upward and away. One may or may not tire of August's filigree and fandango, but for me the sense of mystery in this season is undeniably more profound. If in January I am a desert ascetic, in late summer I return to the full-course spread at the Life and Death Café. There's nothing like it for ambience, for service, for live entertainment: a small combo with trumpet and upright bass, ride cymbals going *lush* . . . *lush*, the blues singer shouting *sundown* as if he meant it.

Waiter! I'll have another bowl of the primordial soup!

8/16/2004 10:47:50 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20041129172208/http://neithernor.blogspot.com/2004_08_01_neithernor_archive.html

Da Capo

By Feathers of Hope (Pica)]

Where I sit, now, is pretty much where I always sit when I set out to write a blog entry. It's at a 12" iBook on a white tile counter (cluttered with papers) that separates the kitchen from the living room, and it faces the kitchen window. Through this window I can see an English walnut tree, in full leaf with the fruits coming in, and a wall of corn. The cornfield is now about 11 feet tall. This is the first year they've planted corn in this field; before now it's all been tomatoes, squashes, maybe sorghum that reached a maximum height of about four feet.

I've never lived in a jungle but I'm starting to get a sense of green impenetrability, and I don't relish it all that much. I didn't before Sunday.

Then, on Sunday:

A light fawn kitten emerged from the cornfield.

There's only one word for this, really: shit.

Last night we watched as this kitten AND a more orange sibling emerged to eat the food we left out for what we thought was ONE kitten, which we thought we had a chance to catch. We've even bought a humane trap to do this. With two, it's a lot harder.

What do we do? We have one bathroom which, when it's not being used as a kitten nursery, we tend to use. We have two kittens, now permanently indoors, that have been de-wormed, tested for FHIV and feline leukemia, neutered, treated for intestinal parasites, vaccinated, and are healthy; these two new kittens are so much like them in every way but size I can't help but think they're siblings who got left out of our grand roundup back in May and are stunted from a lot less to eat. But for sure they have worms, coccidia, respiratory stuff, the works, most of it contagious and all of it unpleasant. And they're not sterilised--my biggest priority. We cannot stretch this household further. Quite apart from the fact that if they really are four months old, they're almost certainly too old to be tamed.

I wish I had the meditation gene.

I guess this feels like enough of a rerun to qualify for the Ecotone Wiki's RePlace.

Posted by Pica at August 17, 2004 08:42 PM

Comments

Good luck - you really do deserve a medal, both of you! We have tamed four month old kittens using good old food bribery techniques. Just as well Mother cat has been neutered but I agree that these two need to be caught ASAP.

Posted by: Jenny at August 18, 2004 01:38 AM

Have you checked around for feral cat groups in your area? Try Alley Cat Allies feral friends network at www.alleycat.org, or punch inn "feral cats" and your region into Google. You probably already have, but...

I don't suppose you have an outbuilding you can convert a bit, so you can use your bathroom again. Cat litter on wet bare toes is such a bummer.

I laughed at the "shit" expletive. I'm sorry, but I just did. It's sort of the universal expletive of choice when a new cat or kitten shows up just when things seemed under control.

Posted by: Catlin Walker at August 18, 2004 06:53 AM

Welcome back, guys!
And what a surprise!
More cats..... I hope you find a solution for this... [problem?].
hugs!

Posted by: Fer at August 18, 2004 08:36 AM

What Catlin said about expletives. I think that was my exact word when Zeke found those three kittens earlier this year.

Alley Cat Allies, for what it's worth, is strongly in favor of Trap-Neuter-Release, which is increasingly SOP these days but which has some significant drawbacks (as Pica well knows). Sometimes euthanasia is indeed the most humane option.

In either case, let us know if you want to use Thistle's old hutch as temporary lodging.

Posted by: Chris Clarke at August 18, 2004 05:09 PM

Ouch. I'm sorry for your new discovery, especially after you've already done so much! And while I hate to do it, I have to second Chris' suggestion of euthanasia. If they're already four or five months old, they're precariously near procreation themselves . . .

Posted by: Siona at August 18, 2004 07:20 PM

Actually, re: ACA, I was thinking perhaps there might be some adoption options via their feral friends network.

For example, in my area I set up off-site adoptions downtown and at Barnes and Noble etc. so people who rescue cats can find homes for them rather than get stuck with them. It's hard work finding homes for shy cats.

Trap/Neuter/Return does have some baggage if you are a person who is also concerned about the local wildlife. Of course, fewer cats outdoors is better than breeding cats. But 40 cats in the house should be avoided at all costs. :)

Posted by: Catlin Walker at August 19, 2004 09:19 AM

What IS going on at your end??? I agree, meditation - a good time to start. Perhaps the spirits are trying to tell you all so,ething. But what?

Posted by: Coup de Vent at August 21, 2004 01:41 PM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/08/17/da_capo.html

Making a Safe Place

By-Weekly Topics for Sept. 1, 2004

Fearing Safety

By Feathers of Hope (Pica)

It is a luxury of someone (white, educated, well above the poverty line) living in a democracy (at least for now) that I can expect pretty much expect to live without fear of being arrested unless I do something stupid. I live in a place where I can leave my car unlocked, both at home and at work if I should by some chance drive to work. My commute doesn't take me through a war zone, unless you define the Solano County Mosquito Abatement Squad in those terms.

I've been reading, on the recommendation of Maria from Alembic, who had it from the London Review of Books, *Thank You for Not Reading* by Dubravka Ugresic, a Croatian writer and intellectual of staggering vitality. When I compare my life with hers, I see no hardship, no rigors, no wars. I see a privileged life as the daughter of an expatriate, endowed with two passports which expands your choices enormously of where to work (especially since they're both "desirable" nationalities), where the obvious planting of oneself in opposition to the prevailing culture confers yet more privilege (sometimes points can be gained from being a Brit, even a stuffy one).

Going to the Code Pink Counter Convention in Davis' Central Square tonight, I am filled with a mixture of fear and despair. Fear for the ignorance that might, just might, get Bush reelected. Despair because the world in such a scenario looks much worse than it did in the 70s, when it looked pretty bad, all those nights I stayed up arguing with my father about the Bomb.

We must not be safe. We must avoid hiding behind our gated communities, real or imagined, and feel as though all this is outside our sphere of influence, interest, or humanity. We must keep looking for a way to make our own existence more precarious -- for the safety of all.

This is for the Ecotone Wiki's *joint blogging topic,* Making a Safe Space.

Posted by Pica at August 31, 2004 09:54 PM

Comments

Your last sentence really grabbed me the second time around. Words to live by.

Posted by: dave at September 5, 2004 09:06 AM

Why do you feel worse than in the 70ies?
At least the nuclear sword no longer hangs
above all of mankinds head.
It seems to me that you are just suffering
from a case of the past looking better as
time goes by.

Posted by: Oliver Neukum at September 7, 2004 06:57 AM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/08/31/fearing_safety.html

The yard

By Slow Reads

I've got Lenore's shades on, driving down I-64. If they were any bigger, darker, or uglier, they'd be a shipyard welding shield. You can only get these masks from eye doctors, I think, and I don't mean optometrists. I'm talking about the other two with the even longer titles that start with "o."

Lenore got the shades when her eyes were sensitive after the cataract operation. But she wore them whenever she was outside until her dying day. I inherited them. To be honest, I was the first one in her apartment after we heard she had died, but no one had a problem with that. Or at least no one has said anything to my face.

Using Lenore's sunglasses is like peering back into my college years, in a way. Lenore would always complain about the light when I was home from school and driving her around. "It's the water, Honey. We're surrounded by water here. It reflects the sunlight back into the sky. It's the brightest place in the world."

I had never heard that last claim before, but now, after finally living where rivers pass through cities, instead of the other way around, I'm ready to accept any extreme claim about my home. The Virginia Peninsula is a jumping-off point. Driving down 64, I feel like I should punch it, race down to the tip of the Peninsula, jump out of the car and run down one of docks, strip off my clothes and throw myself into the water. The traffic, which they've imported from your area maybe to look suave, holds me back.

A lot of stuff ends here. Amtrak's Boston-New York-Washington service ends in Newport News. There's a lot of West Virginia piled up at the piers at Newport News Point, never to return. The deciduous trees are pretty much gone by the time you pass Williamsburg, and longleaf pines, most at least fifty feet tall, dominate the landscape on 64 from there eastward. The black soil is gone, and the pine roots shoot down into mostly sand. The sun also vanishes, too close to be seen. It teams with the sky and the rivers, and you can't tell any of them apart.

The longleaf pines, dark as my shades, have jettisoned their middle branches in favor of a canopy strategy at the top, where they may have taken a final stand against the crushing haze. They are inert, caught mid-stride like statues of brave and overmatched warriors, not hewn in honor but frozen by a quicker and more resourceful alien foe. The light has appropriated the needles and the dark scaly bark and advances now from around them, reconnoitering on side view mirrors and passing chrome, charging from windows and from my car keys, and making for my eyes as if it were a bayonet. I can see how sea power bottled up Cornwallis down here, just by squinting at the sky.

Lenore's welding shield gives the steel sky a dull green tint, and it makes me feel bottled up, too, as if I'm driving through glass, maybe through one of the old Coke bottles I'd drain when I'd visit Lenore's apartment. With my shield off, the Peninsula sky varies from a blue-gray-white to a

darker-shade-of-gray-white, but it's always some kind of gray-white, like the sky over the shoulders of squinting family members in overexposed photographs.

Lenore's father and her brother stared out of silver frames on her end tables. Her pictures, along with her modest library of art, philosophy, history, and literature books occupying separate sections, were reference materials for the stories that kept us together summer afternoons. Her green patio awning softened the light pouring in through her sliding glass doors. She was like a nun, carefully maintaining a convent of culture. She never acknowledged the shipyard.

Her mind was quicker than mine. She was Mercury's nun, if Mercury needed one, and she moved fast to keep her world from being pulled in by the nearby shipyard. Her father was a vice-president of the C&O Railway at the turn of the century before the shipyard eclipsed Newport News Point as the city's chief financial base. Stopping in after work and dressed in my steel-toed shoes and long-sleeve button-downs, I felt responsible for the shift somehow.

Some afternoons she would end her stories with reflections on one or more of my deficiencies. The stories didn't have to end that way because I heard the same stories end benignly lots of times with both of us laughing. She would always laugh first, one eye filled with tears and the other eye trained on me, in training.

I never saw a surprise ending coming. I wasn't even sure it was there after it had settled uncomfortably between us in some wing chair. The only thing I knew for sure was the burning I felt in my cheeks.

After I left for college, I began to feel off-balance at home, and not just in Lenore's apartment. I found no horizon to steady me. The sky told me nothing about what I'd find beneath it. Sunshine may be hitting the pines or rain may be glancing off the asphalt, but who could tell from looking at the sky? The weather was hidden in the steel reflected from the rivers. Each summer, I knew my job and little else.

I remember looking across the James River summer mornings from the Pentran bus curling around Kettle Pond on its way to the shipyard. The river reflected the sky and the sky reflected the river. Nothing was captured between these two mirrors, not even the sunrise, since the view across the river is southwestward. Only the pines on the Isle of Wight County shoreline four miles away stood out - dull green arrows pointing both ways, adding only their ambivalence to the sky's tug on the river. The rest was light steel and lighter steel, but at least you didn't need shades that early in the day.

Prospective employers always found my five summers at Newport News's shipyard to be the most impressive thing on my resume. During one interview, an older gentleman looked out of his fourth-story window and called the yard a "magnificent enterprise." But I wasn't applying for work at shipyards then. Not after those five summers. I wasn't even on the Peninsula by then. By then I was calling home and hearing Lenore speak with an accent for the first time.

I remember stuffing a dollar bill down the chute my first day on the bus. The driver looked at me, wearing what must have been my own expression. I felt the men lined up on the asphalt behind me, so I decided not to ask for change. The next morning I felt the rapid clinks my coins made against the glass and steel as they rattled through their designated paths in the collection box. The sounds jarred me but the fog stayed with me. I took my seat and looked out the tinted window at the sky, dreaming of four-story air-conditioned office buildings with aircraft carrier

desks. I thought of my father spreading his large hands towards the opposite edges of one of them a year or two before he died.

I helped run pipe through a carrier for two of my summers. The X19s were supposed to keep the compartments between the steel bulkheads ventilated, but we started each day with nothing but steam from the river and smoke from the graveyard shift welders below decks. The day's first job was to tape up scavenged pieces of ventilation and to connect them to a blower from maybe two decks above. The air came out at us just about as hard as you can breathe out with your mouth wide open, and about as cool, but if you were very still, you could feel it. Other mates would siphon off of our line, so we had to go back and check it a lot. It was work.

"It's hot in here and I ain't lyin'." Baylor repeated his line on the dry dock bottom underneath a black submarine every morning until the heat and his alternation between goldbricking and work had settled him. As the day wore on, his voice became hard to hear over the grinders and tack welders and riggers anyway. One time - I don't know why - Baylor glanced at me and something connected through the haze, through the safety goggles, just for a moment. Concern, maybe. Maybe I was going through something. I was too young to know, and it was too long ago to reflect on now. Then Baylor turned his head towards the river hovering 40 feet above us and outside the dry dock gates. "It's hot in here and I ain't lyin'," he said.

The second whistle's air-raid wail smothered downtown Newport News every weekday morning at seven. The siren's workups were like blizzards and its long wind-downs were like snowdrifts, throwing us together in ways we couldn't have foreseen. Hauling copper pipe one morning I uncovered Manny Herbert who had sat behind me with a full beard his second time through seventh grade. Steam was puffing up through some asphalt next to a rail line where Manny and some others were loading up cars with scrap metal. I walked away after we had reconnected. "Stay in school or you'll end up here," he called after me, holding his gloves in one hand.

We had our helmets on at seven. They put out enough information to deflect most things. Mine said "X42" and "Finley." I was summer help and everyone knew it, but I didn't know they knew it. I was pretty sure nothing was discovered at the shipyard. I spent my second shipyard summer at the copper shop helping two mates clean pipe. They had burn marks on their faces and hands from the hydrochloric acid they dipped the pipes in and out of all day, one of them lowering the chain and the other guiding the pipes. Towards the end of the summer, I had a sandwich with one of them while the other took a nap under the shop's loading dock overhang.

"How long you worked with Lewes, Smitty?"

"I don't know." He munched, put a hand to his hip and looked to sea. "Twenty-five years, maybe?" He glanced at me, as if to hear my side of it.

I chewed for a while. "What's Lewes's first name?"

He paused. "You know, Finney," he said, chewing again. "I don't know."

Most times, though, the noon whistle took me outside the gate. I'd walk to the West Avenue Library on 30th Street or to Saints Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church on 25th Street and eat my bag lunch there. Both places were almost blue with air-conditioning. The library had books piled to its old ceilings and I could see the gilded stars painted on the church's dark blue

firmament. The white sky waited outside like a leashed dog tied to a streetlamp. I would pull my words out of my back pocket and rest, or dream. One day at the church I read:

And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron.

Not quite as hopeful as the gold words running in a circle around the firmament above me, I thought. Was it even worse outside my Bible, though? The yard reserved the brass for the final outfitting - for the compass and the binnacle and other instruments. The only brass in my world was the Navy officers' buckles and epaulets. But the siren wailed and I stuffed my words out of sight. I walked back, trying to make sense of the carrier's monumental flight deck against the steel humidity that had already mothballed it, three years before sea trials.

The bus ride home wasn't as jarring as the ride in, but the bus's air conditioning wouldn't work much better than our carrier's taped-up ventilation lines. Enoch's laugh would cut through the bus benches and would make for the tinted bus windows on either side of me. It was the only thing I could hear above the bus's roar and the murmuring workers. Enoch worked somewhere around me on the carrier, and his laugh, warm and mechanical, would pulse through the ship's compartments more frequently as quitting time got closer. On the bus, his laugh would become an intermittent alarm I had the privilege of sleeping through, and the bus driver would wake me at my street, which was the last stop. Enoch's conversation would become clearer in my sleep as he would pass my bench three stops earlier.

"You wide open!"

"I saw you rollin' up by the canteen. Forman said you were rollin'!"

"You the one!"

The laugh would trail Enoch off of the bus, along with pieces of men's jokes, funny in their own right once but now serving as reminders of genuine laughter, as ways of passing by friends and years and hopes, without excuse or even contact, on the way off the bus. Words struggling out of shells on the sand after the tides had worn the conjunctions and subordinate clauses into Hampton Roads. Enoch's laugh again. The bus brakes at each stop releasing the pieces and the laughs into the afternoon's bright haze with a valve's mechanical desperation, adding to yesterday's pieces and laughs now floating under and beside every Pentran bus passing through the haze, now tarnished and threatening through the tinted bus windows.

It did not rain that summer.

Source: http://www.slowreads.com/NashSteelVault1.htm

Astarte

By Via Negativa

Up before dawn with old songs playing in my head and the planet Venus slowly winking in and out of sight through the leaves of an oak. Great-horned and screech owls call off and on above the horizon notes of night insects, that endless braid. The half-light of the half-moon lends an undersea feeling to things, a glimpse almost of how the world might look without six billion

bright-eyed humans to dream it awake.

Feeling a little like a refugee, I sit as always, unmoving, in my accustomed spot. If I shifted my chair on the porch by as little as three inches to the right or left, everything would be thrown off-kilter. To call me a creature of habit would be a vast understatement. But without such stillness and fidelity, how could I mark the changes? The safe vantagepoint is the only one that lasts.

I do allow my imagination to run, old hound, sniffing out the day-old narratives of loss and lust. But it comes to heel when I call; it knows how to listen. From the yard, the scrabbling of claws on bark. Up in the woods, a footfall, an explosive snort. A high-pitched quaver suddenly close at hand.

Astarte, I whisper, preferring this older name for the morning star. *Instigator of holy desire, giving the topmost leaves the slip at last!* This hour I have spent with one eye on her progress was well worth the loss in sleep.

Stillness, fidelity, and the inner ear: the body's spirit level, from which alone we can know trajectory and motion. Then, too, one could hardly distinguish figure from ground or find a body's coordinates in space without that slender string we call memory. Half-conscious of it I'm telling the beads of a thousand other such moments, so slowly does the dawn come, so incrementally do outlines and colors emerge - tall goldenrod, the banks of white snakeroot - and so long does it take for that blazing ember to drown in a sea of light.

This is my contribution to the Ecotone wiki *topic* Making a Safe Space. *See also my essay + translation from April 30 called* Man doesn't exist.

permalink posted by Dave @ 9/5/2004 08:57:54 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040927185716/http://neithernor.blogspot.com/2004_09_01_neithernor_archive.html

Silent night

By P.

My daughter finds it hard to get to sleep. Long out of babyhood and an admirer of Hillary Duff and Harry Potter, she still demands the company of a parent for the interminable, final half-hour of her night when she falls asleep.

She tosses and turns, kicks, thrashes and grabs my hand and often seems to want to curl up in my lap, as though it were years ago and she were still small enough to cuddle in a rocking chair. She hates to go to sleep; she itches and wakes if she gets too hot, but if she gets too cold, she'll wake, too, and both events will leave her with a nightmare.

I have never had the heart to deny her those last long minutes of contact. Walking out is my chief response to bad behavior, but she knows, and I know, that eventually I or her mother will be back to admonish and comfort her, when even the worst gale of misbehavior, tantrum, and tears is done.

Everybody tells me this is wrong.

Kids are supposed to be hardened to sleeping alone in their infancy; the parents' failure to do this is bad for the child and bad for the parents themselves [the advoce is correct, I'm sure]. Yet there I sit, staring out her half-curtained window at the pool of color the security lights make on the lawn, with her small, sweaty hand gripping mine, waiting for her to go to sleep and thinking -- too much.

Tonight I am thinking about the adults grieving for friends and children in Russia, the ones killed in an exceptionally cruel act of madness at, for God's sake, a middle school. I am thinking about the explosives that kill children in Iraq, Israel and the West Bank, and about the cruelty of adults who can dismiss their loss as the price of making a point. I can't help thinking that no one can guarantee something horrific won't happen again in the United States.

