



Rev. Hults & Ms. Coyne
Editorial
Now & Then

After an eventful first month for Sally and myself, Billy sent us a gift that he would like to share with our readers. I traveled to Paris last year and returned with stars in my eyes and a longing to return. I had found the city of my dreams. With all of its beauty and history, my most treasured spot was a tiny bookstore tucked in the shadows of Notre Dame. Billy shared my infatuation with this magical bookstore and what follows is a story of his first day in the City of Lights and finding Shakespeare & Company. Enjoy.

There are few places on the planet that could be considered living shrines, and even fewer that are living shrines to literature. The only one I can think of is Shakespeare & Co. in Paris. The original Shakespeare & Co. was founded by Sylvia Beach in the early twenties and became a legendary hangout for writers and artists - Hemingway, Stein, Picasso, Joyce, who haunted the place until the Second World War came along. The latest English language bookstore in Paris to bear the name Shakespeare & Co. was started in the fifties by George Whitman, who is the great grandson of Walt Whitman. Mr. Whitman carried on the traditions of Sylvia Beach, housing her library of books which may be read but not purchased. He also started his own traditions; perhaps the most legendary is the Tumbleweed Hotel which is upstairs at Shakespeare & Co. The 'hotel' is for the most part just a series of beds that are tucked away in the tiny rooms of the library. There is a kitchen of sorts and there is a 'writers room' by Mr. Whitman's apartment which is private. Unlike most hotels it doesn't cost money to stay.

Having read stories of Paris and Shakespeare & Co. for years, I was amazed to find myself one October evening in the City of Lights. I had been met at the train station by George Contos, who has lived abroad for fifty of his seventy-some years. He and a very nice couple who were his dear friends took me in hand. They invited me for dinner, allowed me to check my e-mail, and got me settled in my hotel. George left me to freshen up and said he would meet me in an hour and a half. In ten minutes, I had showered, changed my shirt and was on the street in front of the hotel. I saw George waiting at a cafe, but he didn't see me. I could feel Shakespeare & Co. I knew by the map that it was just a few blocks away, and I could see the top of Notre Dame, but even without those clues, I could actually feel it. I turned right at a bakery, went past a Jazz club, crossed a busy street and there, a little below street level, was a shabby rag and bone shop of the heart. I caught my breath, and wandered up to the door.

There were books in boxes and on shelves outside; there was a small table on the sidewalk where a family of three were having their dinner. A tall red-haired man, a beautiful Asian woman and a small girl of beautiful mixed heritage. After a few minutes in the shop where I boldly walked up the stairs to the Tumbleweed Hotel as though I belonged there, I went back to the sidewalk. I had brought copies of the books I had published, and a few copies of the paper. I stood off to the side watching the family have dinner on the sidewalk, oblivious to the chaos of Paris around them. Finally I caught the woman's eye, and she said something to the redheaded man, and he turned and gave me his attention. I introduced myself and explained that I had been in contact with Quinn at Kilometer Zero, the magazine that comes from the Shakespeare & Co. family. I showed him the paper and the books and asked if Mr. Whitman was around. The little girl jumped up and said, "Do you want to meet George? He will be down in a minute!"

I was about to reply when the door to the upper apartments opened and there was George Whitman, himself. Thin, scruffy, but with eyes that sparkled when the child greeted him. The red-haired man explained that I was there to meet him. A tired look came over his face. How many times had he done this? How many wide eyed writer wannabes, hero worshippers, giggling school girls, had stood on this sidewalk, and stammered and stuttered as he tried to be polite and understand. I handed him the books and he the red-haired man told him that I published them. Mr. Whitman started to explain that Shakespeare & Co. only sells used books, but I said, no, they were a gift. He slammed the books down on a bench and I felt like he was about to give me a lecture about how many lousy books people drop off everyday, and on and on... he does have a frightful temper according to legend. But instead, he reached into his pocket and bringing out a large ring of very unusual keys, handed them to me.

"Then I will give you a gift," he said, indicating one particular key. "This is the key to the writers' room, you may stay for a week if you like." Until the day I die I will never know why I didn't just say thank you and go upstairs. I know I had a room and a dinner date, and all that, but at that moment I was invited to be a part of a long history of a holy place. Something like Jesus beckoning to Peter saying, "Come with me and I will make you a fisher of men," and Peter saying, "Well, okay, but I'll be along after steelhead season."

Actually that is a bit pretentious. It is a well known fact that that key has been offered and accepted by knaves and fools as well as lovers of words and legends of literature. He will offer shelter to anyone. Period. No, he didn't see some spark of genius in these bloodshot eyes, or note the fine quality of the books I had produced; he just offered shelter. It is what he has always done. It is what he will always do. It is not about me.

