

Healing of the Day

Through the winter, my job taking care of the water system inlets for the city of Bend, Oregon put little demand on my time. I noted air and water temperature, wind direction and speed in the morning, checked the intakes to be sure the screens were clear, and phoned in a report to the city offices. Because it took little time, my job paid me little, but we had the very nice house far up the mountain at the intakes to live in, provided as part of the job.

I had not recovered fully from injuries I received when a drunk driver hit me fifteen years before, and physical limitations made it impossible for me to work a full time job. That made our situation tight economically, but, since I could not work full time, it was easier to devote myself to being with my family. I had learned not to be as devoted to material fulfillment as is common in the contemporary world, and I had become adept at finding the good in adversity and at living on very little income.

We were all, Laura, my wife, and Juniper and Amanda, our daughters, and I, highly resistant to cabin fever. We home schooled our daughters, and we seldom left home. We usually got outdoors, at least for a short time, in almost all kinds of weather. If we didn't get outdoors, we didn't usually get bored indoors, because we stayed mentally and physically active even in tight quarters.

We had no television, but we had family projects and individual projects in process. Laura read *Moby Dick* to Amanda and Juniper as they washed dishes, and they took turns reading aloud from the book in the evenings.

Dish washers and dish driers changed, and the person chosen to read aloud changed as books changed, but reading aloud continued and made the necessary tasks of living easier and more interesting. Most days, we had classes in math, history, geography, and other subjects in the mornings. Juniper practiced violin every day, and Amanda practiced the piano. They both wrote, painted, drew, read, and played actively in the house.

Laura wrote essays about our previous caretaking job, on a

ranch in northeastern Oregon, where we lived without plumbing or electricity.

Sometimes, we all sang together.

I wrote a book about our eight and a half years taking care of the ranch, , with many observations of wildlife, with all education centered in our home. I wrote about our close family, living without running water or electricity and our daily adventures on the ranch. I was nearly finished, and for the first time, doubts came swirling down on me like snow blowing down the canyon in thirty-mile-an-hour wind.

Who, I wondered, would devote a year's hard work to a book that might never publish and might never bring in a dime, especially when his family hangs precariously, barely above economic poverty?

The wind had roared down the canyon and swirled around the house most of the time for a week, and I had let that keep me indoors. The snow was two and a half feet deep, but stumps stuck up through the snow or were buried just beneath the surface, and the hill above the house was steep, so I hadn't attempted to ski there. Down the hill and across the creek, the road was usually ideal for skiing, but the wind blew the road almost clear of snow in many places, so I couldn't ski there.

Late in the afternoon, the wind diminished, clouds cleared off, and the sun came out.

Everyone else was happy with what they were doing. I walked down the hill and down the road. Rocks, trees, and high cliffs stood above me on my left. Bridge Creek and Tumalo Creek came together down the hill to my right, and rapid water flowed down the canyon toward town, through, over, under ice. Above the bluffs, an eagle coasted on thermals.

Steller's jays celebrated winter from the small pine trees growing up in the old burn. A coyote on the hill watched the man on the road below him walking down disruptive thoughts, loser's moods, and low-money blues. Somewhere in all the ridges and canyons, a bobcat was surviving the winter. I saw its tracks crossing the road in snow.

I turned back toward home. Even the lesser wind in the brilliant

sunshine stung my face with cold, blew cold down under my jacket collar and through my clothes.

At the house, I stomped snow off my boots and went in. I took my boots off and sat close to the wood-burning heater. I wasn't completely clear yet. I lifted my shining Gibson guitar out of its battered black case. My fingers became music. My hands were dancers. Blues, blues, Good Morning Blues.

"I lay last night, turning from side to side. I was not sick, I was just dissatisfied."

That song was about a man singing himself up out of the low down blues. Amanda was eleven then. She rap-tapped on the typewriter. When I finished "Good Morning Blues, she said, "Sing Mule Skinner Blues," and I did. This is blues about walking away and leaving blues behind, don't care about troubles, a man with a high stepping walk and a dancing mind. "I been working on the new road for a dollar and a dime a day. I carry the dollar home to Rosie, and I throw the dime away." The song seemed to say, I work for enough income for food and shelter, and beyond that, I can throw the small change away. I am free of worry about tomorrow, because I'm caught up in the joys of today's existence.

I thought again of these words: "Look at the wild birds; they sow not, they reap not, they gather nothing in granaries, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them." (Matthew 6: 26, James Moffatt translation of The Bible.)

I looked at Laura, Junier, and Amanda. None of them worked toward a future of material wealth and security. They worked toward happiness, education, creative and spiritual fulfillment in this moment.

We achieved family cohesion, education, creative and spiritual fulfillment that is rare in this materially-oriented world. I was acutely aware again that people can lose happiness and good, in anxious preparation for their material future, and that we had not lost happiness or good, because we didn't get anxious about our preparation for the future. In my mind, I heard these words, "...for well your heavenly Father knows you need all that. Seek God's Realm and his goodness, and all that will be yours over and above. So never be troubled about to-morrow; to-morrow will take care of

itself. The day's own trouble is enough for the day." (Matthew 6: 32-34, NIV)

Outside our house, the sun set in snow on the ridge above us and threw golden light high into the sky. Golden tones from my guitar rose from our house to the darkening blue sky. I sang, up into the deep blue sky. Water fell over the waterfalls, flowed through iced-up rocks in a deep song that carried the day away with it.

I settled out of anxiousness into gratitude that our needs were met every day, that we advanced into our future as a family together, deep in faith, not lost in the pursuit of material values. I felt very strongly again that someone needed to read about what we were achieving with home education, with lives that put strictly material values last. I was confident again that the story needed to be available about how we gained riches beyond measure, happiness, contentment, creativity, and love.

I put my guitar back in its case, snapped the case shut, and turned the light on. Amanda had finished with the typewriter and had moved on to another project.

I sat down and put a sheet of paper in the machine. The rap tapping of the keys seemed to sing a song with the wind that rose again and swirled around the house. The story of our lives continued in our modern house on Tumalo Mountain even as I wrote the story of our time in the old, ramshackle house in Whitney Valley, 250 miles and months behind us but still a rich part of our memories.