My sense of perspective, which says Cleveland might get a free pass from some horrors on the grounds that if someone blew up this long-disrespected city, people would make jokes about it, is a thin shield. Fears enough haunt the city. Home-invasion robberies. Hundreds of sex offenders, newly released. A couple of girls disappearing every year. Shaky schools, bravely doing their best. Poverty and a threadbare social fabric. At night, when I am tired, it is easy to remember everything that is ominous. My daughter can laugh at bogeymen, but they're out there, driving around, eating hamburgers and breathing -- just like her father, but different.

And it's *MY* duty to try to make her feel safe in this last dark span before sleep carries her off.

I don't know how much she learns of the news. We don't go out of our way to tell her; she was young at the time of 9/11, but she had nightmares about it with the rest of us. We lock the doors; we pay for the lights; we din into her a multitude of things to avoid (Maybe there should be Grimm fairy tales for an urban setting). And then again, there needs to be a time to find peace, to set aside fear, to face -- either inward or outward, I'm not sure it matters -- with calm, and to try to create at least the appearance of safe place, for her, if not for myself.

And so I don't begrudge her a hand, if she must hold one. Sometimes we both benefit.

Source: http://my.core.com/~pzicari/text/Safety.htm

Places for Books

Bi-Weekly Topic for Sept. 15, 2004

Translating the rain

By Via Negativa

A contribution to the Ecotone topic Places for Books.

Body of rain, I drink to you. Body of long grass & the dark edge of the woods. I woke up at 3:00 in the morning murmuring the words to a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins, whom I have not read in years - *O if we but knew what we do / When we delve or hew— / Hack and rack the growing green! / Since country is so tender / To touch, her being só slender . . .* A gentle rain with crickets in it & the twittering of thrushes & warblers who have flown all night, in & out of showers, no stars to guide them. I went back to sleep on the couch with my head near the screen door, listening, & dreamed about a woman made of light whose warm regard turned the pages of books yellow, orange, scarlet, made spines of books crack & the covers warp. With a faint whispering their pages began to come loose and flutter down from the shelves in multiple reenactments of the myth of Icarus. I walked through dimly lit stacks chanting an LC call number like the name of a long-gone lover, shuffling through the fallen pages, which were already up above my ankles. This rain will go on for months. When it stops, the sky will reach all the way to the ground: an appalling brightness. We will squint & shiver, we will stamp our feet for warmth on the hard ground, swept bare by wind. Our fingers will itch for the feel of pages turning. Strained eyes will long for opaque surfaces, the darkness between the trees. Our skins will turn brittle. We will search like lizards for a flat rock in the sun.

permalink posted by Dave @ 9/15/2004 08:42:03 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20040927185716/http://neithernor.blogspot.com/2004_09_01_neithernor_archive.html#109525327648175088

Library Lurker

By P.

Some libraries harbor a ghastly phantom -- a woeful wraith of methane, mercaptan, hydrogen sulfide and aldehydes -- a shapeless specter of stink in the stacks.

You wander among the old, steel shelves and turn a corner -- looking for the M mysteries, perhaps. And there it is, proclaiming briefly that *I HAD RED MEAT* or *Weeeee aaaaateeeee beeeeeaaaans*!

Gaaah.

Now, it's in the nature of library stacks that if you aren't lined up exactly with them, you can't see what's down the aisles. It's as if you're entirely alone with the wisdom of the ages (if the ages be Rex Stout and Lilian Braun) as you poke around. From time to time you might hear someone move a book or rub a wet finger along the side of a balloon (why do people bring balloons into libraries? And where do they hide them?) but you never see anyone. Your neighbors have just nipped around the corner of the shelving, and they're out of sight. Maybe that's the temptation. Maybe the library is the errand everyone does right after lunch. Maybe it's a spirit of intestinal mischief that sets off little skyrockets of grossness.

Actually, I love old libraries. The one I grew up with has a 19th-century tin ceiling, dark wooden shelves and a lovely, paneled oak librarian's desk, all in a small space dominated by a picture of my hometown's namesake in his ancient navy uniform. I outgrew the kids section early and lingered for years in the tiny teen section, in the back corner where huge frosted-glass windows borrowed a little of the room's dim light for a work space behind them (and what a privilege, and what a disappointment it was to go through the dark passageway into that room as a young adult, only to find it mostly empty).

I thought the stacks in my college's 60-year-old library were fascinating -- they were all steel, with a warren of low, narrow passageways, dimly lighted, among the books. Clomping in and out among the racks, I became convinced that the floors were made of glass when I noticed that there seemed to be a light coming from below. The floors, in fact, seemed to be afterthoughts tacked onto the shelves, rising two or three stories into a gloomy old stone-and-brick barn. I spent a lot of time in there, looking for stuff and feebly studying at the tiny carrels.

The old storage system -- I have found it in public libraries, too -- is notable for something else. No ventilation. That's no doubt how I encountered the phantom, in a moment of disgust after taking a careless breath.

So, what are you going to say? All mammals do it -- Ronald Reagan once suggested we could blame global warming on cows. Perhaps it's not the principle so much as the unexpected, undesired intimacy it forces on you. The very movement of your passage dissipates the tasteless deed into the general effluvium of mildew, dust, old ink and paper that hangs about such places: There's nothing left to complain about.

One shudders to think of the condition of the older books, languishing untended on upper shelves and bathed for generations in, well, whatever is floating around.

But y'know, perhaps the unspeakable is thought of, if never mentioned. In my final year of college, 30 years ago, the school opened a gleaming new library; the next year I got to use the brand-new library at my graduate school, which was notable for its gray-and-purple color scheme and the plastic drawers in the card catalog. Downtown Cleveland boasts a dramatic new wing that strongly resembles a birthday cake stacked upon a cardboard box. My present hometown is about to renovate ITs main library (but that, heaven help us, is another tale.).

A conspicuous feature of all of them?

Massive ventilation.

Source: http://my.core.com/~pzicari/text/Books.html

Questing For Bookshops

By Feathers of Hope (Numenius)]

An entry for the Ecotone Wiki *topic on* Places for Books.

These next two weekends we're busy so any field trip to Powell's will have to wait for a while. But such an imagined trip leads one to ask where *are* the truly great bookstores, the ones worth making long journeys to visit? Powell's is clearly one, but others? Here are a couple of resources that may help.

Evelyn C. Leeper edits an annotated list of bookstores of the world. This list seems fairly comprehensive and is updated frequently.

More selectively, Robert Teeter has a personal bookstore hall of fame. I'm glad to see I've been to a few of them.

I'm sure there are other such lists out there, but this is a start.

Posted by Numenius at September 15, 2004 11:21 PM

Comments

Back of Beyond Books in Moab is one such. I mean it's not a Powell's: it's actually rather small. But it's got an amazing desert literature selection. and here's the thing: it's in Moab.

Posted by: Chris Clarke at September 16, 2004 01:24 PM

Thank you for the heads up on bookstore lists--back in the early 90's, I used to travel with a small paperback sold in used books stores--it was a pocket sized guide to used bookstores in California. (It was how I found Bay Books in Concord and Bonanza in Walnut Creek).

I sent an e-mail to the Evelyn Leeper, to notify her of the closing of Reede Moore in Petaluma. I just found out last weekend.

I was told the owner retired to devote herself to full time bookbinding. Very disapointed--this was where I found some of my favorite poetry books. I had hoped to return and buy a collection of essays by Roethke on the teaching of poetry. I had found it, but passed at the time--AUUUGGHH!

I also mentioned to Evelyn that we have 3 independents in Davis, one chain, and one university bookstore. If Evelyn is open to an outside review, I let you folks know (and the local poets), and perhaps we can discuss among ourselves our opinions of our local bookstores.

(Ah, forgot the store in Woodland--and it's name!)

Posted by: Anita at September 17, 2004 11:13 AM

The Next Chapter in Woodland...

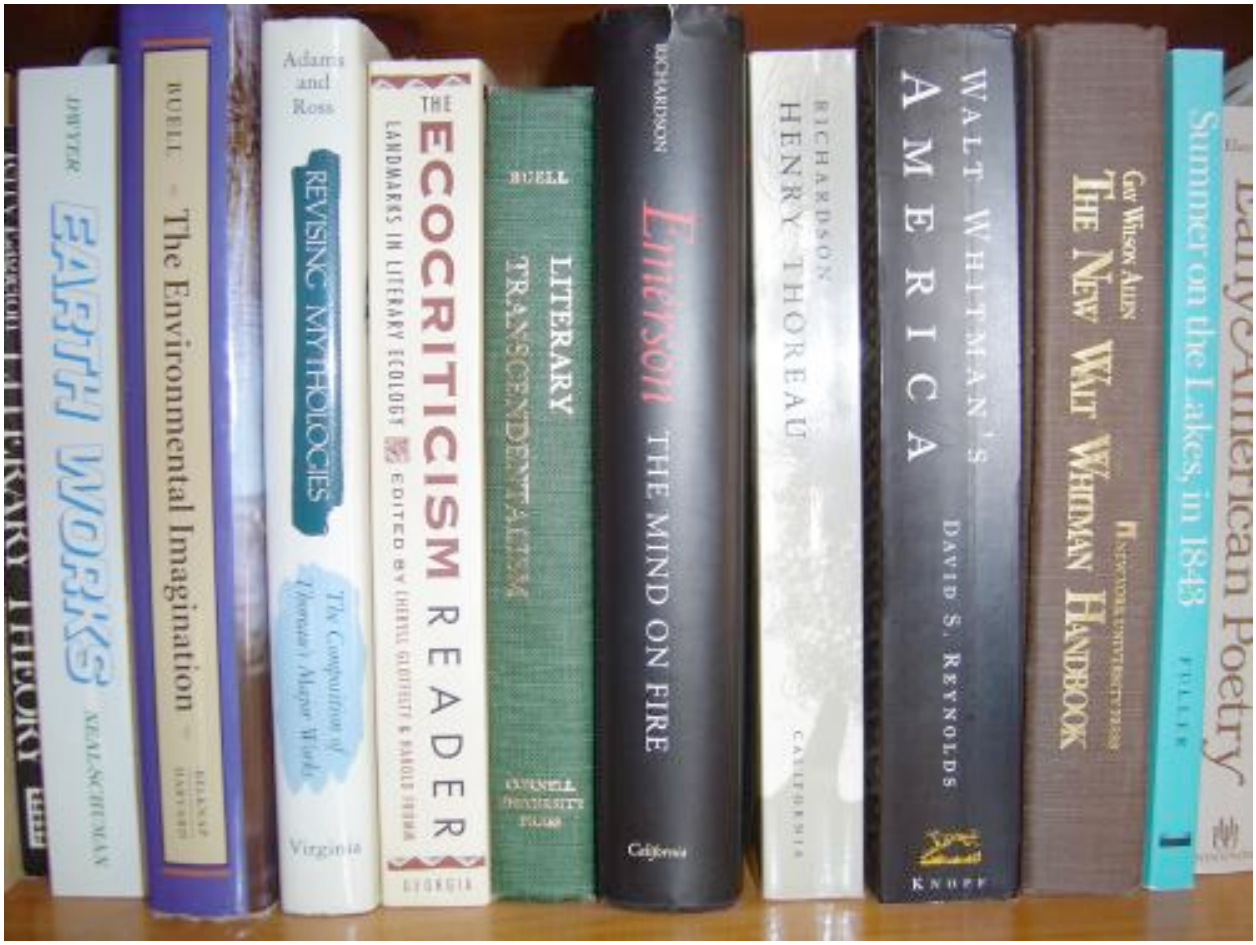
Posted by: virginia at September 17, 2004 02:11 PM

Blackwell's bookshop in Oxford was my first encounter with a 'real' bookshop. For me, the real quality test of a bookshop has always been the range of bird books on offer, and Blackwell's had shelf after shelf of field guides, scientific accounts and bird folklore - it was like Christmas had come early! Add to that its labyrinthine sequence of wooden-beamed rooms and its location on a cobbled street surrounded by medieval university buildings, and you have the quintessential bookshop.

Posted by: richard at September 17, 2004 02:42 PM Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/09/15/questing_for_boo.html

Places for books

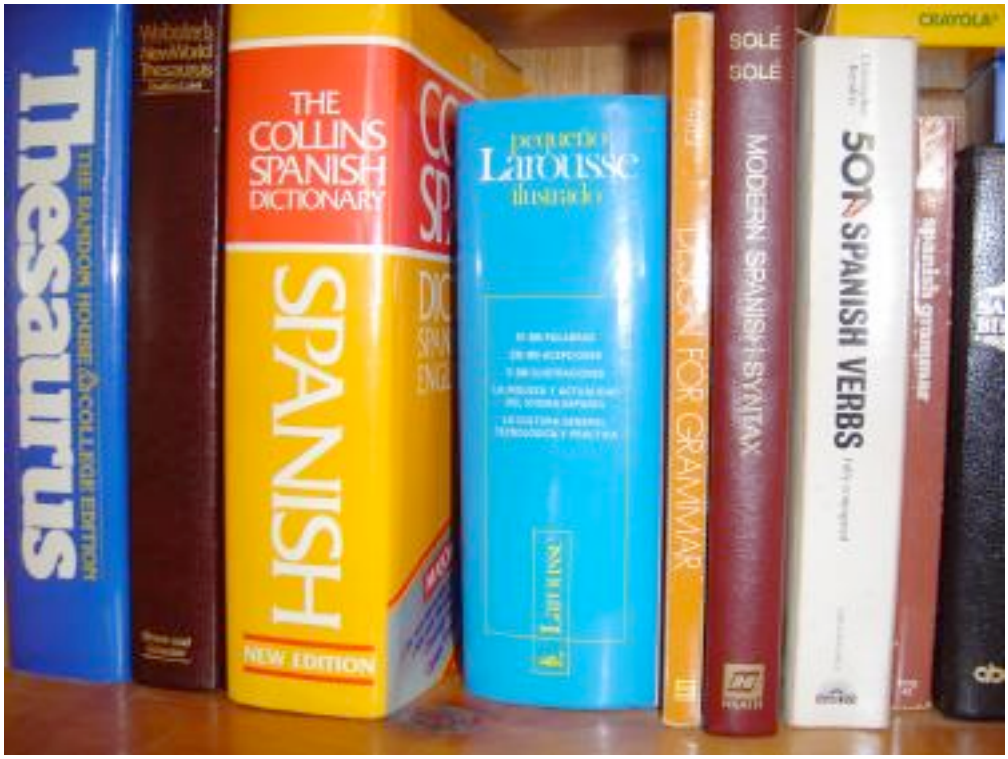
By Hoarded Ordinaries



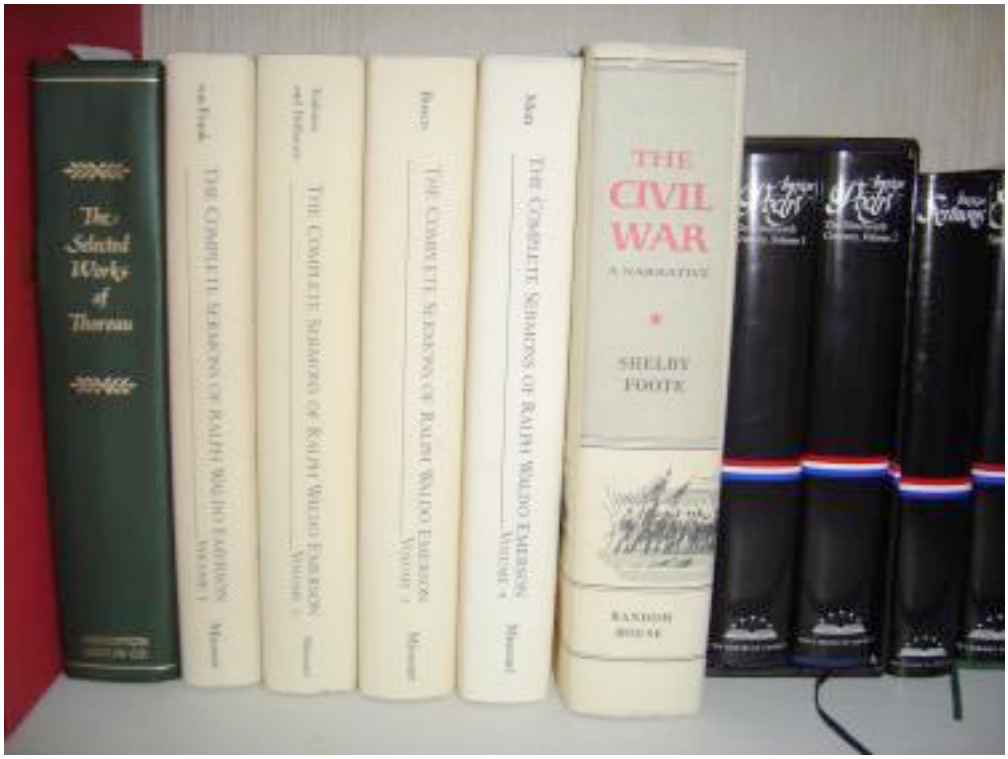
As cruel fate would have it, I've never had enough room for books. When I lived with my parents in Ohio, I was a mad collector of dust: my bookshelves were filled with, yes, books, and model horses, and knicknacks of every stripe. Under the bed, I had boxes of bones: owl pellets, scavenged rodent jaws, a whole and entire deer skull. Crammed in my closet were scrapbooks full of clippings, stamps, bottlecaps. If it could be held, captured, or scavenged, I found a way to collect it. And if it had pages that could be turned, I wanted to read it, own it, hoard it.

Book hoarding, along with stamp and model horse collecting, became my means of escape. Growing up in a neighborhood without children my own age, I spent hours in my room reading, daydreaming, or writing. I was preternaturally precocious, wanting to know the name of every flower and the habits of every bird. Even when I myself was a child, I never got along well with children; my mind was filled with adult thoughts and concerns, my interests lying on the shelves of the grown-up section of the library. I read Lolita before I was old enough to be one of Humbert Humbert's nymphets, and I read Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf not long after most of my classmates had moved past the Big Bad Wolf. In a word, I was a wildly weird child, and books were one expression of that weirdness. When other pubescent girls were panting after the latest teen heart-throb, I was fretting over which avian field guide was the best.