I returned the next day to watch the shop open and the tourists get their pictures taken in front of it. I met Simon, who kind of runs the rare book room. He's English and we hit it off. We got to talking about books and the war, and when a couple of guys in suits came up to the glass door and started to come in, he shut it in their faces, and locked it. "We're closed" he shouted at them, and calmly continued our conversation. I

Behind the Times
Michael Burgess

The best of times, the worst of times, times that try the soul. World in upheaval, civilization in peril and, even for those not living in Afghanistan, personal lifestyles rudely interfered with. An anxious and annoyed nation worries aloud: what then must we do? In any conflict, of arms or the spirit, the best first move is to identify the enemy.

There's an anonymous bit of all weather advice hanging on my office wall: Tell me to what you pay attention and I will tell you who you are. It's one of those t-shirt sized maxims that can, when matters become problematic, save a person's bacon. Matters have become problematic. Actually, they're just a click or two shy of critical.

Crisis of any sort distills life to its fundamentals; this is, in fact, what crisis is for. Crisis is nature's way of telling us what we're doing isn't working; that it was either a dumb idea to start with or that the conditions in which it did work have changed. It offers proof, undeniable and immediate, that we've been ignoring the little red lights flashing on the control panel. Crisis means that someone's dropped the ball. In terms of society, it's the critical mass of social change; that historic moment when events make the sound of a teapot coming to boil.

If the events of recent days tell us anything, it's that attention must be paid. The question, of course, is to what? Much more than we know, or want to imagine, hangs on our answer. A hint was provided recently by an Afghani woman, naturally nameless. Sitting in the dust and rubble of her world, being interviewed by a well nourished reporter with access to clean sheets, cold beer and laundry facilities, the woman summed up her realpolitik: "I just want the world to be quiet."

But the world, both hers and ours, isn't quiet now. For those with ears to hear, it hasn't been quiet for some time. In the sixty years since World War II, the second war to end all wars, roughly one hundred and fifty wars have been waged on the planet by people who, given a choice, would have found something else to do. Quiet doesn't precipitate crisis; what precipitates crisis is not listening to the whispers and moans of disorder; to the grinding background noise of life out of balance. Attention must be paid.

Nothing alters an organism, either biological or social, more surely or more radically than fear. Fear constricts tissues and narrows perceptions into the binomial mathematics of survival: fight or flight. Fear can be, if not a friend, at least an ally; terror, on the other hand, is its own worst enemy. Fear calls us to necessary action; terror makes action of any kind unlikely and appropriate action a matter of blind luck. Fear focuses the mind; terror confuses. Left to itself, it becomes panic, which Webster defines as "an unreasoning terror often accompanied by mass flight."

When panic becomes a proper noun, an historic social moment trumpeted in by the sound of millions of boiling teapots, the change of state is described as "a sudden widespread fright concerning financial affairs and resulting in a depression in values caused by violent measures for protection of securities or other property." Interesting words, 'values' and 'securities'. The past is a

Life is a country that the old have seen, and lived in. Those who have to travel through it can only learn from them. —Joseph Joubert

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Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just.

—Thomas Jefferson

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told him I would be back in December and that Mr. Whitman had offered me the writers' room for a week. He said he was leaving in December and maybe I could help with the rare books as well.

I wandered back among the stacks and found an old volume from the twenties. It was about someone's adventures in the gold and diamond mines of South Africa at the turn of the century. It was a dusty little orange book with no dust jacket, jammed sideways on the shelf. I had merely planned to straighten it out, but when I opened it I saw that it was, first, not priced; second, a first edition; and third, signed by the author. On further investigation I found a letter from the author tucked inside, telling of his plans to return to the gold fields and diamond mines. It was dated 1927. I took it to the young men who were sitting at the front desk. I pointed out the various qualities of the book, and they allowed how that "made it worth something." I took a deep breath and said "Yes, that is true. How much is the question?"

They had no idea, so I just smiled and asked them to put it behind the counter and said I would be back. I didn't mention that it would be in December and that I would come to work, not to buy.

More later.
love, Billy

UPPER LEFT EDGE

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Major Distribution: Ambling Bear Distribution

5000 to 6000 copies are printed and distributed monthly in Oregon and to points around the world.

Advertising Rates

Business Card size	\$40
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1/8th approx. 4x7	\$60
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harsh teacher, not a dictator. Attention must be paid.

In times of crisis, it's as tempting as it is foolish to define ourselves and our lives in terms of our fears. We must also, it stands to reason, be wary of those who feed them. We must remember that people with something to sell (a giant Tonka truck, a boiler plate stock, a corporate financed police state) will do whatever it takes to make us buy it. A great revealed truth of our time was delivered by Deep Throat: Follow the Money. The leader of our nation refers to us, not as citizens, but as consumers. We are now, not so much the lantern of freedom as its imported plastic flashlight that comes on when you clap your hands. The business of America has become, not just part of a well ordered society, but the order of society itself. Attention must be paid.

By some dark and subtle magic, a noble experiment involving two centuries of hard work on the part of millions of mostly well meaning people has devolved into a stimulus/response reflex most often associated with insects, reptiles and crack dealers: Don't feel good enough? / Want to feel better? / Don't have enough? / Want more? We're encouraged to be fearful and unsatisfied by people and market forces whose very existence depends upon it. The thoughtful have long suspected this is not a recipe for lasting success.

