



Here we are again at the winter solstice. Like divers on a springboard, we pause briefly, collecting ourselves before swan diving into the last five years of this century. We gather with family and friends in celebration of the days to come and reflect on those past. I conjure winter images of things small and helpless struggling against the chill buffets of hail and snow. The solstice is a harsh time. Sparrows scratch the drifts of snow for meager seed. A poor man scavenges winter fuel as King Wenceslas watches with his page. Tim Cratchit, a crippled and impoverished child, dreams of a joyful Christmas for his kin. A homeless couple, the wife pregnant, finds sanctuary in a manger. Somehow life continues against hard odds. In the struggle, the dull becomes burnished and shines lustrous and bright.

My father, older brother, and I are University of Oregon alumni. Our combined attendance there spanned some 60-odd years. This New Year's Day the "Fighting Ducks" of Oregon will face Penn State in the Rose Bowl. The Ducks find themselves preparing for this annual event rated as 18-point underdogs. My father would have accepted, no, revelled in, the fact. His Ducks always fumbled and slogged their way through undistinguished seasons of football and basketball. They were perennial strugglers. Occasionally, but infrequently, glimpses of greatness occurred. Our spirits soared. I can see my father now in my memory's eye, gray head hunched over an old wooden Emerson radio, hand cupped to his ear, desperately trying to extrapolate play by play from static, grimacing or cheering as the fortunes of his lowly Ducks rose or, more often, fell.

My parents imbued us with respect and admiration for the little guy, the helpless things, the underdog. As a child I was often disappointed. Our teams rarely won. But sometimes they did.

As the years pass, I thank my parents for showing me the value of the small voice, the minority opinion, the unsung, the dark horse. I ran each step with Abebe Bikila barefoot through the streets of Rome to an Olympic marathon victory. My tears at the finish choked my chest. My heart walks with Desmond Tutu and his people. I carry with me the history of Chief Joseph and his Nez Perce in their struggle.

I would counsel you on the verge of this New Year, this changing of the old for the new, to heed the small voices, acknowledge the sometimes less fashionable, and regard the underdogs. You may not often win. Your political candidate will probably return quickly to private life. Your team might not beat Penn State in the Rose Bowl. But your life will certainly be interesting.

The Professor closes with two recipes for solstice/New Year's cheer, one from Old England and one from Grandma Dueber, once of Cannon Beach.

Cock Ale (1736)

"To make Cock Ale take ten gallons of ale and a large cock, the older the better. Parboil the cock, flea him, and stamp him in a stone mortar until his bones are broken. You must crawl and gut him when you flea him. Put him into two quarts of sack, and put to it 3 pounds of raisins of the sun stoned, some blades of mace and a few cloves.

Put all these into a canvas bag, and a little before you find the ale has done working, put the ale and bag together in a vessel. In a week or 9 day's time, bottle it up, fill the bottles just above the necks, and leave the same to ripen as other ales."

Baga's Glug (Grandma Dueber's recipe)

- 2 5ths Bourbon
- 1 5th Brandy
- 1 pint Rum
- 12 egg yolks
- 3 lbs sugar
- 2 qts Half and Half
- 1 qt Cream

Beat egg yolks and add sugar until thoroughly blended. Stir continuously while adding milk, cream, and liquors. Refrigerate in glass jars. Shake well every day for ten days. Keep refrigerated. Improves dramatically with age. Sip each day to test quality.



Because we recently immigrated to Cannon Beach from Portland, our editor, the very nearly reverend Billy, asked us, in that endearingly imperious way he has, to jot down a few impressions of our impressions. City boy meets Nature, that sort of drivel. Because Reverend Billy pays us (this month, a few cheap trinkets and half a swatch of bright colored ribbon) we'll humor him.

When we announced our move to friends in Portland, the question asked most often was, "What are you, nuts?" After two weeks, the jury is still out. In all fairness, it's been out for some time. We left the city for the best of reasons: because we could. We left it before, as a young man, for an island off the coast of Spain. This was our expatriate writer phase. Ten years later, we left it again for a cabin in the coast range where, for four years, we grazed on berries, howled at coyotes, and watched over a waterfall. This was our Whole Earth phase. Fifteen winters have passed, the last ten spent writing a column for a large Portland weekly. Finger on the pulse, ear to the Rolodex sort of thing. And now we're here, at land's end, an old dog circling three times before he lies down.

Friends still warn of withdrawals. The giddy whirl of lattes, free whiskey, and complimentary standup buffets will, they assure, bring us back. All things are possible. But some, like striking a match on a cake of soap, are less probable than others.

At the moment, it's hard to imagine a reversing of our tracks. We've seen our fair share of cities and, while Portland is right there with the best of them, urban life will always boil down to learning to meditate in a drum factory. Too many people, too little time. The city will do fine without us and we'll do fine without it. Like old lovers, we've agreed to disagree, and to do it from separate bedrooms.

And so, Cannon Beach. A common law marriage of Aspen by the Sea and the Oakland of Kerouac. We've taken rooms in a house at the end of Jefferson Street where our desk looks out at the sea. Our days are spent as they were in the city, smoking cigarettes and making bright colored marks on the computer screen. The seagulls laugh.

Just before sunset, we trudge up the beach to Bill's Tavern where Nurse Vivian and Nurse Andrea feed us coffee in our special IV bottle as we eavesdrop on news of the day. The names are different, the stories much the same. We're content to not yet be part of them, a stranger in a familiar land.

There is no real end to this piece, situated as it is at the beginning. There is no end to anything really, not when you get down to it. Least of all that journey we all take just with ourselves. Taking our leave or arriving, the only question worth asking is this: are we running from something or to it? Here and now, a click or two past midlife, perched between the forest and the sea on the upper left edge of America, we still have only the vaguest notion of what we're looking for. And the quiet suspicion it might be here, hiding behind the wind and the lunatic laughter of the gulls.



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