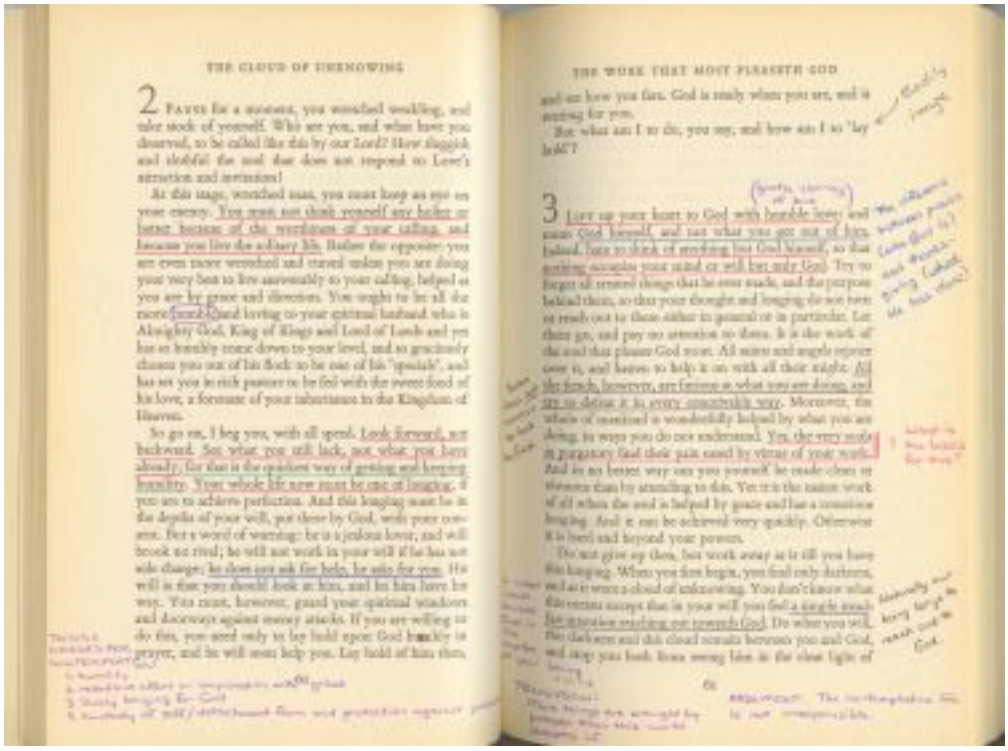
I've recently been sorting through my books. When Chris and I sold our house in Hillsborough and moved to Keene a little more than a year ago, my library went through a massive downsizing. Previously, my books filled two full-size (floor to ceiling) bookshelves along with a shorter chest-high shelf; I had extra books tucked above, behind, and before the ones that fit on shelves. By the time we packed to move, I'd sold over half of my books, some online, others in a massive garage sale in which we nearly gave away possessions. Although I'd resigned myself to the relinquishment involved in consciously downsizing from a 3-bedroom house to a 2-bedroom apartment, there were two garage-sale transactions that broke my heart: the sale of the overstuffed chair where the dog and I would curl up to read, and the sale (to a used book dealer) of the complete set of Thomas Merton's journals. "Try to keep them together," I pleaded. "Other folks have wanted to buy a single volume or two, and asked which one was the best," I explained. "But journals should be read from beginning to end, and I never had the time…" The used book dealer nodded, sympathetic, as if we were discussing a litter of kittens looking for a good home, but we both knew the truth: good homes for esoteric books are hard to find anywhere, and Thomas Merton might struggle to find a home here in New Hampshire.



When we moved to Keene, Chris and I shared a single bookshelf, with some of my books spilling over into a living room curio cabinet and others being stashed in my office at school. Slowly, though, the collecting bug crept in again: one innocent purchase there, another here. Although I've acquired with practice the discipline of checking the library for a book before I buy it, there's always the allure of ownership: if it's mine, I can keep it, and write in it, and always refer to it. If I own it, I can have it at hand at any hour when I need it or want to refer to it or need to cite it: a scholar's occupational hazard.



Even more difficult than downsizing a library, though, is the seemingly simple act of splitting one: there's something heartbreaking about sorting previously shared books into stacks labeled "his" and "hers," each destined to their own separate place. When Chris and I married, we'd both recently graduated with Bachelor's degrees in English; having taken many of the same classes, we owned many of the same books. Back then we decided whose book to keep based upon the notes therein: my copy of the Walt Whitman Handbook stayed as did his copy of the Riverside Shakespeare. Now nearly 13 years later, we've gone through the same process in reverse: having continued to study American Literature first as an avocation and now as a career, I got custody of our jointly-purchased first edition Leaves of Grass facsimile whereas Chris claimed the copy of the Blue Cliff Record he'd bought for me some years back. Many of the books we split are filled with notes from happier, more innocent days, but these notes don't necessarily correspond with who got what: my copy of the Gospel Parallels contains Chris's neo-pagan scrawl whereas his copy of the Diamond Sutra has margins crammed with my scribblings.



THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING

2 PAUSE for a moment, you wounded wrestling, and take stock of yourself. Who are you, and what have you deserved, to be called like this by our Lord? How sluggish and slothful the soul that does not respond to Love's attraction and invitation!

At this stage, wounded man, you must keep an eye on your enemy. You must not think yourself any holier or better because of the worthiness of your calling, and because you live the solitary life. Rather the opposite: you are even more wounded and crazed unless you are doing your very best to live unreservedly to your calling, helped as you are by grace and direction. You ought to be all the more [illegible] and loving to your spiritual husband who is Almighty God, King of Kings and Lord of Lords and yet has so humbly come down to your level, and so graciously chosen you out of his flock to be one of his 'spouses', and has set you in rich pasture to be fed with the sweet food of his love, a foretaste of your inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven.

So go on, I beg you, with all speed. Look forward, not backward. See what you still lack, not what you have already, for that is the quickest way of getting and keeping humility. Your whole life now must be one of longing, if you are to achieve perfection. And this longing must be in the depths of your soul, put there by God, with your consent. But a word of warning: he is a jealous lover, and will brook no rival; he will not work in your soul if he has not sole charge; he does not ask for help, he asks for you. His will is that you should look at him, and let him have his way. You must, however, guard your spiritual windows and doorways against enemy attacks. If you are willing to do this, you need only to lay hold upon God humbly in prayer, and he will soon help you. Lay hold of him then,

THE WORK THAT MOST PLEASETH GOD

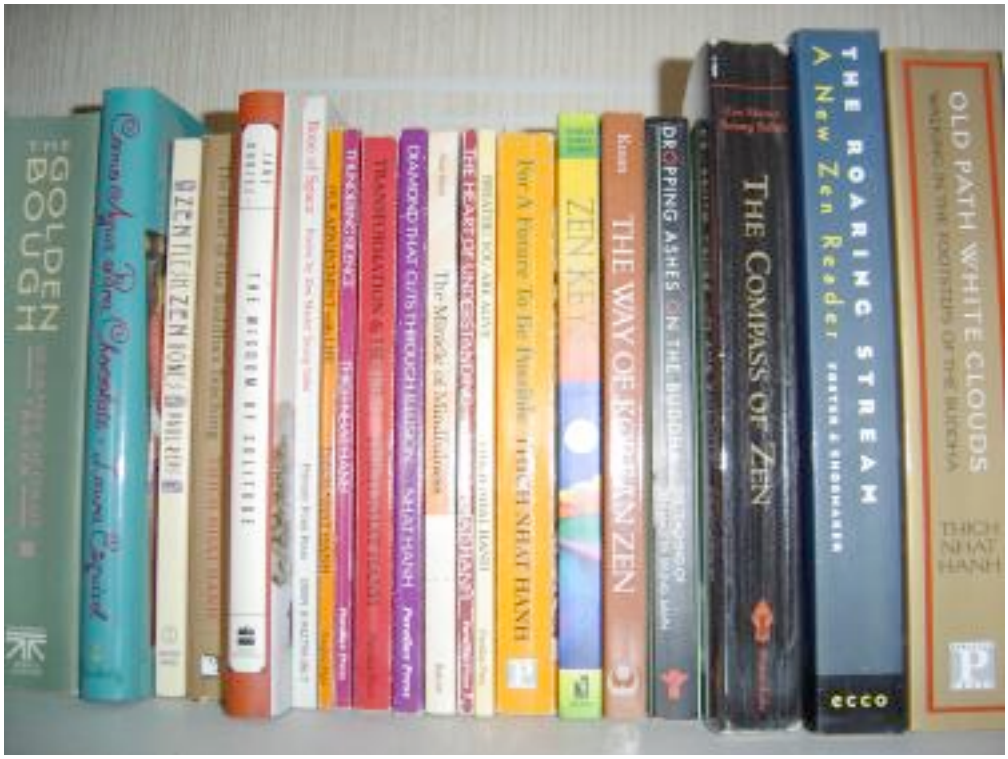
and see how you fare. God is ready when you are, and is waiting for you.

But what am I to do, you say, and how am I to 'lay hold'?

3 Lift up your heart to God with humble love, and mean God himself, and not what you get out of him. Intend here to think of nothing but God himself, so that nothing occupies your mind or will but only God. Try to forget all created things that he ever made, and the purpose behind them, so that your thought and longing do not turn or reach out to them either in general or in particular. Let them go, and pay no attention to them. It is the work of the soul that pleases God most. All saints and angels rejoice over it, and hasten to help it on with all their might. All the friends, however, are furious at what you are doing, and try to defeat it in every conceivable way. Moreover, the whole of mankind is wonderfully helped by what you are doing, in ways you do not understand. Yes, the very souls in purgatory find their pain eased by virtue of your work. And in no better way can you yourself be made clean or stronger than by attending to this. Yet it is the easiest work of all when the soul is helped by grace and has a constant longing. And it can be achieved very quickly. Otherwise it is hard and beyond your powers.

Do not give up then, but work away as if till you have this longing. When you first begin, you find only darkness, and as it were a cloud of unknowing. You don't know what this means except that in your will you feel a simple reach for something reaching out towards God. Do what you will, this darkness and this cloud remain between you and God, and stop you both from seeing him in the clear light of

One book that both Chris and I had owned before we married is The Cloud of Unknowing, a primer on prayer by an anonymous fourteenth-century English monk. It seemed obvious that I'd end up with this book: over the years Chris and I have danced on every conceivable side of the Christian/Buddhist divide, but I always naturally found myself on Christian ground, my longing for a personal God leading me smack-dab back into the arms of Christ crucified. So the other day when I checked to see whose copy of *The Cloud* I'd inherited in the split, it was like reuniting with an old friend to discover my maiden name signed inside its cover, my multicolored notes and underlinings covering its oft-read pages. (Click here for an enlarged view.) Who was it, I wonder, who wrote these notes: who was this 13-years-younger version of myself? I've had this book so long, its cracked spine lightly gives up its yellowed pages, a book I literally read to pieces. So who was that Lorianne DiSabato who thought she knew a thing or two about prayer and the God those prayers are directed to? What Cloud of Unknowing did she labor under when she thought "'til death do us part" was an attainable task?



Whoever Miss DiSabato thought she was, Dr. Schaub now tries to carry on, rearranging remaining books on lightened shelves and retrieving those that hid out for a year in an office at Keene State. Whether we have enough places for our books, they presumably have places for us, holding in their leaves old hopes crushed like dried flowers. Opening an old book, who hasn't been surprised to find an old photograph, note, or dollar bill long forgotten, a bookmark from a long-ago, hurried moment? The books we choose to own also often choose to own us, preserving in their pages a snapshot of days gone by, the youthful dreams of selves we'd forgotten, shelved.

This post in my contribution to the Ecotone biweekly topic, Places for Books. And after you've perused the other postings to this topic, be sure to click on over to The Coffee Sutras to wish Kurt a happy birthday. Kurt is one of the bloggers I read before I myself started blogging, so in one sense "Hoarded Ordinaries" would not exist without "The Coffee Sutras." So even though I'm a committed tea-drinker myself, Kurt, here's wishing you many caffeinated refills.

Posted by Lorianne

Comments

Tom Montag Says:
Sep 15, 2004 at 9:51 pm

So - that's the "official" announcement, huh? Dividing up the library. It's only an emblem of how tough the path is.

What is spooky, looking at your images, is how many of the same books we have. I mean, Rural Hours??

There are two kinds of people in the world, I think: those who write in books and those who don't. I, too, am a writer-in-books. If the author didn't mean to engage you in conversation, they wouldn't have left that white space all around the text. It's like a pre-blog comments box.

You know you've given us lots of clues before today's post that you were a weird weird child. There are worse things.

Lorianne Says:
Sep 16, 2004 at 6:18 am

An official announcement? Nah, that's too obvious…I'm all about implication and subtlety. If you can't read between the lines, you don't know me well enough to hear my secrets.
So, you've read *Rural Hours*? How wonderful! I figure if a book is good enough for Thoreau to read, it's good enough for me, too.

I'm loving this notion of marginalia as being like blog comments…hmmm, I'm going to have to think about that. But yes, I'm bad about writing in books…I've even occasionally written (in pencil, lightly) in library books: shhh, don't tell!
btw, I tried to take a shot of the shelf where *Curlew: Home* is hanging out with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Zen & Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, and an anthology of 19th century women's "local color" sketches, but that picture didn't turn out. So you'll just have to believe me when I say your book is running with a curious crowd!

Ivy Says:
Sep 16, 2004 at 10:00 am

Lorianna, sorry if this adds another darn book to the collection, but have you read 'Ex Libris: Confessions of a Common Reader' by Anne Fadiman? Mentions a merger of two household libraries, too.

Chris Clarke Says:
Sep 16, 2004 at 10:29 am

Wonderful post, Lorianne.. I get the feeling Chris and Becky could profitably start a support group for Spouses of Non-Recovering Book Addicts.

John Says:
Sep 17, 2004 at 11:03 am

You can't get rid of the Library of America books! No!
Really, those things can be addictive:P

Sylvia Says:

Sep 17, 2004 at 7:28 pm

Ouch. Well, you can't keep a good woman down… Best of luck.

ntexas99 Says:
Sep 17, 2004 at 9:22 pm

This was both exhilirating and deeply saddening. It was a bit like peeking into your underwear drawer (who would have guessed you had such slinky and provocative things caressing your most private parts?). It also quietly asked to be contemplated for the pain amidst the pages, although I must openly admit I was hungry for your notations. I especially appreciated your colorful distinctions, as well as your healthy question marks.

Life is about questions, and yours are fervent with the quest of knowing. Dr Schaub has become a force to be reckoned with, even as she huddles 'neath the covers of her books.

O Says:
Sep 17, 2004 at 10:54 pm

I just got back to Windsor Ontario from two days in Dayton. Along the interstate, somewhere in Ohio, I saw some books, were they yours?
It's so hard to give our dears away.

thrive!,
O

Kurt Says:
Sep 19, 2004 at 12:04 am

Lorianne, you are most kind to wish me a happy birthday and to encourage others to do the same. When you started blogging, I knew immediately that you would be a force to be reckoned with.

My garage is becoming increasingly hard to move around in. Why? Because I'd rather buy books than bookcases. So there are boxes and boxes of them out there doing no one any good. Still, it's hard to part with them.

When my ex and I split up, we had to figure out what to do with the CDs. Book ownership, due to differing tastes, was pretty straightforward. And since I was the only one with a turntable, I kept all the LPs, regardless.

Still, some days I'd like to invite the public in and just tell them to take whatever they want of it all. One becomes tired of the burden of book, CD, or what-have-you ownership. They represent not just the ideas of the author but the identities of our own past. From time to time, one wishes it would all just go away.

Never that simple, however, is it?

shane Says:
Sep 20, 2004 at 2:07 am

Lorianne-

Once again, I am awestruck by the power of the words you write…and even more so by the words you don't write.

Mumun Says:

Sep 20, 2004 at 6:49 pm

No announcement, just the presence of splitting the library, reading the margin notes of someone who had no idea what changes were just around the corner. Very good entry.

Wild, weird reading children. When my family switched houses, it was because our library literally pushed us out of our home. Our ranch house in East Providence gave up every one of its walls and its basement to bookshelves, and when those had all been double-stacked, we moved to a Victorian house six blocks away.

So it might not be a big surprise, although it was to my teacher, to find me reading John Irving's early novels when I was a sixth-grader.

John Says:
Sep 22, 2004 at 1:18 pm

Lorianne, thanks for such a wonderful posting. There was so much in there that I could identify with. Always an enjoyable read.

John Says:
Sep 22, 2004 at 3:38 pm

Oh, and another thing… did you use a RULER to underline passages or is your hand really that steady?

Lorianne Says:
Oct 4, 2004 at 7:10 pm

Hey, everyone: apologies for the delay in responding!

Ivy, no, I've not read Fadiman's *Ex Libris*, but it sounds great! I wish there were a book equivalent of Netflix, where you could add books to your queue and then have someone ship the next title to you whenever you were ready for a new read… In any case, I'll add it to my mental list!
You're right, Chris…book hoarding is no less of an addiction than other predilections requiring a 12-step program. Can you imagine a household with *two* book addicts? It defies imagination!
John, I'm keeping my Library of America books…although my Thoreau volume is a bit battered (and well notated!) from my dissertation days. But hardbacks in general are the last of my books to go, and then only under dire circumstances!

Thanks, Sylvia, for the encouraging words: it's helpful to know people are rooting for me!
ntexas, you always seem to find the slinky implications between the lines: a woman after my own heart! Even as I child, I was always the one who asked "troublesome" questions, and I guess I've never grown out of it. Someone has to ask the tough questions…might as well be me if no one else has the courage.

O, if you saw book in Ohio, *surely* they were mine! My mother, actually, still has some of my college (undergrad) textbooks, and she bugs me to take them with me (or sell them!) each time I'm home. So maybe one of these days you'll see *those* books by the side of the road!

Kurt, as much as it pained me to practically give away so many books, it also was a great freeing experience. Thoreau was right when he said that our possessions possess us. It would have felt better, I think, to have given my books to friends who would have cherished them…but in leiu of that, selling books (cheaply) to strangers is also cathartic.

Shane, thanks for the kind words. I tend to be wordy, so it's good to hear that *someone* thinks I occasionally leave something unsaid!
Mumun, it doesn't surprise me that you come from a reading/book-hoarding family. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

John, good to hear that you enjoyed the post. And yes, I used a *ruler* to do that underlining: just like the kid in *Dead Poet's Society*!
Thanks, everyone, for the supportive comments: I'm feeling very warm & fuzzy now!

Source: http://hoardedordinaries.wordpress.com/2004/09/page/2/

Books and attachments

By Beginner's Mind

Books are going to drag me down.

Some of my earliest memories are of watching my parents read, and wanting to read books, too. I was disappointed with first grade; it didn't teach me enough words so that I could read the big people books my parents read. And my books had pictures; my parents' books didn't have pictures.

There are books in every room of our house. I've had to take art work off the wall to make room for bookcases. On many of the bookcases the books are stacked two deep. Suffice it to say our house resembles a library.

We have books in stacks on the floor. The headboard for our bed is a bookcase type. We have books in closets, in milk crates, in cardboard boxes and in plastic bins. We have them on coffee tables, in TV stands.

Some books are here because they make great references. Some are collectors items. I'm very fond of books signed by the author.

There are entire cases dedicated to Buddhism; to fly fishing; technical books, mostly computer science. There are history books. Karen has a few bookcases with children's books. I have one bookcase dedicated to religion and mythology. There are cases with fiction, notably populated with works by Harlan Ellison, Ray Bradbury, H.P. Lovecraft and his fellow pulp writers. We have the mysteries of Archer Mayor, Tony Hillerman, and Sue Grafton.

Earlier this summer we donated several boxes of books to the Lincoln library, which was severely damaged in the floods on 1998. You wouldn't notice anything missing.

If you come into our house, it will be obvious from the start; this is a place of books.

Music in my head: All kinds of Everly Brothers tunes.

posted by Robert @ 10:35 PM | Comments (5)

Comments

You just described my dream home.
Siona | Homepage | 09.16.04 - 12:22 am | #

Heh heh, mine too!
Robert | Homepage | 09.16.04 - 9:38 am | #

I have sold or given away probably 5000 books from my collection in the last 20 years. I still have far too many. t doesn't help that I work in a place where we get free review copies of incredible works.

My wife is looking forward to my finishing the shed-cum-office out back, with its planned 120 feet of built in shelves.
Chris Clarke | Homepage | 09.17.04 - 5:44 pm | #

Well, Chris and Robert... it sounds like the two of you have it far worse than Keith and I. I thought we had it bad, but now I'm not so worried. I've been telling him we need far more bookshelves around here, but the boxes and stacks we have sound like nothing compared to you two. Thanks for easing my mind. I can relax now. And renew the memberships to Barnes and Borders...
Keri | Homepage | 09.18.04 - 12:55 am | #

Robert: What a wonderful attachment to have! Really, your place sounds wonderful. In my own dream, I have a house with a tower, a spiral staircase with recesses (in the middle of the tower a little alcove with a comfy chair), then a wonderful room at the top with comfy couches, a day bed, bookcases and books galore (in audio too), and beautiful casements. I can see myself holed up reading, napping, listening to stories or music, and savoring sunsets. Perhaps a small balcony with gargoyles as companions, so that I can bask in late afternoon sunlight while reading poetry.... Of course, the Vermont Fall colors! The other joy would be in sharing this with my kids! All the best to you,

Nacho
Nacho | Homepage | 09.20.04 - 10:03 am | #

Source:
http://beginnermind.blogspot.com/2004_09_01_beginnermind_archive.html#109530330742808119

placing books on memory's shelf

By alembic

This post is for the Ecotone Wiki's joint blogging topic Places for Books:

This slim volume ' a pamphlet of a post, really ' belongs on memory's bookshelf. Its place is in a library of the past where mote-filtered sunlight washes the walls, and everything they shelter, with the mild sepia tones of nostalgia.

