

Treasured Music of Treasure Valley

At the bottom of my garden in the Treasure Valley of Oregon, a killdeer nested in a scraped spot in the dirt, with four tiny, spotted eggs. I left that part of the garden alone and built rich organic soil and planted seeds in the rest of the garden. Precocious birds, the killdeers hatched and ran away into the grass.

Every evening at dusk, long-winged night hawks swooped and twisted through cooling air, caught and ate insects from the bounty flying through evening. Their wings made a hollow, booming sound when they turned up from steep dives.

I worked on healing, two years after a drunk driver hit me while I rode a motorcycle, crushed my left leg below the knee, fractured my skull, and caused internal injuries. When I regained consciousness in the hospital after the wreck, I realized I had been given gifts, life, joy, and gratitude, the joy of being alive and gratitude for my life and for all life. Some of my friends who came to visit me in the hospital thought the trauma to my head may have unmoored my connection to reality, I was so ebullient, full of joy that spilled out of me in laughter, happiness, in uninterrupted good humor.

I couldn't name the giver of the gifts of life, joy, and gratitude, God, The Life Force, The Good Force that powers the universe; the name didn't matter. It didn't matter that I didn't understand the change that had come to me, the elevation into more joy and more gratitude than I had ever known. I got on with healing and living. In some place within myself that preceded verbal understanding, I knew that joy and gratitude heal.

The drunk driver had no insurance, no money, no property. Before the wreck, I was self-employed, without insurance, with little money saved. The social safety nets in this country are full of holes, and I fell through without even touching any ragged edges.

Poverty didn't diminish my joy nor my gratitude. Spiritual fulfillment and healing don't depend on material prosperity. In the Treasure Valley, I traded part-time work for low rent on the dilapidated house and for enough cash to meet most of my needs. Soft soil underfoot got me away from the punishment to recently healed bones of walking on the hard concrete and asphalt of cities and towns. A relatively isolated place relieved me of feeling self-conscious as I learned to walk again. Abundant wildlife around me stirred and increased my appreciation for beauty in life.

In hot sunshine, I drove the owner's loud red wheel tractor up and down the field, pulling an implement that furrowed small ditches into cultivated ground. I fastened my harmonica into a holder around my neck and blew wild music of my own design as I drove. I could not pull those field-long furrows quite straight. They wobbled in time with my music. I siphoned water over the bank of the header ditch through aluminum tubes that gracefully curved down to the field and discharged water into my crooked furrows that guided water down the field.

The ground dried enough to put machinery on it. A contractor disced the field, planted corn, and left furrows straight as grocery store muzac.

Sun shone on me as I sat in soft dirt, sheltered from wind by the big cottonwood tree I leaned against. I played my guitar and sang a new song about my experience in the Treasure Valley. Eleven more large cottonwood trees grew along the dirt driveway that ran from the gravel road to the back door of my house and past it, across the swale to the long-abandoned milking barn.

A least weasel, red brown, with white underneath, carried its black-tipped tail straight up above the weeds in the dirt road and trotted jauntily toward me. The weasel looked me over as if it liked the music resonating from my guitar, trotted past me and up the steps and in the back door of my house. I got up and followed it, still strumming my guitar but trying now to find a rhythm that matched the small animal's confident trot.

The weasel toured my living room, looked my sparse furniture over, trotted in and circled my bedroom, walked into the bathroom, came out, and trotted by quite close to my feet. Harmony of my guitar tones filled the narrow hallway. The least weasel trotted out my back door, down the steps, and down the dirt road, out of sight into tall grass and trees. I sat down on the back step and played and whistled a new song, a weasel trot, happy, confident, resonating into the world. Eventually, I might add words. For the moment, words didn't matter.

Broad corn leaves pushed soil aside and reached toward sunlight. I siphoned water from the big ditch at the head of the field into straight ditches through new corn. I made musical instruments of the curved aluminum siphon tubes, from a half-inch to four inches in diameter, four feet long. I pursed my lips and blew resonant music through them down the field and into the sky, a joyful noise unto the universe, in celebration of all life, in celebration of my own life.

Corn grew as high as an elephant's eye around my house.

Hard wind bowed the corn down and darkened the Oregon desert with sand and dust. Hard rain blew in the wind. Fierce wind blew down some cornfields in Treasure Valley, blew hay flat against the ground. Rain

softened the ground, and wind blew trees down. Rain drummed against my house.

Water dripped from the ceiling in my bedroom. I moved my bed into the living room.

The smell of washed earth and clean air permeated my small house. I woke at midnight and watched through my big south window. Dark clouds flew across a darker sky. Rain hammered the house. I slept and woke again. Clouds blew away. Bright stars scattered across the sky. Dawn lit the sky with bright tones of pearl gray and spread across the world. Sun shone on the earth washed clean. The corn in the field by my house stood through the storm. My garden stood through the high winds and rain.

Earth serenaded me with rain, wind, bird song, coyotes singing down by the river. Earth and nature and the force of life dressed my basic garden art with a hundred growing colors. Pipers ran through the carrot beds; quail hid in the cabbages. I ate parts of my meals in the garden, radishes, kohlrabi, sugar snap peas, and small carrots.

Tomato plants blossomed and set on fruit. Tomatoes grew, blushed white, then pink, and then turned deep red. Thirty plants bore more tomatoes than I could eat. I cooked tomatoes in my steamy kitchen and sealed them into quart jars. Friends and relatives came out, harvested, ate, and canned.

Quail hid from me behind pepper plants in my garden, behind growing melons. Pheasants exploded from my garden's thick foliage, flew across the road on thundering wings, and dropped into the sugar beet field, out of sight in thick, dark green foliage.

Men on machines harvested corn. The owner sold the farm. The new owner and I stood in autumn sunshine near cottonwood trees and talked. He planned to burn the house before winter. My temporary residence would become tilled earth and grow corn or sugar beets.

I gathered my possessions together and packed as much garden produce in the back seat of my car as would fit around a shiny, patient black dog and a siamese tomcat.

I drove south through Oregon desert, forests of southern Oregon, northern California mountains, forests, meadows, people, buildings, machines. I took my time, because I wanted to see the country I traveled through more thoroughly than I ever had seen it. I pulled off of a side road and slept on the ground beside my car, with my dog and cat close. At first daylight, I got out of my sleeping bag and put my boots on. My dog and I ran through forest and then back to the car. The sun rose. I danced and sang my joy and gratitude to the powerful positive force of life because I lived; I ran; I whistled and sang. I rarely even limped.

I fed my dog and cat, ate my breakfast, loaded up again, and drove toward the highway.

I drove down into the northern Sacramento Valley, across a hundred miles of valley, and back up into the Sierras to Chip's place. Trees, brush, and grass were still green, that far south.

Four of us sat in Chip's front yard in California fall sunshine and ate organically grown ripe, juicy cranshaw and casaba melons from my garden in Oregon's Treasure Valley.

Chip said, "You can't buy melon like this in the store."

"Nope. Nope, sure can't." Everyone agreed and kept eating melon.

Friends harvested the rest of my garden after I left. They wrote and told me they hauled away a pickup load of produce. Long after the new owner burned the house and leveled the ground so the farm could all be watered from one ditch, friends and I opened jars and ate organically-grown vegetables from my garden.