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The world is indeed full of peril,  
and in it there are many dark places;  
but still there is much that is fair.

~ J. R. R. Tolkien (The Fellowship of the Ring)

### Cosmic Raccoon November 2007

You know how most pears are kind of grainy and gooey? Well, Oregon Comice pears are smooth as tofu and sweet as wine. I usually wouldn't mention things like this but because the food-miles are low, the produce here is abundantly tasty. This region is the highest producer of filberts and hazelnuts in the universe, and of course fruit and vegetables are everywhere. The farmer's markets go on and on and on. It's a good thing I don't have a bakery nearby or I'd have to wire my jaws shut.

I also now understand why coffee is one of the basic food groups; the bone-chill from the damp and cold makes you scream for coffee preferably with whipped cream and cinnamon on it. (I do love it when I can use a semicolon.) I still can't get used to how nice people are, and how few crimes there are. Maybe it's because of the pears and the coffee.

There are lots of mushrooms that spring up overnight, and long brown slugs, just to prove God has a great sense of humor and also to make sure the detritus is consumed. The leaves are falling

and sound all crunchy until the fog drops on them. The weather comes on fast, unlike in the mountains where you see it coming for a day. But fortunately there is a great library system, and a movie theater nearby, and the coffee. Since I don't knit and I don't sew, and I cook rather reluctantly, I read and I write a lot. I just finished Pat Schneider's *Writing Alone and With Others* which is a fabulous book I think I will break down and buy soon. She is the founder of the Amherst Writers and Artists program, q.v. There is an AWA group in Salem I'm hoping to join. AWA uses a great technique and produces remarkable material. Maybe I'll start off with writing about being a slug or a mushroom or a vulture, the unsung heroes of our world without which we would be overrun by death and decay.

If you haven't seen *The Dark Is Rising: The Seeker*, put down your knitting and go see it. Each and every one of us is responsible for making sure that the Dark does not win, that the evil that is all around (just watch the news, or listen to the headlines) does not prevail. It is a fabulous movie with great scenery and will lead you, undoubtedly, to the Newbery Honor book by Susan Cooper which had the worst cover in the history of children's publishing for 30 years and has now been replaced by a spiffy new "movie cover" which will lead all sorts of kids to it. I'm only saddened that there are not copies available in the movie theater next to the Raisinets and popcorn. Wouldn't that change the world, to sell books at the movies? Not gonna happen in our lifetime unless something drastic intervenes, but regardless, go see the movie. You'll tell me later how thankful you are that you did.

I've noticed that some mornings the local weather guy shows a nice blank gray screen (fog) with an airbrushed image of Mt. Hood in the background (it might be by a kindergartener with a white crayon on blue, for all I know) and a prediction of "sunbreaks" at noon. It doesn't matter. It doesn't freeze often, there is no snow in the Willamette Valley and if you have a hat, all is well. Instead of dressing the dogs (I'm fundamentally opposed to the concept) I'm thinking of just spraying them with Pam to keep them dry. Plus

they will smell like doughnuts (weener dogs don't have a scent like most dogs; they also don't shed) as a side effect. In the early mornings when we walk, Emily actually has steam coming off her while she trots along. Henry seems to move more quickly and his steam dissolves into a series of wet footprints. He is still hoping for a close encounter of the squirrel kind. Emily is getting old and senile, I am afraid. She often forgets why she was running and walks right past the ball she was chasing, and I can see her thinking, "Gee, what was I doing?" Sometimes I feel like that myself.

Since the cold has set in, I've turned on the ancient electric wall heaters in my tipsy little house. They are so old they were autographed by Nikola Tesla when he installed them. Their heat is slow and warm. So I put the doggy blanket that Henry and Ems and the cat used to curl up on in front of the woodstove in Mancos right in front of the tipsy house's wall heater, and they seem to be accepting it as a virtual vicarious woodstove. Or maybe they are just humoring me.

The roses are waning. I usually keep a sharp lookout for nearby buds that I can filch and put into the ancient silver teapot I keep on the kitchen window sill. I try to limit myself to two rosebuds each week. Watching them open up and then smelling their lovely aroma reminds me that even in winter, or almost winter, our gifts are many. I'm still trying to identify most of the trees hereabouts. There are weeping cypruses, or maybe they are yews or cedars for all I know. There are little Christmas trees with golden tips on their branches, all year a sort of sparkly golden layer of needles. The rhododendrons look like they are getting ready to bloom, and the hydrangeas keep blooming even now. Oaks, mimosas, chestnuts are all trees I've learned. But there are just so many other unknown trees, I'm feeling like a first grader.

I went on another exploratory mission to the coast and fell in love with Nye Beach where there is a hotel named The Sylvia Beach (after a famous editor/publisher) where there are no tvs, no

phones, and just books. Books and fabulous food. Right on seven miles of broad flat beach. And there are two bookstores and two arts centers within a few blocks. All the houses are pretty old, and slanty, and survivors of many a winter storm. You can see whales from the top story, too. As they say, once you've seen a whale your life will never be the same.

Along the coast highway (101) I had to drive through a string of little beach towns, with the usual one-shoe-by-the-side-of-the-road, but also a plethora of clam shacks, fancy resorts (Salishan for one and a Wyndham further up the beach), lighthouses, and tsunami warning signs. Then, on my homeward leg, I had The Most Perfect Crab Cakes In The History of the World at the Pier 101 Restaurant which is not far from the D-River (the world's shortest), and only 40 minutes from my slanty little house. Not a bad world, if you ask me.

I've discovered that putting on a Holiday craft fair is a varsity sport in these parts. There's an airpark in Independence (all the houses have taxiways and instead of a garage, you have a hangar attached to your house) at which there was a huge turnout for a craft fair in a lady's house! Hundreds of cars lined the streets. I'm not making this up. It was the usual crafty kind of stuff, too. Not even a fruitcake warmer or a naked-lady letter opener in sight.

I'm back at work on an autobiography; I'm seriously thinking that perhaps the only way for me to tackle this is on 3x5 cards. Then I can just type them in and cut and paste them in some sort of order, or maybe not, just leaving them like nuts and fruits in a literary fruitcake for people to bite down on and spit out. I am reminded that autobiography is a tricky form, evidenced by a gift from an old friend who sent me Dayton Hyde's rancher's life story, Yamsi, about his ranch not far from here, and then when I looked him up, it turns out he has moved to the Black Hills where he opened a wild horse refuge. I wonder if what it means is that after you write you're autobiography you get to change life-course? I'll let you know after I'm done.

I'm still editing the behemoth Anasazi book (which grew while I was editing it to 700 pages) and have given up on ever taming it. It seems to have a life of its own, and wants to just keep accumulating information and not letting me whip it into shape in the least. I think I need a Richard Simmons Editorial Crash Course to make it behave.

But since making things behave is not my strong suit, I'll put that one on a back burner for now. Still enjoying teaching GED and working for Chemeketa Community College, still enjoying being close to Western Oregon University (WOU for short, pronounced WOO) and am waiting to see what kind of a graduate degree I can get from them. Still enjoying the daily walks with dogs all over the place, and not having to drive everywhere (although I do have to drive seven miles to Dallas to teach). I can only say, this is NOW the Center of the Known Universe and I'm glad to be here. Especially now that the wineries are all having open houses and barrel openings. It might be a rough Thanksgiving, with all those local wines (yes, some made of Comice pears) to have to taste before the turkey is done. If you don't hear from me, you'll know why.