Inside the covers of this slim volume, somewhat sticky with the grime of forgetfulness, is a story about Shakespeare, dead for centuries, and a girl, very much alive in Romania in the early 1960s.

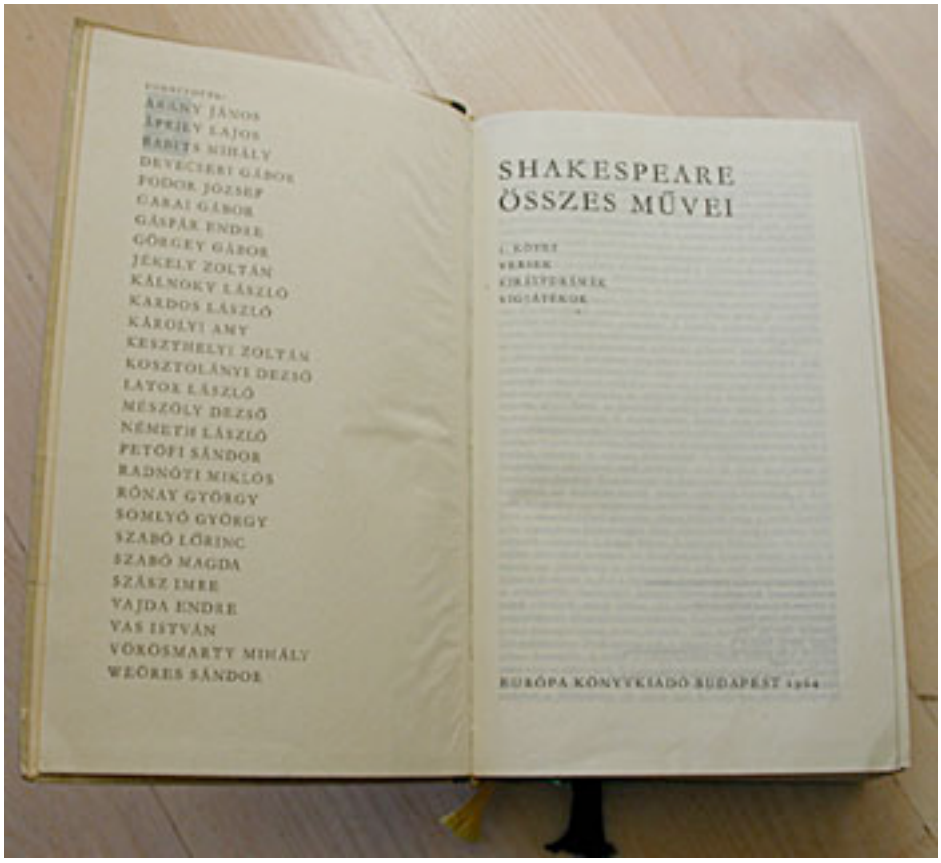
Though I don't remember much hardship in my Romanian childhood, I do remember standing in line for bread, for flour, for butter, for sugar. In much earlier years we stood in line because that's what it took to redeem the coupons we had for our rations of bread and butter. Much later, I believe, the lines at the food stores had to do with the Cuban crisis or one threat or another of capitalist takeovers, or whatever other phrase might best serve here to mirror the 'red scare' my counterpart in a small American town had to endure, along with drills about what to do in the case of a nuclear bomb attack. (We skipped those, by the way.)

Then, there were the occasional lines at the bookstores. Every once in a while there would be a shipment of classics, not too controversial, mind you. The idea was to give the illusion of hope for change, not the means for illuminating those hopes with the clarity of ideas that could bring about that change in fact. In other words, this was a bit of bread and circus for the reading rabble to keep them distracted in the casino of words.

My mother, who back in those days was well-enough connected to get advance word of these rare book shipments, found out that a particularly beautiful two-volume edition of all of Shakespeare's works translated into Hungarian were about to arrive. She was, if not first in line, at least close enough to the door to be let in to purchase one set, which, by the way cost an awful lot of money (if I still recall this correctly).

She brought the books home. I like to think that we cleared the table, perhaps even covered it with our best linen, as if we had been graced with visitors. I like to think that we then gathered around the table and opened the books in a hushed awe. None of that happened, except for my awe, I suppose, when I first started to read Shakespeare's sonnets.

I still have this set: green leather spines with mild gold lettering, and inside the linen covers, thin, nearly transparent vellum paper ... and three silk bookmarks, bound to the spine, in green, yellow, and black. These are slightly frayed from use, which they got a lot of while the Shakespeare I knew spoke only in Hungarian to me.



What my Hungarian Shakespeare used to tempt me with was, of course, an idyllic landscape for escape and romance, courtesy of the magic carpet of words. But even back then, for me, these books were also like a library stocked with the dramatized documentaries of the kinds of persisting human follies that both build and burn libraries, depending on which way the winds of hope or despair are shifting.

Shakespeare's work was my Moebius strip. With each twist in a sonnet, with each turn in a comedy or a tragedy, yet another take, turned inside out, on the will and desires of human beings would flash in my understanding, illuminating not only the way in which art houses follies, but also the ways in which the follies of history make architects out of artists.

Posted at September 17, 2004 12:18 AM

Comments

Maria: this is a beautiful post. I love the mobius strip idea. And I love Shakespeare speaking Hungarian...

Posted by: Pica on September 17, 2004 05:49 AM

Wonderful.

Posted by: dale on September 24, 2004 05:40 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20050226172947/http://www.ashladle.org/archives/000421.html

Plants in Place

Bi-Weekly Topic for Oct. 1, 2004

My green and ivy days

By P.

In a big square window of my second apartment, there hung a huge Swedish ivy.

Facing south in the unobstructed sunshine of a third-floor view overlooking the railroad tracks and a broad, open tract of pavement that had been abandoned first as a railroad terminal and again as a parking lot, it thrived -- gloried, even. The long tendrils of scalloped green leaves must have been three feet long.

Naturally, in such an apartment, the air was rather cool, and I kept the plant well watered. It was a truly happy ivy, and I named it Olga.

Olga was a gift from my sister, in honor of my moving into my first unfurnished apartment. The place was (a) cheap and (b) most convenient to everything I might need downtown -- just across from my office and a little pizza place; down the street from such necessities as drugstores, and the discount store was conveniently placed beyond the parking lot. Not that I had any money to spend, for my pay was low and a lot of it went into rent and heat. I wore my hair long because I couldn't afford haircuts.

The apartment was big, though -- half the top floor of a commercial building. As a fire exit, I had a door in the kitchen that had been trussed up in plastic, duct tape and insulation to keep noise and smells from the other apartment from coming through. If there ever was a tenant back there, I never knew. I didn't worry about it, because I expected the building across the street that housed my office to burn first.

In fact, neither of them did, but the old hotel that housed the office later became a real estate agency and the brick facade just outside Olga's window collapsed in the 1990s. I think they tore down the building after that. The bricks would have landed on a greasy-spoon diner with an arched roof that huddled against mine -- I wonder what the patrons made of it.

I liked the flat I had because it had central heat. The one before it had an antique space heater that I didn't trust. I could live with cold, except at bath time -- the place had not a shower but a tub, and that located against the outer wall of a huge, unheatable room with big, sunny windows that frosted up in the winter. I often cadged showers from my friends. Fortunately in those days I spent a lot of time running around the countryside and, while I probably got dirtier, I didn't smell any worse than the farmyards I was visiting. It was a lush and green time -- green in all its senses, for I surely was, too. I labored happily with the idea that I was making a difference in the world around me, and I was proud of what I did. I suspect now that I was so green I had no idea of what I was doing, but I plugged away at it with enthusiasm and no thought for the time clock.

An older woman I got acquainted with tried to set me up with her daughter, saying she liked my innocent enthusiasm and idealism. The daughter probably thought me a complete geek, but was

nice enough about it in a conversation we had on the back porch: She confessed she had no interest in me -- I, rather surprised it was an issue, acknowledged that I had no interest in her, either, and that was that. Mom lost interest, too. It was just as well; she was rather overwhelming.

In my spare time I rounded up furniture -- a secondhand bed from home, tables and chairs from garage sales up and down the valley. At the time, a lot of folks from my grandparents' generation were unloading traditional wooden chairs, tables, cupboards and whatnot, and there were great bargains to be had in antiques. They were quite unfashionable and cheap. The chairs in particular creaked, and a small dinner party I had, just under Olga's window, was a symphony in groaning, wobbling wood. I still have quite a bit of that, though it lives mostly in the cellar, waiting to be refinished.

A couple of times I cut the ivy back a little and replanted the cuttings, to make it thicker. I remember talking to a woman who told me I had to be ruthless in trimming plants, to keep them thick and manageable. Indeed, she had a lovely coleus on her desk. I couldn't bring myself to be ruthless, but I paid a lot of attention to my ivy.

This blissful, hard-working time lasted less than a year. I moved on to a different post -- not really a promotion, more an opportunity to do more work in another place. I moved again, repeatedly, for a while.

Olga didn't like moving. Her subsequent windows faced sometimes north, sometimes east, and seldom enjoyed the daylong, full sunlight she enjoyed in her first window. Scalloped leaves turned yellow, and the stems grew bare and ugly. I trimmed and rooted some to try keep the plant full. The trimmings even became a second pot. The original pot eventually died out. Over time, I lost a good deal of green, too. Now, 30 years later, I still have the clones, which get a filtered sunlight in a southern window and survive without particularly thriving. Much battered; more confident; less innocent and quite a bit less idealistic, I suppose I have fared better than the plant. I really owe her (them?) a repotting.

Source: http://my.core.com/~pzicari/text/Ivy.html

Change Of Scenery

By Feathers of Hope (Numenius)

A note for the Ecotone Wiki topic on Plants In Place.

They've started to cut the corn. When I returned home in the evening, the edge of the field near the road was down and the harvester had just started cutting a swath into the interior. Before we settled in to listening to baseball for the evening, Pica and I walked up the road to the levee. Pica mentioned that it would be time for the coyotes, and on cue, they started howling. Several of them. Two trains were passing, and as is their wont, the coyotes howled at the trains. Walking back to the house, we saw one of them trit-trotting out into the alfalfa field to the south, looking in fine fettle. They know there's feasting to be had once the corn is down. The crows meanwhile will get their own surprise. Two of Pica's coworkers brought down a fancy new live trap to catch

crows as part of ongoing research on West Nile Virus. The trap is right now near the English walnut tree in our yard, but will be moved out into the field once the corn is down.

And soon we'll have our view back.

Posted by Numenius at October 1, 2004 11:02 PM | TrackBack

Comments

it's amazing to hear about coyotes. They are just a fantastic part of cowboy movies to my anglised experience. It must be amazing to hear them at night.

Posted by: Coup de Vent at October 5, 2004 12:53 PM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/10/01/change_of_scener.html

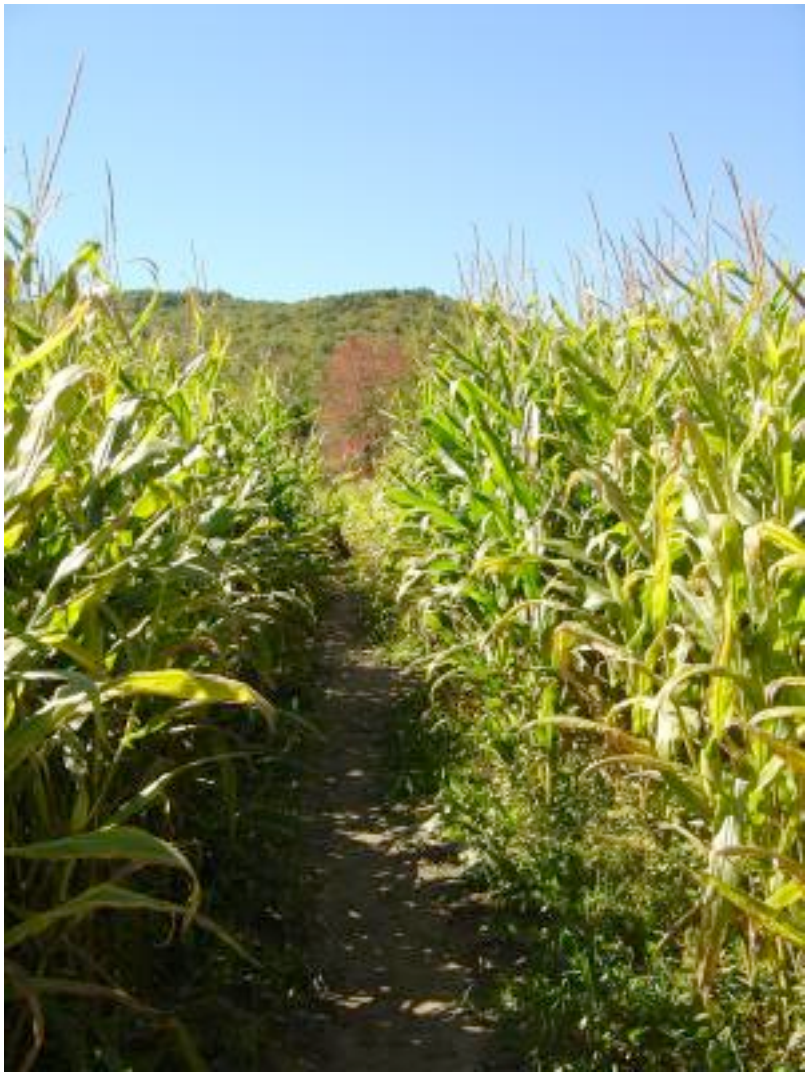
A-mazing

By Hoarded Ordinaries

Today was a quintessential New England autumn day. Temperatures were mild, the sky was richly blue, and the landscape glowed with earthy colors: red, yellow, orange. On this

quintessentially New England day, I did something that felt quintessentially Midwestern: I got lost in a corn field.

The Stonewall Farm has designed a corn maze on their White Brook property here in Keene: a chance for this non-profit educational organization to broaden their outreach (and fund-raising) during a time of year when everyone's thoughts are turned towards corn, pumpkins, and hayrides. Although I hail from Ohio where cornfields are plentiful, I've never walked through one much less navigated a corn maze. The maze, I read, features over a mile and a half of meandering trails. "The journey from beginning to end," the Stonewall Farm website assures me, "should take you anywhere from 45 minutes to 1-1/2 hours or more to solve." Apparently I'm on the "slow-poke" end of the corn-maze spectrum since it took me nearly 2 hours to learn an essential life fact. After 20-some years of schooling and the completion of a PhD, I am (just barely) smarter than 4 acres of corn.



The Stonewall Farm corn maze has been open to visitors for several weekends now, but this is the first weekend where I've been in Keene to check it out. Its meandering trails were muddy from all the rain we've been getting in the (repeated) aftermath of Hurricane Whoever, so navigating the maze offered more than the usual number of challenges. I've always thought that I had a good sense of direction: I can navigate a woodland trail with the best of them, especially if I have a good map. But corn mazes are mapless, and cornfields in general lack easily recognizeable landmarks. Believe me, it's very, very easy to get completely disoriented and a-mazed in a corn maze…and therein lies a great opportunity for fun and edification.

Never having been to a corn maze before, I didn't know exactly what to expect. I'd seen in the movies hedge mazes with meandering pathways delineated by tall groomed shrubbery, but the trails in a corn maze are much narrower. At all times in a corn maze, you can hear disembodied voices of people on different paths than yours; at times, you can hear the radio playing at the end of the maze, your ultimate goal. But even though you can hear voices and music, you have no way of knowing how to get to these sounds even though they seem to be imminently close at hand. In a word, part of what's a-mazing about a maze is the way it leads you to distrust your

senses: when you do come to the finish point, you are naturally surprised because you'd given up all hope of being anywhere near it.

Both labyrinths and mazes have been used as metaphors for the spiritual path. As Rebecca Solnit notes in her delightful book Wanderlust: A History of Walking, labyrinths and mazes are distinctly different, each with their own theological import. Labyrinths like the famous four-quadrant pavement maze inlaid in the floor of Chartres Cathedral represent the individual's journey toward God. Spiritual aspirants walked these wending pathways as a kind of site-centered pilgrimage: if you couldn't afford a trip to Jerusalem, you walked a miniaturized version of Christ's Via Doloroso by patiently pacing the path toward a labyrinth's center. Labyrinths are "unicursal" in that they offer only one path that folds intricately upon itself. You can't get lost in a labyrinth: as long as you have the patience and endurance to keep walking, you *will* get to the center, your goal attained. As such, labyrinths represent the gradual inevitability of God's grace: unless you turn around or stop walking, you will eventually reach God at the end of your wandering, guaranteed.

Mazes are different. Whereas labyrinths, Solnit notes, represent "an inflexible route to salvation," mazes symbolize "the confusions of free will without a clear destination." In a maze, you can get terribly and even terrifyingly lost: after a while, all intersections start to look alike, so deciding between left, right, and straight can be a disorienting proposition. Part of the fun of today's corn maze lay in finding (and repeatedly re-encountering) various signs and trivia questions that maze workers had planted throughout: with such signs as landmarks, you could make some attempt at orienting yourself upon realizing that, yes, you'd been to this particular intersection before. But unlike a labyrinth, which merely requires patience and durable shoe leather, a maze demands that you keep your head in order to reach the finish. If you choose your turns poorly, you can circle and re-circle the same ground in maze, walking and re-walking the same pathways without getting in any way nearer to your destination. Mazes, in a word, represent stuckness, the way we can get mired in the same old muddy paths time and time again.

Whereas labyrinths represent the inevitability of God's grace, a maze seems very "Zen" to me: although it helps to keep your head in a maze, ultimately you can't "think" your way to the finish line since the dead-ends and re-doublings of a well-designed maze serve to confuse your rational thought. Any given turn in a maze might take you on a time-consuming, dead-end detour; any given turn in a maze might take you on a time-consuming, finish-finding foray. As Solnit again notes, the "moral of mazes" is that "sometimes you have to turn your back on your goal to get there, sometimes you're farthest away when you're closest, sometimes the only way is the long way." In my case, after trying to think my way out of the Stonewall Farm corn maze (and only succeeding in returning to the starting point *twice* for all my effort), the way I found the finish line was by consciously stopping all attempts to find it. Instead of trying to think or decide which path was "best," whenever I came to a fork, I took the right-most branch; if that led to a dead-end, I turned around and took the *next* right, and the next, and the next. Zen Master Seung Sahn has an oft-repeated bit of advice for his students: "Only go straight, don't know!" In my experience navigating the Stonewall Farm corn maze, I learned that "only go right, and watch out for mud" worked just as well.

Although I felt a bit foolish when I arrived at the finish point to discover that it had taken me over an hour and forty minutes–much longer than even families with small children–to navigate my way from start to finish, I can say I have a deeper appreciation for corn fields now. Never having gotten lost in a maze much less a cornfield before, I had no idea how lovely the sound of wind soughing through stalks can be. For all the sounds I heard of families shouting out to one another (”Hey, guys, come this way!” or “Joey, I’m over here!”), I never once heard a whiny-voiced kid ask “Are we there yet?” At journey’s end, there was a bell to ring, cheers from maze workers, and hayrides for tired tykes. Perhaps an ample hay-filled wagon pulled by sturdy steeds is an apt metaphor for heaven itself?

In its own meandering, roundabout way, this is my contribution to the Ecotone *biweekly topic,* Plants in Place.

Posted by Lorianne under Uncategorized

Comments

leslee Says:
Oct 3, 2004 at 10:18 pm

Sounds like my life. Hmm, so mebbe I should just keep turning right?

