

Home Schooling

Lessons from a Southwest straw bale house site.

What I learned (or re-learned) this August while building a straw bale house in a small, desert valley in Utah:

On a seemingly still day, a large, heavy mat of cardboard (two inches thick by four feet wide and seven feet long) can float east for miles, a thousand feet overhead like a magic carpet if a dust devil grabs it and lifts it into an air stream.

It's as fun to plaster one's home with mud, clay and straw as it was to play in mud when you were six.

A community with neither streetlights nor outdoor house lights allows a starry night or a full moon to dock immediately next to you. Mud breathes.

The Colorado River used to be called the Grand River. Hence, Grand Junction, Colorado; Grand County, Utah; and the Grand Canyon.

When a house construction crew includes a healer, a Celtic music radio program disk jockey, and an artist/rock music disk jockey, the house seems to be built like a song – with spirit.

Breezes matter in southern Utah. If you doubt this, go sit for a few minutes in the sealed, plastic, temporary outhouse with the door closed, on a hot day.

Even if you have no feet, you can be the hardest-working straw baler.

Some years ago, when a political dispute was raging in the valley and signs were torn down by opposing sides, someone tacked up a lone sign that survived, and remains today at the entrance to the valley: "Caution: Falling Sky."

The friendly owner of the nearby upscale winery and resort on the Grand River is depleting the next valley's aquifer and tearing your arid public lands to shreds with his cattle. You choose how much you sense Earth's presence around you.

The skin of a house is like the skin of living beings: It covers many parts, skills and mistakes.

Among the few things that succeed in being white in red dust (aka redrock) country are the sacred datura flowers, unfurling large after dusk and lasting one night.

If you're lime, sitting in water in a garbage can all winter will make you stronger.

There is inexplicable, but sharp enjoyment in drinking wine and eating eggs nurtured by neighbors. Especially when the wine comes from the vineyard of two gay men, and even good Mormons helped when the community turned out to pick their grapes; and the eggs come from the chickens of a woman who drives an old black and white police car.

Different hummingbird species make different sounds with their wings while hovering.

If you cook at home, you won't notice you've just ordered the senior breakfast.

Some of my neighbors care as much about who dies, and how, in an attack on Baghdad as an attack on Manhattan; others care only that people are dying in one of those cities.

Our hardware stores assume all houses will be built with straight lines and 90° angles.

Now that the oceans are heating up, corals are committing suicide by throwing out their food-producing algae. (I read this one evening online, after a record-hot day of building.)

Some construction workers carry black widow spiders away, rather than killing them.

When a 1,200-pound steel beam falls on your big toe, make sure you're standing in sand.

Humans aren't as beautiful after death as juniper trees are.

If you are aware, political work for the environment will find you anywhere on Earth.

I wonder what the bear was thinking when he decided to poop on my well cover.

Steel rusting is merely burning more slowly than a forest on fire.

The best night to swim at the local swimming hole is Saturday evening because the Seventh Day Adventists have the water rights, but don't irrigate alfalfa on their Sabbath.

In a rural desert community, the food of current excitement is what is in season and local. In an urban area, the food of current excitement often is what is out of season and from far away.

Living inside a house brings comfort. Living outside brings mysteries.

Mars can be a close friend at 2:30 am, August 2003.



Mary O'Brien of Eugene has worked as a public interest scientist for the past 22 years. She can be reached at mob@efn.org



Oregon Family Dental, PC

Welcomes

Stephanie Coursey, RDH

Now accepting new hygiene patients

*"Providing quality care
with a gentle touch."*



344-7900 • 11th & Chamers • Eugene

Simple® NEW FALL STYLES



FOOTWISE
THE BIRKENSTOCK STORE

181 E Broadway • Downtown Eugene
342-6107 • Mon-Sat, 10-6 & Sun 11-5

301 SW Madison • Downtown Corvallis
757-0875 • Mon-Sat, 10-6 & Sun 11-5

THON BUSTER (thon' bust er) noun



1. one who contributes to KLCC in order to preemptively truncate an upcoming pledge drive ("Radiothon").
2. any pledge to KLCC which occurs before the onset of a 'thon.
3. *figuratively*: anyone who sleeps comfortably, knowing they have taken action, rather than having put off or shirked some ethical obligation.
4. *slang*: a hipster, especially one with highly developed musical tastes and/or extensive knowledge of current affairs.
5. *rare*: a single, supermassive cash donation, usually dropped from an aircraft at high altitude, which on impact completely eliminates the need for one or more Radiothons [see MOAB "Mother of All Busters"].

usage: "Having already contributed to KLCC, the happy Thon Buster could hardly wait for Radiothon not to begin."

BE A KLCC THON BUSTER TODAY!

www.klcc.org or 463-6000

Michael's
FUTONS
FRAMES

Back to School Sale!
All Futons - All Frames
ON SALE!

Plus - 20% OFF Selected Floor Models!
20% OFF Previously Displayed FUTON Mattresses!
FREE Curbside Delivery! (Some restrictions apply)
HURRY IN FOR THE BEST SELECTION!

521 Main St., Springfield, OR 97477 • 744-3343
2085 NW Buchanan Ave., Corvallis • (541) 757-2445

Financing Available OAC • 90 Days Same As Cash! • VISA/MC/DISC

www.michaelsfutons.com