In the meantime, leading lives that are, relative to ninety percent of humanity, burdened with staggering wealth and privilege, we'd become, long before September, a nation of self-professed victims. By a cruel quirk of fate, not even obscene levels of excess protected us from feeling, in one vague way or another, unfairly put out: our nation's inner child rebelling with laughable cause. The rallying cry of this neurotic little uprising was, in simplest terms, this: They said if we bought all the stuff we'd be happy, so we did but we're still not. If, having done everything television told us to do, instead of being happy, we feel hollow, unfulfilled and ill-used, it can only mean that something, or someone, is actively interfering with our bliss. Bad things don't happen to excellent people (so the theory goes), certainly not worry and stress, unless there's someone who can be sued. Long before September, our national mantra had mutated, not all that quietly, from a plurius unum (out of many, one) to: it's not my fault, I don't have time for this and somebody needs to pay.

Aside from self-righteousness, hubris and broad spectrum gluttony, our national character seems lately to be mostly about worry. Worry is, of course, inertia: a slow motion form of terror, our brain chemistry's answer to gravitational collapse. Worry debilitates and paralyzes the will by turning life into a web of immovable forces against which resistance is futile. Admitting no solution, worry demands that the Dorothy in us surrender; if possible, unconditionally. For this reason, in the entire homemade, impromptu pageant of human history, researchers have failed to unearth a single instance in which a difficult situation, let alone a serious historical challenge, was made one bit better by worry. The only known antidote to worry is action. As an old friend, a gardener, once observed while digging a hole in the rain: "It's hard to be depressed when you're doing something." What then must we do?

The first step of any journey is not, strictly speaking, a step at all. The first step is to determine where exactly you are. We would be wise to, as Bob Dylan suggested twenty years ago, admit that the waters around us have grown and accept that soon we'll be drenched to the bone. The times are changing, the winds are gusting and we need to be our own weathermen. Before we set foot on any path, we must accept that, for you and I and the Afghani woman, and the billions of her fellow humans who just want the world to be quiet, forces have been unleashed that are, for the most part, wildly out of our control. They are, as point of fact, out of the control of those who've unleashed them. A new hand has been dealt and most, if not all, bets are off.

We must remember the old joke, no less funny now than before: if you want to hear the universe laugh, tell it what you're doing tomorrow. We must remember also that the purest act of freedom is laughter. Like it or not, the game's afoot. What's begun is the next leg of the adventure: our expedition of discovery to find what it means to be human. Since turning back or stopping aren't options, we might just as well pull our fears out and hold them to the light.

Are we afraid we'll lose our jobs? It could certainly happen. The economy was, long before September, sliding into what could easily become an unparalleled global depression. The only certainty is uncertainty; the only guarantee is that there never was one. Aside from doing our best work, not just for the pay but for the satisfaction that's in it, there's nothing to be done.

Are we worried we'll be in the wrong place at the right time and watch, frozen like a deer in headlights, as the shining wings of random doom bank toward us in a shallow dive? It could certainly happen. There's also no reason in the world it couldn't be carrying a crude but effective nuclear device purchased with a credit card in an open air market. Aside from staying as far away as possible from anything worth blowing up, there's not, as they say, diddley-squat we can do about it; or, just as importantly, not do.

Are we worried about anthrax (already responsible for as many deaths as an unremarkable freeway accident), small pox or any of the several unspeakably unpleasant plagues that could erupt tomorrow morning at a shopping mall near us? It could certainly happen. According to the experts the same experts who, we recently learn, knew very little about the anthrax they knew enough about to design and sell delivery systems for), life could become, quickly and without warning, an immunological crap shoot. Beyond moving into our backyard isolation bunkers, which we can be confident will hit the market soon, there are no precautions to be taken.

Are we, at bottom then, merely worried about dying? We all die. Dying is part of life. The real challenge, the only challenge to the thoughtful, is choosing to live well; which is to say, with purpose, dignity, awareness and compassion.

Some time ago, on public radio, a young man being slowly brought down by AIDS read an essay he'd written about his personal adventure in mortality. He was diagnosed early on in the plague (twenty million dead and just beginning, no news at eleven) and his doctor advised him to get his affairs in order. So, as best he could, he did. He prepared his family and friends, did whatever paper work that needed doing and worked hard to find a measure of peace with his new reality. The first drugs appeared. He responded well to them and his prognosis drastically improved. "So now," he said, "I wasn't going to die." He prepared once more to live. He made plans and new acquaintances, scheduled vacations and rejoined human society. When the disease came back with a vengeance, the doctor gave him new drugs, but the new drugs made him sick and weak and one day he just stopped taking them. "So now," he said, "I'm dying again." He has, like the rest of us, no clear notion when. At the time he told his story, a year had passed. Being unable to hold down a job, he has a wealth of time on his hands. To fill it well, he takes long walks. As he walks, he chants the mantra his disease has taught him: "I am living, I am dying, I am living, I am dying..."

Attention must be paid.

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—Bill "Wacky" Wickland
on the State of the Union