



Ah, spring! Whales migrate. Crocuses and daffodils pop out of the warming earth. Catkins fluff the limbs of willow thickets. Band-tailed pigeons chortle in old spruce trees. The crow people beak around in my woodlot clutching bits of soft material and twigs.

Spring, when a young man's fancy turns to thoughts of love and baseball and, well, bicycles.

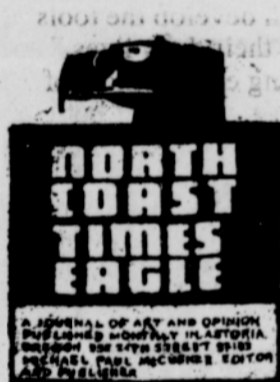
For several decades now I've had two bikes in my stable. The first is a tough old buffalo, a Peugeot mountain bike, time-proven, a trusted and battle-scarred veteran of countless campaigns in the foothills behind town. Its frame tubes are heavy and tough, like old plumbing pipes welded together. We've rattled and spun down thousands of miles of logging roads and dirt tracks together. Of all the things which have passed in and out of my life, it remains my favorite--excluding books, of course. On the first day I got it, some twenty years ago now, I rode whooping across a few neighborhood lawns, transported back to youth memory.

Its companion for many years has been a shimmering Imron red, stainless and chrome racing stallion from the Specialized Bicycle Company, frisky and lithe, intolerant of user error, a bike named "Allez," ("Go!" or "Come on." in French), and it certainly does that.

Two weeks ago, in a rare conspiracy of good fortune, spring came sashaying in just as I acquired a fine new handmade racing bicycle. The bike fell to me through the admirable offices of Mr. Robert Ragsdale, a connoisseur of sweet road bikes and a stout fellow well met. She's a Belgian model from the salons of Eddy Merckx, togged out in a parfait of succulent Italian colors, a sleek and nubile creature, playful and born to run.

These things are skittery, like terns in flight. The Campagnolo running gear looks like Zuni jewelry, cleanly curved, trim, burnished, aesthetically apt.

The following day, accompanied by my riding friend Laurie Beers, I taxied the new machine onto the macadam, snapped into the pedals, and spun toward Seaside. March sun glinted off the spokes. The bicycle and I streamed north on Highway 101 like a greased arrow. I felt like Hunter S. Thompson rocketing out of Golden Gate Park, listening as the "strange music" begins, a tune played out along the edge, a song of wind, and speed, trepidation and freedom. Huzzah for spring and the beckoning road!



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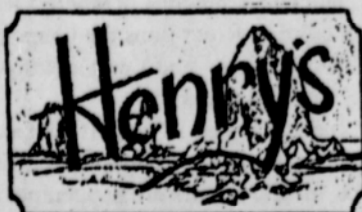
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FROM THE LOWER LEFT CORNER

Victoria Stoppello

My reading disorder

We rearranged our living room furniture and now it is obvious we have too much stuff. The new arrangement points out how many books and magazines and newspapers we have--mostly mine that I keep thinking I'll read. In some ways I have a reading addiction, but I'm like a person suffering from anorexia. I deny myself the unbridled luxury of reading. I snatch small moments of reading between tasks or while waiting for something else to happen. I surround myself with the tantalizing enticements of my addiction. I save them, eye them guiltily, but I don't "get around to" reading them.

I believe, truly, that to sit down and read for an extended period would be a luxury I cannot afford, especially if it's something strictly pleasurable. I deprive myself of the luxury of a well-written novel, the way the dieter denies herself the luxury of a chocolate mousse.

The problem with this is that I'm surrounded by half-read magazines: Orion, Yes!, The Atlantic Monthly, Harper's, Metro, The Bear Deluxe, Tikkun, Residential Architect, Home Power, alumni magazines from two universities, stray copies of The Peaceworker, The LA Times, USA Today and The New York Times Sunday Magazine. You see, I haven't collected lightweight stuff that one could buzz through in a half-hour sitting.

I don't see myself as a reader, which my husband thinks is hilarious. Of course, he doesn't think he's a reader either, while he plows through David Halberstam's "The Fifties," while taking a break from a more difficult book, "The Whole Shebang," which explains the origin of the universe.

Like a person with an eating disorder, I don't have an accurate self image. I don't think of myself as a reader because I compare myself with an extreme example instead of the general population. I compare myself with my former husband who read even more than I do. He was a researcher with a Ph.D., a super model of reading, but I've been slow to figure that out.

Reading probably has a magnetic pull for me because it was my great escape as a teenager. Like kids today hooked on computer games and TV, it was my way of disappearing into another reality. High school in a hard-luck logging town, isolated both by geography and my family's problems, being required to care for my two half sisters while my mother headed to the tavern, meant I had two means of escape: books and late night television. My first exposure to Shakespeare was Laurence Olivier on Channel 6 late at night.

I could disappear into a book. I may as well not have been at home. Very irritating for my mother who seemed to view me, the much older daughter, as more servant than offspring. (How's that for a teenage viewpoint?) I had the audacity to be in a book rather than at her beck and call.

So reading got me into trouble, but it also saved my bacon. I was lucky to be able to read something once and comprehend, because I'd rather read novels than do homework, and crammed my work into study hall. But, I earned scholarships and went to college, where there was more to read than I'd ever imagined. Now reading took on a different flavor, a requirement which sometimes felt like a Thanksgiving dinner every day: three Shakespeare plays a week plus reading for two or three other lit courses. My eyes were bigger than my stomach. I survived, but I lost my appetite. I completed my degree, but I turned away from the world of words. It was as if I realized I needed a fitness program to balance all I'd consumed.

Now I'm back in the world of words, but I'm disgorging them as much as I'm consuming them. Not quite bulimic, I'm actually taking them off little by little, like a slow weight loss program, letting go of all the words and experiences I've consumed over fifty years.

One writer I admire seems to have a solution for the likes of me. He is a true scholar and therefore must struggle with how much to read and when. He's told me his routine: Breakfast, a favorite radio program, one hour of reading, and then to work. Perhaps I can try that--actually allow myself a real hour of reading each day. Perhaps my craving would be satisfied and these pounds, I mean piles, would gradually dwindle. Victoria Stoppello is a writer living in Ilwaco, at the lower left corner of Washington state.



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