P. Says:

Oct 3, 2004 at 10:55 pm

You could as well turn left — as long as you did it consistently. I wonder if you could build a maze that required folks to consistently turn left, then right? (wondeful essay!)

Lorianne Says:
Oct 4, 2004 at 5:07 pm

Leslee, I'm not sure if turning right, left, or straight is the answer…but I certainly know what it feels like to be lost & mired in mud! I think the moral of the story is to just keep going!

P, I too wondered about maze design as I wandered: I'm sure there are many sorts of directional algorithms that govern the turns & twists of an "average" maze. In my case, I think you're right: I just needed to do *something* consistently vs. trying to choose the direction that "looked right." But I'm sure there are mazes out there that are purposefully more complicated than the one I tried!

Thanks for the comments!

Kathleen Says:
Oct 4, 2004 at 10:10 pm

We were JUST talking about this maze this weekend.

3rd House Party Says:
Oct 5, 2004 at 12:04 pm

Seasons and cycles

Autumn Leaves

Dave Says:
Oct 7, 2004 at 11:52 am

Excellent essay! I'm abashed now to learn that I have been confusing labyrinths with mazes all this time.

It's interesting that "amazed" has a neutral or positive connotation, while "bewildered" seems inescapably negative. In the folk-mind, i guess wilderness is the most dangerous kind of maze. (Think of the Wild Wood in the *Wind in the Willows*.) But in the King James Bible, wilderness, too, is a type of labyrinth as you describe it.

"Bewildering Grace, how sweet the sound . . . "

Source: http://hoardedordinaries.wordpress.com/2004/10/03/a-mazing/

October morning (tone poem)

By Via Negativa

Out for a walk before breakfast, I quickly miss my hat. The sky is clear, & as the light increases, the leaf color in the understory grows more & more distinct. Whenever I pause, the clouds from my breath rise straight up. It's as if I'm sending smoke signals - but what is the message?

Just as I reach the top of the ridge, the sun comes up. There's a sudden honking of Canada geese from somewhere a mile or two away: a small, local flock, I imagine, has just crossed paths with the sun at this very same moment. I look carefully to the right and left of the growing blaze of light above the horizon. The valley fog forms a parallel ridge system: ghost mountains, thrown into high relief. When I turn away, blue dots appear in my field of vision on either side of wherever I focus my gaze.

The sun at sunrise doesn't rise; it descends. From the crowns of the oaks it seeps down limbs & trunks. I follow the moss-covered trail between shining columns, wade through streams & pools of soft, golden light. Saplings already in their autumn colors seem lit up from within. I feel as if I've stepped into a Maxfield Parrish illustration.*

To the west, the mountain's shadow draws a straight line across the fog. Below in the darkness: a train whistle, cars on the highway. Above: a layer of white. Then the crest of the Allegheny Front shining in the sun. Then nothing at all.

By the time I get back, the sun's halfway down the field. Fog streams from the barn roof. A nuthatch taps in the top branches of a walnut tree.

*
Western Pennsylvania botanist and photographer Paul Wiegman, in a post to a botanical listserve, writes:

The color change is beginning at the highest elevations of Allegheny Mt., Negro Mt., Laurel Ridge, and Chestnut Ridge, and the lower elevations are still green when viewed from a distance. From within the forest the changes are low to the ground with the ferns and herbaceous vegetation, and some of the understory trees.

Given these two notes, it appears that fall starts from the tops of the mountains and creeps to the lower elevations at the same time it begins at ground level and slowly rises into the canopy.

*
Cold October morning.
The katydids get started
well before noon.

*
A chorus of chipmunks
up & down the ridge:
mine mine mine mine mine mine mine.

*
Cold morning.
A forest full of spiderweb silk
& only the sun to trap.

*
"All this, here, overpowers everything," Tom Montag wrote yesterday. "When you see just how beautiful the world is, all of a sudden it swallows you up and there is nothing left of you to send home. The place takes you and you're gone. All we can write are love letters or suicide notes."

He's talking about watching the waves at Keweenaw Bay on Lake Superior. But it could be

almost anywhere, I think. And what if one is already at home? To whom should we address our letters then?

*
Earlier, as I sat outside drinking my coffee, I noticed that the first hole had appeared in the wall of foliage across from my front porch: a small spot of pale blue among the yellow poplar and birch leaves. In a few weeks I'll have my view of the horizon back.

But it's folly to think that when the trees are finally all bare, things will become - *you* know - somehow *clearer*. Because isn't *this* how one pictures a revelation? Brilliant. Brief.

In between there's green, there's brown, there's November gray. And yes, for you fans of clarity, there's baffling white.

*
This morning it seems
suddenly remarkable
how every shadow leads
to a particular bush, to some
tall trunk. I stand
like a tracker lost among
a profusion of paths, squinting
into the sun.

_____

*E.g. (That would be me on the left.) Amid much awfulness, "Dream October" actually isn't too bad.

This is a contribution to the Ecotone wiki topic Plants in Place.

10/4/2004 04:24:51 PM

Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20041129194322/http://neithernor.blogspot.com/2004_10_01_neithernor_archive.html

garden-variety volunteers

By alembic]

This post is for the Ecotone Wiki's joint blogging topic Plants In Place:

If pixels could emit odors, you would be greeted here at alembic with the stale air of neglect. No one has been here to fling the doors and windows wide open, to shake out the rugs, move a bit of furniture about, or to plop fresh flowers into the grand vases of language to brighten up this space of the public discourse. Not that there aren't any signs of life here.... With my absence, a

few vermin did feel emboldened enough to scrawl spam graffiti all over the antechambers of comments.

I am working lots, but not too efficiently at that, it seems. Then again, it may just be that the pace has quickened, or that the demands have grown in number, and the expectations in proportions. Half the work I am doing these weeks is not for pay; it's all volunteer. Like half my garden.

The liquidamber seeking shelter near the house, the oak sunning itself on the steep slope rising from the back of the garden, the holly tree springing up from a cluster of azaleas in semi-permanent shade, the rampant star jasmine with its tendrils hooking on to whatever will support it, the as-of-yet sparse climbing roses scaling the fence, the seasonal freesias, more timid with their scent than their commercially cultivated relatives ' these are some of the plants that have showed up for volunteer duty in my garden over the years we have lived here.

Consummate volunteers, they need little from me in terms of care and feeding. Every Saturday, come rain or shine, my neighbor's gardeners strap on all sorts of tools and implements and race through her garden, snipping, culling, and blowing up a storm (not to mention exhaust fumes) with their leaf blowers. No plant that wasn't in the original plan survives in her garden.

I envy her the clarity of vision and the determination to stay the course, as far as her garden is concerned. (Odd, or maybe not so, that I should have dreamt that she was giving a fundraiser party for Bush....) My garden is unfolding, in spite of my intentions, it seems. For this, a few birds ' and who knows what manner of insects ' have been grateful, judging by the number of nests that get blown out of the trees and the very bushy bushes with the first new big windstorm of the year.

I know that this haphazard unfolding of greenery, volunteer though it may be, will, at some point change from a picturesque seediness into an anarchy in which the ivy, buoyed by the numerous roots that it can shoot into the ground as well as into the air, will choke the life of variety out of my garden -- plan or no plan.

Indulgent as I am of the changing order of plants in my garden, I make sure to keep my pruning shears and hedge clippers sharp as they can be ... just in case!

Posted by maria at October 06, 2004 08:19 PM

Comments

Up here, it's a constant battle to beat the wild jungle back -- it will overtake anything in its path, during its short-lived rule on the topography, on top of the permafrost. It defies logic, how we can be like field workers out with our machetes, hacking, hacking away, just to have to turn around and do it again the following month. Such is its desperation I guess, to make a name for itself in the brief time span of "not-winter."

I love freesias. I buy them all the time at the grocery store, they are so fragrant and happy to be. But that liquid amber looks kind of threatening, as the page said it will lift up concrete porches and drop spiney, sticky fruits that must feel just lovely under bare feet. I bet the sunlight through the burgundy leaves is quite striking, though.

Posted by: Kate S. on October 8, 2004 05:46 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20041014111143/http://www.ashladle.org/archives/000432.html

Energy of Place

Bi-Weekly Topics for Oct. 15, 2004

Energy of place

By P.

I don't know nothin' about energy -- Mama! Don't make me write about energy, I'm a lazy man!

I suppose the most energetic place I can think of in Cleveland -- that I visit regularly, anyway -- is Terminal Tower, home of Tower City, where folks bustle on all sorts of transitions -- off the "rapid" trains, up out of the bowels of the building and away to jobs downtown; off the street, down and away to their homes; in on their lunch hours to grab a bite to eat and buy a knickknack for somebody's wedding shower; in to kill some time before the ballgame; on the way from school -- there's no lack of bustle there.

I never seem to have anything in particular to do when I am there, actually, so I watch the scene as objectively as I can. The mall has a "dancing" fountain running the length of the old train station's passenger hall, in which computerized valves squirt jets of unnaturally unturbulent water through the air to land with a wet smack upon a stone stage with some sort of drain beneath it. It's always good for a few minutes of contemplation, though the music accompanying the dance hasn't changed in 14 years and is a tad too loud. I suspect they choose the classical stuff to discourage kids from hanging around. It's an active, happy place, though, even if security guards in Smokey the Bear hats giving you the eyeball.

Fat, middle-aged men aren't considered security risks, but the way I dress, I am sure they're looking for me to start asking shoppers for money.

You want energy? Stand in a high place and watch the vehicles streaming along the downtown freeways at rush "hour." All those people on their way somewhere! Or drive down I-71 to Columbus, and fall into step with the stream of travelers there. Molecules in a vast liquid, we move, for the most part, with the same lack of turbulence the gouts of dancing water in Tower City do. Then see the road constrict below Medina County, or around some construction project, and watch as the traffic becomes dense, then sprays out on the other side. Unlike the gases in the refrigerator, though, traffic loses energy when it slows and heats up when it begins to expand again.

But for my money, give me a lack of energy. What I seek most often is peace and quiet, for it's harder to find and easier to lose. Let me step out into a snowfall, or into the woods about lunchtime -- after the birds have finished their morning song -- and stand and listen to the tiny sounds around me. The foraging chipmunks. The scritching of leaf upon leaf in an invisible eddy of air. The hiss of flakes settling upon the ground.

Such a quiet is mighty, for all that is fragile. It can work its way into your soul, and heal what is chafed and inflamed, and give you rest.

Source: http://my.core.com/~pzicari/text/Energy.html

Power source

By Hoarded Ordinaries

I just spent the past two days mingling with friends old and new at the Kwan Um School of Zen's biannual Dharma Teacher retreat at the Providence Zen Center in Cumberland, Rhode Island. As I've mentioned before, I used to sit a lot of retreats at both PZC and the Diamond Hill Zen Monastery which sits across a pond and up a hill from the Zen Center. Because of all those hours spent meditating, walking, and breathing there, the property I sometimes jokingly refer to as the "cult compound" feels like home to me. The earth there is steeped with memories, and the buildings hold a special cumulative power.http://www.flickr.com/photos/zenmama/1043905482/

Although this weekend's retreat was held at the Zen Center, many of us stayed Saturday night at the monastery. Before you think that staying in a Zen monastery is an excessively austere practice, let me set you straight. Although the monastery itself doesn't have a phone or TV, the Zen Center down the hill has a TV room where I watched the first half of Saturday night's heart-breaking Red Sox game while sitting sandwiched on a couch between two Sox-cheering Zen Masters. Whether lay or monastic, the Zen Masters in my school are delightfully "real": they watch TV, go to movies, and shout "bullshit" at bad umpire calls. When I told Zen Master Dae Kwang that I'd recently bought a TV, he gave me an emphatic high-five. You know you need to get out more when even 60-year-old celibate Zen monks tell you you've been living too austerely.

After even Zen Master Bobbie Rhodes had given up on the Sox, I made my way uphill from the Zen Center to the monastery. I'd forgotten a flashlight, so I walked the gravel driveway in the dark, my feet following a dimly lit path strewn with beech leaves. This is a path I've walked countless times before: among my favorite memories of Diamond Hill Zen Monastery are all those early evenings on 3-week summer retreats when I'd walk back to the monastery after taking a postprandial sauna and *hot shower* at the Zen Center: a brief spot of bliss for meditation-

weary legs. All those times when I'd climb the hill back to the monastery, I was utterly certain that Heaven consisted of three simple things: a full belly, heat-loosened muscles, and clean, still-damp hair. Saturday night was chilly and dark, and I walked back to the monastery slowly, carefully feeling the path underfoot with every step. If I'd ever claimed to be able to walk the route from Zen Center to monastery in my sleep, Saturday night I nearly proved that to be the case.

The first time I sat a retreat at the Diamond Hill Zen Monastery, I slept fitfully: although the 4:30 am wakeup bell and rigorous day-long meditation schedule left me exhausted, I was nervous about a foreign practice form and unfamiliar physical setting. Having sat many retreats at the Monastery, though, I now sleep like a rock whenever I find myself there. Although 4:30 wakeup still comes too early, I usually find myself energized by the aura of practice that imbues the monastery. Just as sitting on a mat and cushion feels like returning, staying even for one night at the monastery feels like a kind of spiritual transfusion: here, I've found the power source, somewhere to plug into a site that is particularly charged with strong practice energy and good vibes.

Korean Zen monasteries are traditionally built on or near mountains: it is important to find a spot that is geomantically auspicious. Although I'm not well versed in the geographic features that make for good monastery-building, Diamond Hill has always seemed well-placed to me. Although both the Providence Zen Center and the monastery tucked behind it are surrounded by suburban housing developments, when you are in either the Zen Center or monastery, you feel like you've been removed from the ordinary workaday world. Yes, you can watch the Red Sox in the Zen Center TV room; yes, you can check your email from the communal computer also located there. Still, the sight of a Korean-style monastery on a suburban Rhode Island hill is surprisingly deceptive: it's easy to think that incipient buddhas and bodhisattvas have been sitting here for thousands of years, not "only" since Zen Master Seung Sahn came from Korea to America in 1972.http://www.flickr.com/photos/zenmama/1043905552/

In a word, this site in Rhode Island is more than merely the Kwan Um School of Zen's administrative head temple: it's the School's power source. Whether because of the particular way Diamond Hill's bedrock is aligned or because of all the people who have practiced there, PZC and its monastery pump out a seemingly endless supply of high-octane practice energy. How many souls have gazed loosely on these floorboards as they followed their breath in and out; how many ears have hearkened at the sound of this bell as morning and night it shatters even the deepest realm of hell? The Dharma Teachers who gathered this weekend are merely the latest in a long line of practitioners past and present who have come to this particular corner of Rhode Island to find their true self and save all beings. Each one of them has soaked up a spot of this site's energy, and each one of them has left a drop of their own. From the moment you arrive and lasting days after, you feel the power surge of sincere intentions and great compassionate vows.

This is my contribution for the Ecotone biweekly topic Energy of Place.

Comments

Ji Hyang Says:
Oct 18, 2004 at 10:49 am

The energy at Diamond Hill Monastery *is* just tremendously strong, you've captured that here.

Lorianne Says:
Oct 19, 2004 at 12:26 pm

Ji Hyang, you ever notice how everywhere *you* go is tremendously strong? I don't think it's mere coincidence…

Source: http://hoardedordinaries.wordpress.com/2004/10/17/power-source/

Almost heaven

By Via Negativa

The bi-weekly Ecotone topic is Energy of Place*. "What the hell am I gonna write about that?" I thought. But a weekend jaunt in West Virginia gave me plenty of material, as it turned out.*

It was a cold, windy night. I had a knit cap pulled down over my ears, but several times an hour I was awoken by especially strong gusts that made my jerry-rigged tent fly flap violently, like a large bird trying to gain altitude. I dreamt not of flying, but of walking through endless, enclosed spaces where some sort of conference was in progress. I also dreamt that all the other tents but our two had blown away, and we woke to find ourselves alone in the campground.

*

I get up at 5:30, brew coffee in my tent, get bundled up and sit outside to drink it, gazing at the stars. At ten after six there's still no sound from the other tent. I'd better start walking if I want to stay warm. It can't be more than a mile and a half to the trailhead at Seneca Rocks.

The highway passes a couple of small farms with yard lights. I wonder briefly if people who install yard lights are more likely to vote Republican? I'm heading northeast, more-or-less, which means that Venus is a little to the right of straight ahead and the big dipper a little to the left. Just after I pass the last farmhouse, a meteor streaks through the bowl of the big dipper. Fire in the hole!

I cross the acres of empty parking lot and reach the bridge over the North Fork at 6:45. All but the brightest stars have faded, and the jagged outline of the huge stone fin known as Seneca Rocks looms above the trees. I decide to follow the trail a little ways into the woods, pausing at a bench that affords a good view of the Rocks through thinning foliage.

At 7:05, ravens start calling from the vicinity of the Rocks - I presume they must have a nest

somewhere on the ridgetop. Their first cries are high, like the wails of lost children. It's now light enough to distinguish yellow from green in the trees around the bench.

The wind up on the ridgetop must be terrific - the pine tree growing out of the cleft in the middle of the Rocks is dancing wildly against the lightening sky. Now the ravens are calling *hoo HAH, hoo HAH*.

7:10. The red from the red maple trees is now visible, along with dark patterns on the cliffs - patterns that will, I know, soon resolve themselves into ragged files of table mountain pine trees, growing from cracks and small ledges. It amazes me that these trees can grow without any soil, other than what they bring with them. If anything ever killed all the pines, I wonder, would Seneca Rocks get more than a small fraction of the visitors they attract now?

It occurs to me that this bench was situated solely for the long-range view; the foreground view of trees and boulders is more impressive a little farther along, I recall from the day before, and decide to walk on.

I pause to admire the fur of miniature shelf fungi on the north side of a monstrous dead tulip poplar beside the trail. Just as I look up, a raven circles through the window of sky above the bare limbs. It lets out a series of *ruark*s - the sound ravens make when they're enjoying themselves, surfing in a high wind.

Small cumulous clouds are sailing rapidly across the otherwise clear sky. From my perspective, each cloud disappears behind Seneca Rocks, as if dropping into a toothy maw. At 7:30, the sunrise turns them pink. The first sunlight glows along the crest of the Allegheny Front.

7:40. I'm back on the bridge with its unobstructed view of the Rocks. Now all the clouds' bellies are golden, and I notice that each has a backspin. That is, they're rolling on their axes as if to travel west, but the wind pulls them rapidly to the east. Yellow sycamore leaves ride the wind above the river. Since this is the North Fork of the South Branch of the Potomac, I think, I could spit in the water and it would get to Washington.

At 7:45 a blue jay calls; at 7:50 I hear a flock of white-throated sparrows in the thickets along the river. It's time to head back.

*

By 11:30 we're at the parking lot at Spruce Knob, at 4,863 feet the highest point in West Virginia. We might have gotten here sooner, but kept stopping to admire the snow. When it rained yesterday afternoon at Seneca Rocks, some two inches of snow fell above 3,500 feet. It's especially striking against the orange and yellow leaves of sugar maples, but here on the crest of the Front and on the rolling plateau beyond, most of the trees have already lost their leaves.

The short trail around the summit is called Whispering Spruce Trail, after the almost-krummolz forest of wind-buffeted red spruce. But today, the spruce aren't whispering so much as *roaring*. We have a hard time standing upright in the strongest gusts.

On the southwestern end of the summit, we look down across open talus toward the brown, Novemberish hills for a few minutes, then retreat to a large grove of spruce where the wind immediately dies and yesterday's snow, sheltered from direct sunlight, still lies deep. The contrast between the fury without and the stillness within points toward something deeper than words.

We find a seat overlooking North Fork Mountain and the other ridges of the folded Appalchians, still a mix of green and orange and yellow. On the northeastern end of the summit, the Forest Service has tastefully situated picnic tables among the trees and patches of open rock. Each table is invisible from the others, and each is spread with its own serving of snow.

