



Time on the river is healing time. Not for those great wounds, the bitter fractures, but for those incessant small abrasions, irritations and rashes that life so abundantly provides.

So, when the happy hour snacks at the Local become only salt and oil and texture on my tongue, when I begin to feel like a hatchery trout, fins abraded by confinement in narrow concrete canyons and soul in enui from the constant company of domesticated others, I head for the river.

I go, hoping cool currents will firm flabby muscles and juicy river food wash the taste of hatchery pellets from my tongue.

This is not the time for the big, famous rivers. There I find, in different dress, the same people I seek to escape. It is time for the little river.

The little river is near Newport. Drive up a road that soon turns to gravel, past stands of second and third growth timber, past abandoned homesteads with ancient twisted and bushy apple trees to a place just inside a National Forest. Here I turn off the road down a narrow track to a flat spot beside the stream and park the camper.

Across the river is a cabin. Its owner is working in his garden. He shades his eyes, recognises the camper, waves and goes back to his hoeing. I've known him for years. He won't come visiting the first night. But the next day, when the sun is high and he knows I'm loafing in the camper, he comes.

He comes bringing two of the strange, crude looking flies he ties from the feathers off his own chickens. The native trout in the little river prefer them above all others. "Hey, the camp," he calls as he wades the shallow riffle and I turn the heat on under the coffee.

As we've shared coffee and conversations over the years, his iron grey hair has changed to white, wispy scarcity and my black to grey. We both still drink it without cream or sugar and, "Yes, by God," he'll have a dollop of brandy in it. Me too.

He talks enthusiastically of the birds he's seen, a fascination of his. "Who'd ever of expected an old logger like me to become a bird watcher?" He once said and chuckled at the absurdity of it. That was the year I brought him Roger Tory Petersen's 'Field Guide to Western Birds.' By the next year he had their names in Latin and mispronounced them without embarrassment. Over all these years, we've never exchanged names, or needed to.

After an hour or a little more he leaves and that will be it for this visit. Later, when the sun is off the water, I catch two of the small, feisty trout from the stream and have them for supper with a beer from the cooler and two slices of good rye bread.

River food.

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A dying man needs to die, as a sleepy man needs to sleep, and there comes a time when it is wrong, as well as useless, to resist.

Stewart Alsop

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I hate to be an alarmist, but Portland's chic and counterculture might want to hide the children. Yes... **THE SQUARE DANCERS ARE COMING!**

Sure, go on and laugh. What possible harm could come from a few unnervingly wholesome couples in gingham, straw hats, and off-the-rack clogs? None, of course. It's when they gather in groups of 20,000 that things can get twitchy, if not entirely out of hand.

Critical mass, regardless how Norman Rockwellian it might seem, is still critical mass.

To give you some inkling -- for the past week, a caravan of motor homes from all over the land has been streaming from Independence, MO to the Washington County Fairgrounds in Hillsboro. Better there than Waterfront Park, certainly. But their final destination is the Oregon Convention Center where the 43rd Annual Square Dance Convention will give horrible new meaning to the verb 'to boogie'.

Not laughing so hard now, are we?

The second largest army of conventioners ever to airdrop into the latte capital of America (the record rests with Rotary International, whose 1990 gig brought 22,000 black belt networkers to a town still struggling with the principle of the Rolodex), the gathering will bring square (and round and clog and contra) dancers from hotbeds as unlikely as (sitting down, are we?) South Africa, Japan, Taiwan and American Samoa.

They are, apparently, everywhere.

The convention is billed, small surprise, as "The World's Greatest Square Dance Event." Eat your heart out, Woodstock II.

"There is no question," bubbled Gary Grimmer, executive director of the Portland Oregon Visitors' Association, "that this is an amazing opportunity for the city."

Interesting word, amazing.

Still, it's good to look on the bright side. Which, in this case, pencils out to \$15 million for hotels, petticoats, Dr. Pepper, and chicken fried steak.

On the very brightest side, the Satyricon has no plans to book an alternative accordion marching band for a three-day pancake breakfast.

Drop the seal and back away slowly. Hit the beach, have we, campers? Out from the city for a little melding with the ecology and an excuse to wear silly clothes? Captain Lindsay Ball, head of the fish and game division of the Oregon State Police (Jokes Aren't Us), has a teensy suggestion.

Keep your fushlugginer hands off the baby seals.

It seems that, having bought the t-shirt and the coffee mug, the legions of the warm and fuzzily correct yearning to save something are making their annual flurry of nasty mistakes.

Listen carefully.

Baby seals gazing wistfully off to sea are not hoping to be rescued by children with sand buckets. They're waiting for mom to come back with lunch. Not only should you not drag the little cuties, shrieking and thrashing, to the nearest wildlife refugee center, you should not so much as touch them. Contact with humans, whose scent lingers long after they've moved on to the kite shop, is the leading cause of seal orphans.

That's why there's a fine.

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