

Songs of Childhood

Linus explores a new world

Linus O'Brien, my grandson, is 3 tomorrow. Like all little ones, he is busy reflecting back, through his own unique being, the worlds in which he's been immersed. Two of his worlds are books and songs, to which he pays extraordinary and repeated attention. The words then come out in situations that seem to him analogous. A few examples:



It is December of last year, and Linus is 2. He is visiting in Utah, and one terrible night his intestinal machinery is giving him fits. In the midst of sitting up in bed crying and flailing around with a plastic bottle, he mistakenly hits the edge of an alcove wall with the bottle. He hears a crack, and with it the moment in Dr. Seuss' *Horton Hatches an Egg* when the egg Horton the Elephant has been sitting on for a year hatches out. Amid stomach pain tears, Linus blurts out with impressive memory, "'It's mine!' cried the bird when she heard the egg crack. (He had done all the work, now she wanted it back!)"

Linus and I are walking through the snow, following the tracks of a fox that has moved through the yard the night before. Linus is having a great time tracking the fox's movements until he remembers what the fox was after in the song, "The Fox Went Out on a Chilly Night." Linus suddenly stops. "Oh no!" he quietly laments. "Duck and goose." (As in, "He grabbed a grey goose by her neck and swung a duck across his back, and didn't mind the quack, quack, quack, or the legs all dangling down-o, down-o, down-o; Didn't mind the quack, quack, quack, or the legs all dangling down-o").

Linus, 2 and a half, is confused about how to move forward rather than backward on a tricycle in a Sacramento bicycle shop. He somehow tries both at once and comes to an awkward stop. Unembarrassed, he looks up at the watching store owner, and happily pronounces from *The Little Engine That Could*: "I came to a stop with a jerk. I simply could not go another inch."

Linus, 2 and three quarters, has walked to a neighbor's yard to see their goats. But the neighbors also have June, a large, friendly bear of a dog, who takes an immediate interest in Linus. Linus' fear is rising as he tries to get away from June by running around and around the legs of five adults. Regardless, June's nose is faithfully glued to Linus' back. Suddenly, at the height of his terror, Linus rings out across species barriers, "All around the cobbler's bench, the monkey chased the weasel."

Linus loves the planets and has heard about them many times in books. Ask him the planets' names, and he begins to reel them off: "Earth, Venus, Pluto, Mars, Myranus ..." Myranus? Well, Linus has heard "Your-Ranus" so he reasonably feels it is his Ranus.

And then there's the cultural worlds he hasn't yet encountered. Linus, his dad, Josh, and mom, Laura, are jumping on the bed. "I'm a bird!" Linus calls out. "I'm a plane," Laura announces.

"I'm Superman!" Josh shouts.

"Oh!" Linus inquires, pausing his bounces, "What soup do you make? I like soup."

And then there are the cultural worlds he has apparently entered of which Josh and Laura are unaware. After they ask 2-and-a-half-year-old Linus why he won't let them know when he's pooped in his diaper, Linus gives an answer that would make Cheney proud: "I do not have to speak the truth."

"Where did he get that one?" Josh asks Laura.

In his car seat behind Josh and Laura, Linus hears them spelling out a word he can't decipher: D-I-A-P-E-R. Not to be bested, Linus wants to let them know he's on to their game. "L-I-N-U-S. Linus," he calls out, adding, for good measure, "Linus Compendia."

Linus has gotten a stethoscope for his birthday. He is reaching up under Josh's shirt to listen to his heart. "I should let you know," Linus gravely notes, "this is going to be a little bit cold."

I should let you know, Linus, that you and your age-mates (in reasonable numbers, of course) are more than a little bit wonderful.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

STAYING ALIVE

Our deflating economy may — though we hope it won't — produce the worst times since the 1930s. With state and local government budgets in crisis, Gov. Kulongoski seeks federal funds for infrastructure while proposing that thousands of Oregonians lose in-home and child care, funding investment for the future with "painful disinvestments in the present." *The R-G* calls those cuts "unsavory," but the governor's term was more accurate, though inadequate. Try "life-threatening" in some cases; for example, when loss of child care means inability to work, even if you're lucky enough to have a job.

Investing for the future is important. But meanwhile, so is staying alive. Already hundreds of thousands of Oregonians live in poverty, while the federal treasury has thrown trillions of dollars at financiers whose casino-style "innovations" caused this slow-motion train wreck in the first place.

We should use at least several hundred billions of federal money to bail out ourselves — cities and states — and not just for infrastructure as it's usually understood. Otherwise escalating service cutbacks will hurt our most vulnerable neighbors, causing more job losses and economic contraction. As federal taxpayers we should thus build for the future partly by funding life-saving health care and social services — so we can all have a future.

Federal funds to weatherize low-income housing should also be expanded, both saving energy and creating jobs. These programs operate in Eugene as well as throughout Oregon, and investments in them have a wonderful multiplier effect in local economies.

Robert Roth
Eugene

RACKET PREVAILS

Rob Bolman, inveterate liberal (letters, 11/26): It's a good thing Percy (savior) defeated Torrey (devil) or we'd have

deafening silence about the cops brutalizing the peaceful anti-pesticide protest in May or their outrageously jackbooted attack on the campus Campbell Club last week. And what a relief that Obama (savior) beat McCain (devil); otherwise we'd have a pro-nukes, pro-death penalty, blank-check-for-Israel-to-steal-every-last-inch-of-Palestinian-land, pro-PATRIOT Act, same-old-gang-running-things, etc. ruler! Get the irony, Rob?

You don't see not voting as a first step to rejecting the racket-as-usual because you evidently see the prevailing order as basically sound and healthy. Your lesser-of-two-evils perspective helps guarantee that things will keep getting worse for life in general. You legitimate and reproduce a toxic system with every vote. Instead of the passive consumerism involved, when will it be time for acting with vision and independence?

John Zerzan
Eugene

NOT A ZERO GAIN

William Lewis makes the claim that converting automobiles to electric power is at best a net zero gain in reducing environmental damage. I would agree that an electric automobile is still a large chunk of metal on the road adding to congestion, but at least it isn't continuously burning fuel, even at idle. Most electric vehicles are designed for local driving, typical of 80 percent of our auto use, and are typically smaller. Therefore they are quite appropriate as urban vehicles, a net gain for the environment.

Lead acid batteries are not very efficient but are cheap and durable enough to last through their warranty and have been totally recycled in this country for many years. Recycling is obviously a base resource industry and like many other resource industries can be exploitive of the poor and third world countries, but that too is improving, with a net gain for the