A small tower gives an unobstructed view in all directions, but after a few minutes I climb back down, find a nice, sunny spot out of the wind and take a brief nap. A., wearing a wind-proof parka and lined pants, enjoys the experience of being rocked and buffeted by the wind far more than I do in my quilted shirt and jeans. But I understand the attraction. One can get almost drunk on a wind this strong. Between the wind, the snow cover and the strong sunlight, the overall effect is mind-altering - especially for minds still attuned to the look and feel of mid-October. Theories of aesthetics err, I believe, when they ignore the connection between the experience of beauty and the experience of power from outside or beyond the self. That connection, and the joy that accompanies it, is one experience denied to the powerful themselves, I think. But I could be wrong.

*

This part of West Virginia is exactly like central Pennsylvania, only more so. The same geological formations cap the ridges, but they're much harder farther south as a result of being more tightly compressed during the main Appalachian orogeny, 210 million years ago. Thus, the Tuscarora quartzite that forms talus slopes of smallish boulders along the crests of mountains in central PA, such as the one I happen to live on, can produce spectacular fins in West Virginia, most famously at Seneca Rocks. In other words, some of the mountains in the Mountain State have so much attitude, they actually sport mohawks!

We take a roundabout route home, driving first northward on the Allegheny Plateau, past Canaan Valley and the town of Davis. A line of giant wind turbines looms over the horizon like the invaders from *War of the Worlds*. Their triquetra-shaped blades are spinning merrily, though a bit more slowly than I would've expected. I think about the conservationists I know who are contesting plans to situate wind turbines along nearly every ridgeline in the area, posing unknown hazards to migrating birds and bats. Now, seeing a large wind farm for the first time, I want to cry: *Hand me my lance, Sancho!* But the things do have a bit of grace.

We follow a long, lonely road to the east. "INDUSTRIAL PARK - FOR LEASE" says a sign just outside Davis. There's nothing there but trees and little wetlands. But after a few miles, we begin passing active and abandoned coal strip mines. Just west of the Allegheny Front, we are startled by a high wall along the highway that turns out to be the breast of a dam for a large reservoir. Smoke billows from smokestacks in what we presume to be the power plant.

There's just enough daylight remaining for one last swing through the ridge-and-valley section before heading home on U.S. Route 220 - as it happens, the same highway we returned from the Adirondacks on two and a half months before. If we had had more time, a longer hike would've been nice, but it's enough just to drive in a place where virtually every bend of the road discloses another stunning view: a rocky gorge filled with long-legged rhododendrons, sunlight glinting off foaming water. An unpainted house flanked by apple trees and a clothesline flapping with brightly-colored scraps of laundry - or are they prayer flags, transplanted from Tibet? A high, steep pasture with a white horse grazing halfway up it, and a black horse immediately below. One faces north, one south. Both raise their heads to watch as the car speeds by.

10/18/2004 03:36:55 PM postCount('109813203149767531');

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20041129194322/http://neithernor.blogspot.com/2004_10_01_neithernor_archive.html

short circuit

By alembic

This post is for the Ecotone Wiki's joint blogging topic Energy of Place:

A few miles from the mild hills where I live, on a finger of land with spectacular views of the San Francisco Bay, 613 men, sentenced to death, wait. Some while away their time playing chess and doing crossword puzzles. Others spit at their lot in life, as if the saliva, like holy water, like fire water ... or whatever magical potion, could wash away, if not their sins, their surroundings. These are the men on death row in San Quentin prison, which was opened in 1852. A fortress with walls the color of vanilla ice cream, this prison is visible to all who pass through Central Marin on US 101.

Every year or so, one of the men on death row is executed. Lengthy appeals have kept the machinery of death barely in operation, while the population on death row has been growing. When all appeals have been exhausted and there is an execution at the prison, those who oppose the death penalty turn out in great numbers at the gates. Relatives of the victims of the crimes committed by the condemned men also turn out. The relatives come seeking closure, or whatever else they hope will finally release them from their torment.

#

When I was a new mother, still raw from the hormonal rollercoaster, we lived in a house that gave us an unparalleled view of San Quentin prison and the San Rafael-Richmond bridge. I saw many a dawn break over the water and illuminate the prison walls as I tried to calm and comfort my crying infant.

Sometime during the first months that we lived in that house, there was an execution at San Quentin. I had this fear, this odd notion, that the soul of the man whose life was going to be

taken so precisely and according to regulation that night, would rush forth from the walls, rip across the water and rush up the hill looking for a place to alight.

I could not fathom that soul's intention: healing or revenge? I was simply seized by this belief that the condemned man's soul would wonder into my small world in which, at that time, everything was at it should have been. I was enmeshed in my dream of suburban bliss: a husband who went off to work in the morning and whose return I awaited with dinner on the table, an infant who was a bundle of promises of a bright future. I wanted to stop time ... put it behind bars. I wanted a peculiar stay of execution of my own.

#

Every year about 30 more men join the others already on death row in San Quentin. Outside the prison walls, ferries take well-heeled commuters back and forth, the river of cars ebbs and flows with people on their way to or fro from the East Bay, windsurfers sail past the aging walls ... all is in motion around the place, whether powered by wind, water or oil. Inside the walls might as well be another country.

#

Every now and then, there is an execution at San Quentin, and a cold shiver goes through me, but it doesn't seize me like it did that first time. For a few days, after an execution, it seems to me that there is bad energy everywhere. People seem more aggressive on the roads, angrier in stores ' a bit uglier, too, in spite of all the flattering light that this part of the world has plenty to spare. But then, I tell myself that I am imagining things.

I have asked others around me if they found it odd living in this place of plenty ' excesses, really ' with the largest death row prison so much in view (but so rarely in sight) as they go about their daily business. They (at least those I asked) said that they didn't find it strange. It's just the way things are. It's all part of what makes this place what it is.

#

You would think that after living so close to death row I would know a little more about San Quentin and the death penalty. The prison is in my sight nearly every day still ... and yet, I barely notice it. It has become a part of the landscape.

Posted by maria at October 30, 2004 06:40 PM

Comments

I have a friend who teaches meditation at various prisons in Florida. He's an ex-military/CIA man: needless to say, he's tough as nails. Several years ago he was the presiding clergyman at the execution of a Buddhist he'd been ministering to...and his account of that experience was absolutely heart-wrenching. The men on death row have done heinous crimes, but the suffering they endure is dehumanizing. In the end, my friend couldn't look into the eyes of the man, his friend, they executed: he was too ashamed of what society was doing in the name of "justice."

Posted by: Lorianne on October 30, 2004 07:20 PM

Lorianne: Thanks for your comments and for the account of your friend's experience at the execution. My first experience with the death penalty and execution comes from living in

California ... and I find it really, really difficult to grasp the whole issue, let alone be able to discuss it with people around here. That an ex CIA and Buddhist could not look the condemned in the eyes goes to show you what morass we are in when it comes to crime and punishment....

Posted by: maria on October 30, 2004 07:46 PM

Maria, this beautifully written post really spoke to me. I cannot bear executions, whether the real ones we read about in the papers, or re-enacted executions in movies, or stories in books. For some reason, no kind of death or illness affects me in the same way. Maybe I'm super-sensitive, and take on a part of the guilt I feel at what to me is a terrible, societal wrong. Maybe it's that I contemplate my own death under similar circumstances, and am horrified at that. Maybe both. But your comment about the soul of the executed man rushing up the hills into your secure home seemed like something I would have imagined, too. Thanks for writing this and for your own sensitivity to something we all probably try to ignore.

Posted by: beth on October 31, 2004 07:23 AM

The first time I saw it from the ferry I thought it was a beautiful building. That was before I knew what it was.

Posted by: Tish on October 31, 2004 11:30 AM

Maria, are you writing this from one point of view on the death penalty or the other? I sense you are avoiding the question itself to dwell instead on the feeling of the place rather than the issue. I think it's actually almost more interesting to look at it through those words than through the controversy.

I thought I was against the death penalty, but then I followed the trial of what had to be the most cruel, horrific murderer, one who had already served a regular prison sentence for a prior murder. I guess that the details were too much for me, I decided I would be very comfortable pulling the switch personally on this man. I suppose you could label me inhumane, looking for revenge in a moment of callousness, but this still remains for me the right answer in that case.
But back to your original thoughts... I also wonder what people think about who live in sight of funeral homes, crematoriums. We lived next to a graveyard for a couple of years, it never bothered me, even when a fresh grave was dug next to our parking spot. We've elminated so much of the real visible reminders of death, while immersing our popular culture in media images of violence. Interesting trade.

Posted by: susurra on November 1, 2004 05:06 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20041120084156/http://www.ashladle.org/archives/000443.html

Energy of Place

By The Cassandra Pages

Late October, 2004. Small town in Vermont. Outside the window, bare maple branches toss in a gusty wind. Beneath them, a carpet of russet, beige, brown leaves, drying, and a crimson burning

bush. It's Sunday morning, and I can hear the wind, and a four-wheeler recently purchased by a neighbor, running up and down the street for the entertainment of his two daughters, bundled into the vehicle. This is new in the past few weeks, but the sound of internal combustion engines is all too familiar; a month ago, the sound would have been a lawn mower, or the leaf-blowers from another neighbor's lawn service.

I feel a little slow and thick this morning; maybe it was last night's wine or the lingering conversation, which tipped, teeter-totter-like, between talk of middle age - physical complaints, aging parents, teeth, and medical care – and politics, America, the future. The greyness of the late fall outside has a similar, worried torpor. We wait for Tuesday to know our fate, like the newly shown hostages, young UN workers captured in Afghanistan. I went outside to see if there was any Swiss chard left in the garden, and startled an unfamiliar cat, who stared at me from my own back porch as if I were the intruder.

In my other home, a different scene would be unfolding. Montreal wakes up about now on a Sunday; last week at 9:30 I was on my bike riding from the Plateau into downtown, on my way to the cathedral, marveling at the empty streets. By ten or eleven, other cyclists are emerging, necks wrapped in scarves; people are starting to enter the park, hand in hand, children in strollers. No one is rushing, although the roller-bladers glide by like water. Café owners and shopkeepers begin to come out, sweeping the streets, greeting their neighbors, ready for the first customers of a day that will stretch into night. There will be a few cars by now, but rarely the sound of a car horn. Montreal is the quietest big city I've ever been in.

What is absent is not energy, but anxiety. The energy I notice is mostly human-powered, and on a human scale: people walking, biking, talking, at the pace of a heartbeat or a footstep, or the lift of a coffee cup to the lips. The frantic, endlessly circling four-wheeler would make no sense there; even the boy who spends long hours in the park bouncing his mountain bike on the children's big flat rocks in the playground is not aimless: he is practicing a skill, and he's intent on it, as are the skateboarders who take over the large shallow children's wading pool as soon as it's drained in the fall. People stroll together in the parks, talking and smiling: women friends, male friends, couples, people with *dogs* who seem to be friends. And people aren't afraid to be alone: everywhere you see them, quietly sitting, looking, drinking coffee, smoking, or, most often, reading.

I've gone back and forth enough now to know that the difference in energy is not imagined but real, even though I can only see its pathology or health through symptoms, some subtle, some not so. The anxiety, stress, and fear that insidiously worked on me before are at least obvious to me now; even when I am in the midst of them I have some choice about what to take in and what to keep at bay, what to fight or challenge and what to ignore.

What keeps the spirit alive? Books and art; creativity and spirituality; music and color; sensuality, nature, relationship. We should be glad for this virtual place, where these things are still topics of discussion, and sources of shared joy and refuge.

Source:
http://cassandrapages.blogspot.com/2004_10_31_cassandrapages_archive.html#109923910023522994

Cats and Place

Bi-Weekly Topic for Nov. 1, 2004

Cats and Place

By Feathers of Hope (Pica)

This entry is for the Ecotone wiki's joint blogging topic, Cats and Place.

Never really having been a cat person before it's been interesting to watch what were two feral kittens grow into something resembling adult cats--with no adult training. They know how to find warm spots in the house; they react to chaos in a chaotic way, attempting to reverse it; they play with all kinds of things they shouldn't and shun cat-specific toys.

What to learn from a cat: find a place you like and take over; eat; nap a lot. (Don't go into scholarly publishing, in other words.)

Posted by Pica at October 31, 2004 08:58 PM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/10/31/cats_and_place.html

The Feline Neighborhood

By Feathers of Hope (Numenius)

An entry for the Ecotone Wiki topic on cats and place.

Berkeley owes much to its cats, I once read. Or at least I owe much to them: when I was growing up near there, going on walks and meeting the neighborhood cats was my main contact with the feline deities, since we didn't have cats at home. I wonder now if there's a relationship between neighborhoods that are good from a cat's point of view, and neighborhoods that have been built for walkers. After all, one of life's great pleasures to go for walk and meet up with a friendly cat. Village Homes, the archetype in this town of a humanely-planned development, certainly has many cats contentedly roaming the interior walkways and sunning themselves on vine-bestrewn wooden fences. The photographer Hans Silvester is justly celebrated for his photographs of Greek village cats. And who wouldn't want to walk around a Greek island village?

We need to ask the cats their opinion on urban design. Will a feline Christopher Alexander come forward, please?

Posted by Numenius at November 1, 2004 10:57 PM | TrackBack

Comments

"One of life's great pleasures..."
It's true!
In reading this (found at Ecotone), i'm reminded of how many cats i've met this way. A number

have been featured in my journal, as in the entry above.
As a walking commuter, i almost felt that it was my duty to say hello to these neighbors, that it was their space i was moving through, in the end.

Posted by: ideath at November 1, 2004 11:59 PM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/11/01/the_feline_neigh.html

Porchwise territorialities

By (iDEATH)]

A white predator? How silly, in a temperate rainforest. But no sillier than my fat backyard birds or those dogs with legs too short to run, who have been bred with different guidelines than sense. White cat sits on our porch sofa proprietarily, for hours, blinking smugly at our comings and goings. Some days he sits on the railing of the porch across the street, intimidating the poor grey cat who lives there until, defeated, it slinks behind the house.

I don't know where his home turf is, but it seems clear that this guy has imperial sway all over the immediate neighborhood. I liked him better before i saw that poor grey cat, all kinked tail and scars, retreating.

- I claim this porch in the name of me.

Tiny white hairs everywhere.

(For Ecotone and my November writing task.)

Source: http://ideath.livejournal.com/66556.html

Eyes, cats

By P.

My mother hated cats.

A woman with considerable firmness of character, she would quite consistently tell any child who asked why, "Because they're sneaky!" End of discussion. My father, himself a dog person, never expressed an opinion that I know of. But in those days, a rural village was a place for dogs and not cats anyway, so the issue was largely an abstract one.

The only felines I knew were a couple of Siamese belonging to an aunt and a couple other Siamese belonging to an English teacher, and all I knew of the latter were the stories the teacher would tell about them on a slow Friday afternoon when the week had gone well.

Therefore it was not until I was nearly an adult that I found out how allergic I am to cats.

After an unfortunate and time-consuming episode involving a "large bolus" of steamed clams with a side of pollen, a Frisbee and an emergency room, my doctor explained that it takes two exposures to produce a distinct allergic reaction -- once to set the immune system, again to trigger it. Eat more clams and die was what he was getting at, I supposed. But it explains why I once lived for three months with a dormitory cat and did not suffer noticeably.

This was an odd cat, in an odd dormitory: We had a suite in a gorgeous old building from the turn of the 20th century, replete with wainscoting, leaded windows and a working fireplace. On account of the last, we had a fire-sprinkler system hanging from the ceiling, and the cat liked to leap from the mantel and prowl, squirrel-like, along the pipes a foot from the ceiling. The pipe over my desk was too small for walking, though, and the cat occasionally fell. I caught it several times, not always with my hands. My over-optimistic roommate thought at first that he could take it out for "walks," but learned otherwise when it left a gross little deposit on my bed one Monday and again on a pile of my cushions the following day. It didn't return after Christmas.

Around that time I started visiting my uncle and aunt and their cats for a frigid spring break in the Adirondacks. It was sort of an anti-Fort Lauderdale, beautiful, elegant and quiet. But something about their spacious cottage, beautifully paneled in warm pine and kept toasty by a leaky Franklin stove, always made me choke up and flee out-of-doors. I loved the silence the woods kept in the depths of the cold; I liked getting my breath back; but I didn't care much for my nose and fingers going numb. Then, riding in my uncle's Lincoln through the darkness on the way back from some trip, one of the Siamese took it into her mind that she would ride me like a mink stole, and settled around my neck.

I like petting a warm, purring creature as much as the next guy, but I sort of stopped being able to breathe. I blamed my uncle's cigar, but my aunt said, "I think you're allergic to cats!"

It was a moment of epiphany. Suddenly, my annual spring "cold" stopped being a matter of poor personal hygiene, as my mother had it, and became something out of my control, due to pollen and mold. The red welts the dorm-cat raised when it clawed me, and me alone, made sense. I need only avoid cats in the future -- and drive myself to the woods.

The power of understanding is limited, however. All of a sudden, cats were everywhere I went -- shedding in a house on an overnight stop; contaminating carpets where I must sit; crawling unbidden into my lap (for I am warmer than the average lounge lizard). It was years before I learned of antihistamines, and I would not have been able to afford them at first, anyway.

My boss once offered me his spare room as emergency quarters during a blizzard. There was an air mattress on the floor, and an assurance, "Oh, no, the cat never goes in there, it's too cold!" And to be sure, it was cold, but the room's door lacked an inch of the floor and the steady bar of light it admitted was accompanied by a warm breeze that was heavily freighted with cat dander. I was beyond congested. It was the most expensive $50 (for a motel room) I ever saved.

My wife's best friend collects cats. She's up to five. This makes visits awkward.

My first house was found to have cat hair an inch deep in the heating ducts. I took the precaution of having the ducts cleaned, just on principle, for the door to the cellar had a cat-sized opening in it and I thought I had seen cat dishes.

I can't hate cats, I just can't touch them. Which is just as well, now, as I look out the back windows of the house and watch one of the neighborhood's semi-wild cats peek under my backyard plants, hunting the wily chipmunk, and rub off the paint on the corner of the garage. The birds that frequent my overgrown yard are a constant source of fascination to the cats as well as me, but the nests are safe, since the cats are not hungry enough to climb. Besides, people sometimes sally from our house waving their arms and hollering "boogaboogabooga-SHOO!" (This amuses the squirrels but does seem to make the cats nervous. I can't say they actually run away, but they do leave promptly, which is good enough.)

REVENANT

On moist days,
the ghosts of Nat's cats
rise up downstairs.
As wisps of scent,
they pace the cellar doubtfully
and peer for landmarks:
Behind the boiler,
between the cabinets.

So much has changed.
Once a train set filled the front,
a jewel-like world
off-limits to cats and kids;
in back hung ordered tools,
obscure in the dimness --
and the laundry was Her space,
she of the soft voice and gentle hands
that filled small dishes.

Now there's just the heaped possessions
of the careless, catless people
of the new millennium.
But Nat's cats remember.
And they miss their litter box,
which so often they missed in life,
to ensure that no one would forget them.

Source: http://my.core.com/~pzicari/text/Cats.html

The butternut chronicle: Nov. 16, 1998

By Via Negativa

For those who just tuned in, I'm transcribing and reworking the notes from an old journal consisting entirely of thoughts and observations made while sitting on my front porch. It ran from November 1 through November 19, 1998.

I'll also submit this as a late entry for the Ecotone wiki topic Cats and Place.

If I were a good ecological citizen, I'd be reaching for the .22 right now. And I might yet. But I have such a hard time pulling the trigger any more.

A cold wind has kept me off the porch for much of the day. I'm beginning to think I might have picked the wrong time of year to start this record. It was still 34 with a stiff breeze when I came out at 2:00, and I don't last for more than ten minutes. But the wind did allow me to sneak out without disturbing the black and white cat hunting in the overgrown front yard below me. Out of habit, I grabbed the rifle from its usual spot behind the door, setting it down on the wicker sofa beside me.

Though completely feral, this cat's relative lack of wariness by daylight distinguishes it from, say, a red fox - another non-native that occupies a similar ecological niche. Actually, given that we have both red and gray foxes on the mountain, with coyotes moving in, the few wild-living housecats may only survive because they are able to switch to a more diurnal pattern than they might otherwise prefer. Thus are new niches pioneered.

Not that this ecosystem needs another prolifically fertile mid-sized predator. In the absence of top carnivores, and with the highly fragmented landscape offering lots of access to formerly inaccessible deep-forest spots, omnivores such as raccoons, skunks and opossums are devastating populations of songbirds through nest predation. Seen in this context, feral housecats are just one minor piece of the puzzle. It's the unnatural proliferation and consumption patterns of human beings that are at the root of all this, of course.

This cat is, I suspect, a regular resident of an old barn down in the valley, less than a mile to the east. I have tracked it up over Laurel Ridge in winters past. An all-black cat sometimes shows up as well. They both seem to specialize in rodents - mainly chipmunks and meadow voles - but I'm sure neither would hesitate to raid a song sparrow or ovenbird nest in season, if they happened across it.

After a few minutes of fruitless stalking of the semi-subterranean voles, the cat goes out to the driveway and pads down to the big log that lies at a right angle to the road. Using the log as cover it sneaks back toward the stream. At the base of the butternut it surprises a chipmunk, attempts to pounce. But the chipmunk easily dodges and disappears in the dense weeds.

The last couple days it's been warm enough for the birds to bathe in the stream below the butternut tree, but not today. I wonder whether the cat's interest in this spot stems from familiarity with its frequent use by birds? Quite possibly so. I picture the cat crouched low among the sedges, waiting for its chance as an unsuspecting junco whips up an instant fountain with its wings . . . As much time as I spend out here, I still miss so much of what goes on!

The cat climbs the bank and works its way over to the corner of the house. Some new movement in the weeds prompts it to freeze once again - more voles, no doubt. Finally it heads up the slope and out of sight. I suspect it may be headed for an old woodchuck hole that gives access to the

crawlspace underneath the kitchen, which is fine with me. Plenty of white-footed mice there. I'm getting as tired of setting traps as I am of taking potshots at feral housecats.

The whole time I tracked the cat with my eyes, I was remembering a story that the ancient Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi once told on himself. He was trespassing in a fenced game preserve when a strange-looking magpie startled him, brushing his face with its wings on its way to a nearby branch. He raised his crossbow to take aim at it, but just as he did so,

He noticed a cicada, which had just found a beautiful patch of shade and had forgotten what could happen to it. A mantis hiding behind the leaves grabbed at it, forgetting at the sight of gain that it had a body of its own. The strange magpie in its turn was taking advantage of that, at the sight of profit forgetful of its truest prompting.

'Hmm!' said Chuang Chou uneasily. 'It is inherent in things that they are tied to each other, that one kind calls up another.'

As he threw down his crossbow and ran out of the grove, the gamekeeper came running behind shouting curses at him.

(A. C. Graham translation, Chuang-Tzu: The Inner Chapters, Hackett, 2001)

To be a part of the food chain does involve one in a sort of infinite regression. But what Zhuangzi is critiquing here, I believe, is the way the focused awareness of the hunter can be so easily spoiled by thoughts of gain. The instant one thinks "I have forgotten myself!" all is lost. As soon as Zhuangzi loses his mental equilibrium, the game warden is after him. There are so many ways to participate in the lives of others - and the majority of them seem to involve some sort of ego-projection. I wonder if my squeamishness about killing doesn't derive primarily from my own fear of death.

posted by Dave Bonta @ 11/16/2004 08:32:40 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20050326195832/http://neithernor.blogspot.com/2004/11/butternut-chronicle-nov-16-1998.html

New Urban Place

Bi-Weekly Topic for Nov. 15, 2004

Maybe not. Of life and style

By P.

Cleveland boasts two "lifestyle centers" -- not gay-lifestyle centers, though we have two of those, too -- but commercial-lifestyle centers of the kind developers have been touting recently.

Some algorithm has determined that two is what we shall have, east and west. Presumably this is the same algorithm that determined we shall have no Ikea. The developers say they aren't just shopping centers, though that is what they look like, but places where people will live, or stay in hotels and work at offices.

I was all set to rant about how awful the one I know is, but then my thinking evolved, my brobdingnagian rant fell into a tar pit and died, and something more nimble and less hungry took its place. I had considerably resented the new east-side center, which took over a big natural area and turned it into a parking lot that washes the feet of a cluster of exaggerated neo-Victorian stores with just enough decoration on the brickwork to suggest the 19th century. Phooey, I was inclined to cry, give me the real thing, where I can walk beneath the cornices and the ornaments and the towers and arched windows and see the dust and the rippled glass of the windows and know they are the actual work of frostbitten masons of a century ago, and where I can honor their work by enjoying it.

I know such places, like the Warehouse District in Cleveland itself, and the Armory Square in Syracuse, N.Y., and a handful of others in New England where developers and individual investors have renewed their old buildings to try to attract new customers. They're walk-able and interesting to look at, and generally as expensive as the new construction, but without the parking lots.

Comically, a magazine for developers burbled that our new lifestyle center wouldn't be like all the others, because instead of having standard stores it would have different brands ... but they all sell the same things, since that's what the focus groups have said the customers want, and nobody wants to go out on a limb with a hundred million dollars. They all seem to have Cheesecake Factory stores. Our Cheesecake Factory is decorated in a bizarre Temple-at-Karnak theme with purple walls and bulging pillars that seem to say, "you're not fat, look at THESE! So buy our cheesecake!" How unique.

I guess I hate the idea that gray-suited guys with Powerpoint presentations and market statistics have decided the best way to gather in the public and make money is to offer this, and this, and that in such an environment, with certain vistas and certain attractions for the eye and the dollar. They do it well, so that when I visit the mall I feel drawn in in spite of myself, even though I'm repelled by the calculation behind it.

My thinking stepped into the tar pit as I walked among the leaves along the Shaker Lakes near my home, admiring the reddish-brown and tan carpet under the oak trees and thinking they looked like a Victorian woman's wedding dress, meant for wear in the fall, after the crops were in, when there was time for such entertainments as weddings.

Across the street from the lake and its lifted curtain of trees is a girl's school, in a distinctly '50s and '60s modernist style. The blocky brown building's best feature is a huge glassed-in lobby that runs a couple of hundred feet under a zigzag white roof with huge pleats, which look a bit like a nun's headdress. The modernist school supplanted an estate, which in turn replaced an orchard planted by the Shakers. All that remains of the first settlement is a huge stone wall, sometimes in dubious condition and never pretty, that shuts out the main roads.

And I remembered that the natural area the lifestyle center wiped out was formerly the home of TRW, once a defense contractor that we all considered the spawn of the devil in the '60s. (Where have all the defense contractors gone? Does anybody picket Dow Chemical anymore? If they did, would someone come outside and hand around Teflon-coated pot scrapers and explain the explosives are really made in Bangladesh?) Before that it was an estate, like so many other big properties on the East Side.

And I came around to the idea that places -- the peopled ones, at least, are continually renewing themselves, and that where I'm repulsed by the calculated commercialism of lifestyle centers, my daughter merely sees them as cool places to shop. Well, she has more money than I do.

I visited Dallas 20 years ago in the midst of a building boom. All the towers there seemed to have sweeps of green glass. I wonder what they look like now. And I saw Houston in the spring. A friend and I took a walk from the conference hotel to a corner where several tall white buildings loomed, connected by a walkway that made a complete circle overhead, like something out of a fanciful Star Trek set. We looked around for a while for the famous sign but found nothing -- but for the flamboyant architecture, there was no trace left of the place's infamous tenant -- Enron.

If there's any solace to getting old and having to avoid cheesecake, it's being able to see stirrings of movement in the history of one's surroundings. I can't begin to guess where it's going, but it's not painful to speculate, if you keep your perspective, and it may be reassuring to know something's going on.

Source: http://my.core.com/~pzicari/text/Lifestyle.html

New Urban Place

By London and the North

Ecotone's topic currently is on NewUrbanPlace.

When I had a look at some New Urban Theory web sites I was reminded of a module I did on social policy way back in the late seventies when doing a sociology degree at a polytechnic in East London. I was fascinated at the time to find that during and after the second world war many bombed out East End families had decamped to the countryside of Kent, erected makeshift

dwellings and bought up old railway carriages to make into homes. These people probably had had very little before the war and had even less afterwards aside from these homes.

With the emergence of the welfare state in the early fifties there came a round of public legislation to improve the standards of housing. Included in this legislation was the requirement that all dwellings had running water and adequate sanitation. The consultation about what type of housing people wanted was largely ignored. The remaining slums of the East End were demolished. The green fields of Kent were cleared of the shanty towns and many people were shunted back to the new tenement blocks of London.

Posted by Coup de Vent at 12:48 AM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20050213043022/http://www.airenet.co.uk/alife/2004_11.html

Mixed Living

By Feathers of Hope (Pica)

When we were in Madrid last December, we stayed with a friend just down the hill from where I grew up. When I was growing up, though, the area was fields of thistles, parched in summer and a good place for madrileños to dump their old mattresses and whatnot. Now there are high rises.

In the manner typical of European planning, this new tiny barrio has plenty of shops at the foot of the apartment blocks: pastry shops, light fixture specialists, and of course the fabulous papelería where I bought my Stypen-Up are all downstairs. There are two buses that run along the street, and two different metro lines are both within walking distance.

This is so normal there that it arouses no comment. Here, when they opened the Davis Lofts, a small mixed-use complex in downtown Davis, it was hailed as a breakthrough in planning and design. Yet if we are to make cities livable in the 21st century, this is going to have to become the norm.

This is for the Ecotone Wiki's New Urban Place.

Posted by Pica at November 16, 2004 10:16 PM

Comments

Indeed. They may even have to build less than 1 parking space per unit :)

Posted by: Jarrett at November 16, 2004 10:29 PM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/11/16/mixed_living.html

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New urban places in post-industrial England? often fall prey to the 'dereliction of regeneration'. They are created with high hopes and usually not quite as much regneration funding as would be ideal. They are created by removing those who lived there or had a connection there before. The new space that is created is assumed to be one that 'the community' (who they? - certianly not the

planners, who live in nice rural villages far away) will 'take care of', with no funding or training to do so. Unsurprisingly; after a few years the nice wooden fences start to rot, the weeds sprout, the broken bottles are not swept up, graffiti appears, etc etc. A bit like Ecotone and the Chinese wiki-spammers, I guess :)

Solstice Place

Bi-Weekly Topic for Dec. 15, 2004

Winter shadows

By Hoarded Ordinaries

If this were Punxsutawney, PA instead of Keene, NH, if it were February 2nd instead of December 15th, and if I were a groundhog instead of a human, we'd definitely be in for six more weeks of winter.

For the first time in days, the sun is out and shining brightly here in Keene, and with the sun come the shadows. As I walked the dog around Central Square this morning, I tried to snap a picture of the sun-drenched facade of the Cheshire County Courthouse. Back in October, I posted up-close pictures of the Courthouse, but I've long wanted to get a photo of the Courthouse juxtaposed with the steeple of the Methodist church further down on Court Street. Today from the vantage point of the island of green at the eye of the Central Square rotary, I snapped this picture of the Courthouse and Methodist Church, but what I didn't notice until I got home was

the huge impressive tree shadow that spreads over the street like a spiderweb. If I were a groundhog in Pennsylvania (or a groundhog anywhere, for that matter), I'd be taken aback if I popped my head above ground to spy a shadow of such looming immensity.

We're in for far more than six more weeks of winter here in the newly frigid Northeast. Winter solstice, the official start of winter, isn't until December 21, but Mother Nature is running ahead of schedule. Yesterday our daytime temperatures dipped to 20-something degrees with a brisk wind that made it feel notably colder; this morning my hands ached with cold as I waited for my body to acclimate to walking in the 17-degree chill. These temperatures are merely chilly by New Hampshire standards: 17 degrees feels like bikini weather compared to that day last February when the temperature hit 14 below. But since temperature is a relative phenomenon, a new chill feels colder than an accustomed freeze: it just might take my body until December 21st to acclimate to winter weather.

Winter solstice is the day when the northern hemisphere is tilted the farthest from the sun: the shortest day of the year. But because winter solstice is also the day when the sun shines at the greatest slant, it's also the day of the longest shadows, a phenomenon marked at megalithic sites such as Stonehenge, Newgrange, and even New Hampshire's own Mystery Hill.

Without traveling to England, Ireland, or even Pennsylvania, though, I can tell you what's afoot: the sun is low, the shadows are long, and the wind is cool and getting colder. Like Bob Dylan said, you don't need a weather man to know which way the wind blows. Here in New Hampshire, the wind is blowing in winter, long months of it: the shadows are long and, for the next few days at least, growing.

This is my contribution to the Ecotone biweekly topic Solstice Place.

Comments

Mrs Darling Says:
Dec 16, 2004 at 1:38 pm

I love that pic with the shadows.

leslee Says:
Dec 17, 2004 at 10:15 am

Yeah, I was out Wednesday evening and thinking, man I guess I haven't adjusted to the cold yet because I'm freezing. It wasn't until I got home and saw the thermometer reading in the teens that I realized it really was cold. But as you say, it's all relative. I'm hoping it doesn't get like last winter's sub-zero temps! I've noticed lately on my walks how fat the sheep look and I wondered if that means we're in for a very cold winter. But maybe they always look that puffy in their wool coats and I just didn't notice before.

Kevin Kim Says:
Dec 21, 2004 at 10:33 pm

HEY! ANYBODY HOME?

Kevin

Source: http://hoardedordinaries.wordpress.com/2004/12/15/winter-shadows/

On the edge

By P.

If this were Punxsutawney, PA instead of Keene, NH, if it were February 2nd instead of December 15th, and if I were a groundhog instead of a human, we'd definitely be in for six more weeks of winter. For the first time in days, the sun is out and shining brightly here in Keene, and with the sun come the shadows.

As phenomena go, this one may be *too* well known.

The snowfall has finally stopped. The day, still cloudy, is coming to an end. Outside, the wind has fallen still and a layer of snow thick enough to cover all the blemishes on the lawn has coated everything. And as the failing light gives up its power to cast a shadow, a lovely, ethereal phenomenon takes hold.

All the world turns blue, the cool cobalt blue of clear skies, and the snowy ground seems to give back the light that the clouds no longer provide. Tree branches, the swing set and the bushes stand out black, in sharp individual silhouette, and the little marks where an overstressed twig dropped its load or a squirrel hustled to a new hiding place disappear.

For a moment, everything is still -- as still as can be in a city where uncaring traffic hisses and scrapes a few hundred yards away.

Then, like the expiring day's last breath, the wind rises. The daylight fades further, the lights go on and the world shoulders us into ordinary night. Afterward, it is possible to remember the Christmas cards whose illustrators tried to copy the scene, to realize that what you've just seen is as commonplace as Baroque music this time of year. But during that hushed moment you can't help but suspend thought and watch, hushed yourself, as if the vision were new.

If I remember correctly, the day ends no more than seven minutes or so later on Dec. 15 than on Dec. 21 in our temperate zone. The change of season speaks to my body this year, though. All I want to do is sleep. I can't help but wonder if I would feel it sooner if I lived farther north, or if I would be immunized if I moved to the South. I suppose it doesn't matter; I live where I live and I have to cope with it as best I can. And there's always more coffee.

Source: http://my.core.com/~pzicari/text/Twi.html

Oil Spills Near the Solstice

By Feathers of Hope (Pica)

The ship that is breaking up off Unalaska has my colleagues on alert; if a lot of oiled animals start coming in and they need a vet, somebody's going to have to work over Christmas.

The problem is, there are only six hours of daylight. The spill seems not as bad as feared, and it's possible they'll blow up the ship and release the oil in a controlled manner, as long as they get good weather, which is in short supply in the Aleutians in winter, along with the light.

Long nights. Getting off work and it's already dark. My brother and sister-in-law who live in Juneau get this darkness thing a lot worse than we do, yearn for the snow because at least it brightens up the long darkness.

The darkness, though, makes the light so much more welcome when it returns. I'm not sure I'd enjoy the tropics with sunset at six year-round. How then can you drink cocoa?

Written for the Ecotone's Solstice Place.

Posted by Pica at December 16, 2004 09:56 PM

Comments

The suddenness of sunrises and sunsets in the tropics is also very disconcerting. One minute the sky is pink, the next minute the sun's up.

Posted by: Dave at December 17, 2004 10:39 AM

Hot chocolate is enjoyed in intense air conditioning under wide ceiling fans under the arcades of hotels with colonial names such as Raffles or the Peninsula. It's not so much season-less as all-season all the time.

Posted by: Nicole at December 17, 2004 02:18 PM

Remember the darkness in Boston? Though the winter days were often beautiful, I just couldn't get used to waking up at 6 in the darkness, bicycing to work along the Charles in darkness, sitting inside the office building all day without a window while the daylight glided by outside, and then, after three, the world descending back into darkness after which I bicycled home along the Charles, again in darkness. All while the trees were bare and the streets were grey with people in black coats walking about. Dismal.

The tropics have color. And cocoa is a tropical drink (isn't really logical, is it?). I've never lived in the tropics but I think the animals would more than make up for the brisk, clear mornings.

Posted by: butuki at December 17, 2004 04:51 PM

I once visited Juneau in mid-June, a week before the summer solstice. The light barely dimmed at 10 p.m., and my wife and I strolled delightedly around after a late dinner. I'm not sure I could live with the dark end of the year, but the other end -- ah, wonderful.

Posted by: p. at December 19, 2004 04:21 PM

Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2004/12/16/oil_spills_near_.html

A certain slant

By Via Negativa

Put it off all you want; there's no escaping the pull of the blank page. We writers stare into it the way, in ages past, a body might have confronted and tried to befriend its own mortality. It was considered greatly enlightening, in fact, to acknowledge one's "inner death" that way, back in those benighted centuries before the gospel of unlimited Growth unseated the old values of poverty, humility and hospitality.

Mid-afternoon a few days before the winter solstice and I'm up at the spruce grove at the top of the field. The air is as clear as it gets and the view out toward the east is spectacular, but I've seen it too many times to become entranced. Mountains and rivers without end, big deal. But turn around, go into the grove. Look: a small patch of sunlight on the needle-covered ground illuminates an otherwise invisible, glistening tapestry. Marvellous!

I kneel before it, run my fingers along the ground to make sure this isn't some kind of wintertime mirage. A few threads bend to the pressure of my fingertips, but most of them somehow escape my touch. They are extremely fine, and stretch right across the surface of the ground: the ruined

webs, I suppose, of what I always like to think of as handkerchief spiders. They are too taut simply to have fallen from the trees, I think. The whole network trembles in this barest ghost of a breeze, while all around the unlit ground looks bare and ordinary.

Then a few minutes later at the so-called vernal ponds along the crest of Sapsucker Ridge, another kind of revelation: three flat, white spaces on a forest floor otherwise free of snow, blank pages for the tracks of coyote and white-tailed deer and the long shadows that stripe them from end to end. I stand and stare at the largest one, contrasting its present opacity with my memory of how it looked on my last walk here a week ago. It was a few hours closer to dusk, and I stood watching the dark outlines of tree trunks shake and shimmy against a reflected sky for so long, I almost managed to convince myself that I was being given a glimpse into some other time, some other forest.

Now this frozen and snow-dusted pond in the woods is the opposite of a looking glass. But with the sun so bright and the sky so blue, its surface offers a sneak preview of coming attractions one or two months away. The long shadows will be just this shade of blue, yes, and in between, the granular surface of the snow pack will glisten, just like that. I will time my walks and set my course so as to head as much as possible into that "certain slant of light," alert for anything that gleams. I remember how my friend Crystal Dave used to walk when he was out searching for quartz in a freshly bulldozed site of a future subdivision, head down, hands clasped behind his back. "You just go along blinking into the sunlight," he said, ever the night owl, "and look for that one stone that winks back."

*

There's a certain Slant of light,

Winter afternoons -

That oppresses, like the Heft

Of cathedral Tunes -

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us -

We can find no scar,

But internal difference -

Where the Meanings, are -

None may teach it - Any -

'Tis the Seal Despair -

An imperial affliction

Sent us of the Air -

When it comes, the Landscape listens -

Shadows - hold their breath -

When it goes, 'tis like the Distance

On the look of Death -

(The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition, R. W. Franklin, ed., Belknap Press, 1998, # 320)

A contribution to the Ecotone wiki *topic* Solstice Place.

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20050516115503/http://neithernor.blogspot.com/2004/12/certain-slant.html

solstice in the suburbs

By alembic

This post is for the ecotone wiki's joint blogging topic Solstice Place:

Where I live, in this pocket of Northern of California, just a short drive north from San Francisco, the week preceding the longest night of the year is my favorite time ' provided that the storms and rains keep their distance.

Most of the deciduous trees have shed their leaves by mid-December. Bare branches on tall trees and ripe red berries on fat bushes that are still wildly green provide specks of intense color. There is fresh new grass everywhere you look, on hills, by the banks of the creek, in cracks on the roads. Brilliantly red blooms on the bottlebrush plant swirl in wind, just a few feet from the windows of my office and kitchen. At certain times of the day, small birds flock to these branches, chattering and fluttering, as if this were a festive occasion.

Sometimes, around mid-December, it gets really cold around here, especially after the sun slips behind Mt. Tam. When I am out in this cold, I get excited, out of an old childhood habit of waiting for snow. Back then I loved snow. I loved how it felt, how it smelled, how it whitewashed the drabness and poverty of the eastern European town of my childhood.

Of course, it rarely, if ever, snows here. Most of the time, the sun's *winter-slanted** light illuminates ' instead of heating up ' the valley and the hills. It's all picture perfect, even if the night does descend rather early and hangs on for hours on end. But that is another blessing of sorts. With the morning light coming late, so do the crows with their urgent cries. And the chainsaws and the leaf blowers, those grunts and groans of suburban aspirations, are missing. And there is no chorus of dogs, locked in yards alone, whose barks and yaps and howls, at most other times of the year, bounce from ridge to ridge, amplified by winds.

Solstice in December is the pause, the breath held for a moment, when you feel free of time and the labored rhythms of your lungs. In the long quiet night and the brilliant shine of day, the brief period before solstice gives me a chance to lose sight, however briefly, of the poverty of a busy suburban life.

* *tribute to Emily Dickinson (and dave's solstice post on via negativa)*

Posted by maria at December 18, 2004 12:45 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20050129031138/http://www.ashladle.org/archives/000487.html

Solstice Place

By Cassandra Pages

SOLSTICE SUNRISE

Moved as I was by Stonehenge when I finally saw it, fifteen or so years ago, rising above the

Salisbury Plain, I'm not a solstice person. Here in the hills of Vermont there are a number of people who observe a self-styled blend of New Age beliefs and pagan practices, including quite a few women my age or older who favor Birkenstocks and long flowing skirts printed with moons and stars, and wear their graying hair down their backs; some of them know how to dowse, or to make aromatherapy essences from flowers; some of them weave or spin; they like to talk about crystals, and labyrinths, and angels in their gardens, and it seems to me that they don't have much to do with men. I've been invited a few times to attend some of their gatherings for one or the other of the solstices, but I politely decline; I guess I'm too much of a Christian to feel comfortable there (while acknowledging the pagan aspects of the holiday I am celebrating!)

But that doesn't mean I'm not affected by the solstice, or that I don't notice it. It would be impossible not to, living this far north, where light for living things feels in short supply even in the summer. And still, Vermont is not really northern; it's barely halfway to the pole. The other night I handed my Icelandic neighbor a couple of radishes from a plate of crudités before dinner. He looked skeptically at the red orbs in his hand, and then bit into one. "Hmm," he said, looking surprised. "This is not bad!" He explained that in Iceland the growing season is so short that radishes are one of the few things that people grow, and kids are always given seeds and a little plot of ground. "But they always taste awful," he said. "Woody and musty, or just tasteless. Not like this at all." According to him, no Icelander even tries to grow a tomato outdoors, or a green bean. I should be grateful.

On these shortest days, I think of the longest ones, when the evening light glances warm and golden against the delphinium and roses. Today, the house is frigid, and by three p.m. it was starting to get dark. Now, at five, there is less skylight than at nine on a midsummer night, and it is a deep blue shading to azure, split by black tree branches, and grounded by coldly reflective snow.

The last year I was in college, my roommate and I had an apartment in the student ghetto. There were two bedrooms, and a kitchen, small bath, and living room between the two. When we moved in, in the fall, we tossed a coin. I got the light-filled southwestern bedroom, and A. got the smaller, darker bedroom on the north side. We planned to switch at midyear. Every evening, we'd emerge from studying in our bedrooms, make dinner, and sit at the little wooden table in the kitchen to eat, watching the sun set over the lake in the distance. Thunderstorms swept across the valley from the west, and sometimes lake-effect snows obscured all vision. But the sun kept up its determined journey.

We got in a habit of marking its setting place each evening on the window glass. In late December, we marked the sun at its furthest point south, and I mentioned that it was time to switch rooms. I hated the thought of moving into that cave, but didn't say so – fair was fair. But to my astonishment, A. said she had come to like her dark room; she'd come home from several hours at the piano in one of the equally tiny basement practice rooms in the music building, close her bedroom door and study or read with the blinds down all day. It felt safe, she said. I knew she was unhappy about her life, a failed love affair, confused about what to do after graduating. I urged her to take the bigger, lighter room, but she insisted. So we kept things as they were, meeting in the kitchen every night to cook a simple supper and eat together and talk about music, books, friends, professors, love; and watching as the sun now made its slow progression toward

the north. We kept marking the days on the window glass, each little dot representing one day closer to leaving this existence we both loved, for another unknown one.

A. lives in Georgia now, and I've just set up a household even further north than that relatively northern apartment. Our lives diverged; we traveled miles from those dreams and heart-to-heart talks, and despite a friendship that was once extremely close, we've lost touch. But writing this I've realized that back in that apartment, the sun has faithfully traveled up and down the window thirty-one times.

This is my contribution to the Ecotone wiki topic *for mid-December,* SolsticePlace

Source:
http://cassandrapages.blogspot.com/2004_12_19_cassandrapages_archive.html#110368304525251750

New Year and Place

Bi-Weekly Topic for Jan. 1, 2005

On the road

By P.

I have a long history of adventures on New Year's eve.

You know, the kind defined as "someone else having a bad time a long ways away."

In college, a roommate and I once trekked to New Jersey to visit a girlfriend of his who turned out to have no plans for the party she had invited him to. We spent the night in the fog, driving home through the Catskills.

Afterward, my wife and I gathered with friends of hers who were more reliable about following through with their plans. We'd meet somewhere, sit drinking and telling stories through the evening, and go home, counting ourselves as having had a good time.

Then the friends began to scatter, shedding wives or jobs and acquiring religion, kids or paunches. We kept up the tradition for a while, making lightning trips to New York City or Washington, D.C. to meet. I had my first — and last — experience of deep-fried calamari on one of those trips. My stomach still squirms a little at the recollection, to this day my strongest impression of Newark, N.J.

On another, we went to the top of the World Trade Center and watched from the observation deck through the gathering mists as the lights came on at the Verrazano-Narrows bridge. Yet another trip led to a night of storytelling in Arlington, Va. I think that one was notable for our taking an inadvertant and slightly scary tour of the Poconos on the way home.

Then things came unglued. We joined a different friend in Toronto once and had an uneventful supper at a downtown club, where they asked us to step out of the way as they moved our table to make a dance floor. We wandered into the lobby, where our waitress forgot about us. When we sought her for champagne and our check (the couch in the lobby was quieter and more comfortable than the dining room), she said she thought we had skipped out on her. The trip home was memorable for a tiny beeping sound from the back of the car that followed us all the way through Buffalo. Much rummaging led to a clock that somehow got set.

We invited that same friend to Cleveland, where once we stood in the rain to watch fireworks downtown and got thoroughly soaked. The friend was a good sport about it. I went indoors to warm up and spent a chilling quarter-hour listening to cops debating the merits of pepper spray vs. collapsible batons.

A later adventure took us to a coffeehouse that offered free pastries and a blues band for the night. It sounded promising till we heard the band and observed that the crowd consisted of the band's families and us. After a couple of cacaphonous numbers, we fled. I always wondered how

long the families stuck it out. The coffeehouse itself disappeared soon from its suburban corner — though, Lord knows, we still have plenty of coffeehouses.

While our daughter was still in diapers, we were invited to ring in the millennium, (or the old one's last year, depending on whether you start counting at 0 or 1) at a gracious mansion near our house. The glittering space, with pale gray carpet and multiple fireplaces and display cases full of glass, was peopled with well-dressed, soft-spoken, well-to-do folk, but the promised baby-sitters were absent. We retired to the TV room to keep the kids out of trouble.

Cold sober, I remember sampling caviar and realizing an anecdote I was telling to a laser-thin woman in a black dress was stupid before I finished it; I shudder to remember a thoroughly dull conversation I inflicted on the fellow who invited us.

Naturally, amid all this elegance, my daughter had a diaper explosion. Appalled at what happened to the velour pants, my wife was ready to go home, but our hosts persuaded her to stay. Then, invigorated by all the attention and perhaps feeling lighter by a pound of the unmentionable, our girl then began playing tag all around the place with the one other kid there — in and out on the soft carpet, among the soft-spoken, impeccably dressed pillars of the Upper Crust. I had to follow, full of anxiety lest a tottering 3-year-old might collide with one of those display cases. My wife stewed.

When at last she had had enough, I grabbed our sans-culotte marathoner and we fled, half an hour short of the historic moment.

On the whole for new year's, give me the couch, an old video, and some hot chocolate.

And leave but a kiss within the cup, and I'll not look for Guy Lombardo.

Source: http://my.core.com/~pzicari/text/Newyear.html

No Stopping Anytime

By Hoarded Ordinaries

When Gary and I went to Manhattan several weekends ago, we spent part of our first (cold) night in the city walking the neon-lit streets of Times Square. Although I'd visited Times Square before, I'd never wandered its streets at night on foot. Tonight while Gary and I celebrate the New Year safely ensconced here in humble little Keene (which does, nevertheless, drop a lit ball at midnight while marking the occasion with fireworks), over half a million alcohol-warmed revelers will crowd Times Square to greet the arrival of 2005 in properly boisterous fashion.

Although Gary's Times Square photos are sharper and brighter than mine (and that's sparing any comment about that first photo of Yours Truly hamming it up with a pizzeria mannequin, or Gary's final shot of Annette and me leaving him in the dust), I cherish my snapshots for several reasons. Looking at these images, I remember how cold we were as we stood in front of the illuminated Prudential Financial marquee waiting for it to cycle through various advertisements culminating in a glowing shot of falling snowflakes. (Again, Gary's camera captured that precise moment whereas mine did not.)

Standing slack-jawed with camera in hand like any gawking tourist, I didn't notice all of the nuances of Times Square until I transferred my digipix to my laptop and reviewed them afterward in (warm) leisure. I chuckled to realize, for instance, that there is an Armed Forces Recruiting Station smack dab in the middle of the madness of Times Square, as this photo reveals:

And near the center of this last image, I love the red sign (visible as well as at the far left of the second photo, above, of a tourist-laden bicycle-rickshaw) that reads “No Stopping Anytime.”

At the heart of the City That Never Sleeps, Times Square is a perpetual motion machine, with taxis and tourists and recruiters and rickshaws buzzing and blurring without ceasing: moving, moving, moving. Tonight for New Year's Eve, those of us in Manhattan or Keene or points elsewhere raise a glass to celebrate the fact that Father Time himself *never* stops for *anyone*. The ultimate rickshaw-driver, Time keeps pedaling, wheels perpetually turning, whether you're smart enough to step out of the way or not. Wherever you and yours are ensconced, here's hoping you're warm, safe, and looking ahead as Time and his traffic honks and hurries into 2005.

This entry is my one-day-early contribution to the Ecotone *biweekly topic* New Year and Place.

Source: http://hoardedordinaries.wordpress.com/2004/12/31/no-stopping-anytime/

Another sunrise

By Via Negativa

I wake around 6:00 and am out on the porch by 6:30, in time for the last 20 minutes of darkness. Most mornings this time of year, the transition from night to day is virtually imperceptible. But this dawn lurches dramatically from dark to light and back again as breaks open and close in the fast-moving clouds. By 6:55 I can see well enough to write between the lines in my pocket

notebook. My first page of the New Year, however, will be an almost unreadable mess. It's unseasonably warm - 50 degrees (F) - and breezy. By 7:00 o'clock, a large portion of the sky has cleared off, revealing the gibbous moon and one star or planet, maybe Jupiter. A hunter walks up the driveway, headed for his tree stand. (In Pennsylvania, muzzleloader deer season resumed the Monday after Christmas.) "A little late, aren't you?" I call out. He mutters something I don't catch, then says, "The way I figure it, everyone else probably has a hangover, so I'll be the first one out here." A couple minutes after he heads up into the woods, it occurs to me that I ought to try and watch the sunrise, assuming it will be visible. I tuck a sitting mat under my arm and set off for the crest of the higher of the two ridges, the one to the west, which we call Sapsucker Ridge. Crossing the field, I hear the twitter of waking songbirds, and just as I enter the woods, a white-throated sparrow calls. For once, it doesn't sound the least bit melancholy. Nor do I hear either of the two popular onomatopoeic interpretations, just the song itself. It stutters a bit at the end, as if the bird still has a bit of sleep stuck in its throat. I reach the ridgetop by 7:15 and spread the mat at the base of a smallish chestnut oak, some 25 feet away from the mammoth red oak that we refer to simply as the Big Tree. I had thought I might sit against it, but decided I'd rather watch the sunrise through its massive spread of limbs. Who knows how many more years we'll have it with us? I feel sorry now that I didn't bring a bottle of champagne to toast the New Year. I would've gladly given some to this tree, poured it into the ground around its trunk. The tree I'm sitting against is a creaker. I look straight up and realize I've got company: a dead cherry tree is leaning against it, too. Only one thin branch stands between me and a world of hurt. Fortunately, on this side of the ridge, the wind is erratic, and the rubbing of tree against tree yields only an occasional *eeeeeek*, or a lower-pitched *uk . . . uk . . . uk.* A hundred feet to the west, some other creaker is going *erk erk erk erk*, as regular as a metronome. The whole time I'm sitting there, it doesn't let up. Shortly after I get settled in, a crow calls - *Here, here* - and another answers in the same fashion, like British members of parliament after a stirring speech. Well, what's not to applaud? As it turns out, I'm very lucky. There's one, small break in an otherwise solid curtain of cloud above the eastern horizon. From my perspective that break is right in the middle of the Little Juniata Water Gap in Tussey Mountain, some seven miles away as the crow flies. And through that break I'm able to watch the sunrise. By 7:30 the hole in the clouds has turned deep crimson. At a few seconds before 7:35, the first retina-burning edge of the sun pops into view. It takes only a few minutes to traverse the narrow gap and enter the clouds above. In fact, the leading edge has already disappeared before the bottom of the orb clears the horizon, and at the point where the greatest part is visible, I notice a very thin band of additional cloud bisecting it. I feel as if I'm watching a strip tease through a peephole (not that I've ever done such a thing, of course). Hmm, O.K. - I say to myself - I'm watching the ball rise. By 7:38 the bottom edge is visible above the horizon. Happy New Year! Less than four minutes later, the sun's gone and the red is rapidly draining from the aperture through which I was fortunate enough to verify one possible, arbitrary beginning point of another complete circuit of the earth 'round the sun. Is this why the Quiché Maya think of the sun as a mirror, I wonder - because its original radiance has been obscured by the host of calendrical contrivances we read into its (apparent) daily round? The real sun showed its face only once, they say, at the beginning of time. Since then the Day Lords have been ascendant. I pick up my sitting-mat and continue my walk, heading southwest along the ridge to the so-called vernal ponds. The largest - less than 25 feet across at its widest point - is still just barely frozen. A pool of melt water has formed on top of the ice, which has sunk down so that only the outermost three to four feet of ice are still above the water. The exposed ring of ice bears a striking pattern of what look like the interlocking footprints of large

birds. But it's the water in the middle that draws my attention. Again, the sense of an aperture: this time, a window into a world of sharper contrasts and greater mutability than the one we know, that dim reflection frozen in the mind's eye. The tree trunks are silhouettes against a grayish-white sky, with here and there a patch of pale blue or creamy yellow. The slightest movement of air sets the horizontal branches shivering; electric impulses pass from trunk to trunk. It's never enough to make them really waver, though. They stand, solid citizens, with their heads downward, roots hidden somewhere beyond the edge, behind the clouds. At 8:20 I leave the pond and circle around behind the grove of Norway spruce at the top of the field. I'm struck suddenly by how quiet it is, apart from a few train whistles. I stop to admire a small patch of milkweed: straight stalks projecting stiffly at various angles to the ground, gray pods still spilling seed-flecked down. A few of the tufts look as if they're barely holding on, but it'll take a stronger breeze than this to lift them free. Half the sky is now clear. In less than a minute the sun will at last emerge into that clearing - and into this one. The milkweed fluff will glisten like snow, which on other years would lie several inches deep by now. In a few seconds the sun will shine full in my face, all of it, for the first time this year. It's already happening, before I've finished writing about it in my pocket notebook. At how many countless points on the planet is another sunrise just now beginning? *Sunroot* . . . *treeshine* . . . whatever might have been here, unsayable, in the always present moment - *you* know - by the time I get it all down, has been here and gone. _____ *A contribution to the* Ecotone wiki *topic,* New Year and Place.
posted by Dave Bonta @ 1/01/2005 04:21:42 PM

Source:
http://web.archive.org/web/20060506062351/neithernor.blogspot.com/2005_01_01_neithernor_archive.html

New Year's Resolutions

By Feathes of Hope (Pica)

I sat next to a young woman on the plane to Chicago the other day. She pulled out a sketchbook even before we were asked to turn off our electronic devices. It turned out she was working through Betty Edwards' Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain, a book I've seen many times but never actually read. During the flight we each drew people we weren't looking at and our hands as two of the four "pre-instruction drawings" -- a self-portrait and a chair weren't really possible that day in row 24 on the port side -- but when I got home I looked for Numenius' copy, the 1989 edition (there's a new edition out now).

At left is my copy of Picasso's portrait of Igor Stravinsky, drawn upside-down, which Edwards claims is the fastest way to disengage left-brain activity.

Among all the resolutions I haven't quite formulated for the new year but which hang in the background as nagging perennials such as eat better exercise more get a better handle on the cash flow, draw more is one that feels like an invitation. Draw more of here.

Ecotone has been sadly bombarded with spam but this is my entry for the New Year.

Posted by Pica at January 4, 2005 08:44 PM | TrackBack

Comments

So what's the writer's equivalent of drawing upside down?

I'm pretty sure it's not writing upside down. Backwards nor.

Posted by: Jarrett at January 5, 2005 10:00 PM

I don't know, but my guess is that it would be meditating.

Which I suck at, so this is a good way to short-circuit my head without spending money or using drugs.

:)

Posted by: Pica at January 6, 2005 11:24 AM Source: http://www.magpienest.org/feathersofhope/archives/2005/01/04/new_years_resolu.html

Liz

By RipRap

New Years Day I rise early and steal the house for myself, solitary reading and Coltrane's "Blue Train". I read Gary Snyder's "Danger On Peaks". He's so specific: "…yarrow, scotch broom…" Memories indexed by names. A scent, a color, moment in the hot sun.

splayed pile of sprigs

air of scotch broom

your silver hair

January 01, 2005 at 09:44 AM in Poetry | Permalink | Comments (0)

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http://web.archive.org/web/20050216024930/thezone.blogs.com/riprap/2005/01/index.html