

ENCOUNTERS IN THE RAIN

Coastal Life

Story by MATT LOVE



Photo by Matt Love

Henry David Thoreau was a prodigious man of rain. He wrote much about rain in his journals. For example, take this entry from March 30, 1840: “Pray what things interest me at present? A long, soaking rain, the drops trickling down the stubble while I lay drenched on last year’s bed of wild oats.”

Notice how Thoreau paid attention to rain. Notice how he allowed rain to fall on him.

Pray, what things interest me at present, when rainfall hit 20 inches for December in Astoria? My recent encounters in rain, that’s what.

Here they are:

I was walking in cats-and-dogs rain down Marine Drive on my way to the KMUN radio station. My trusty pea coat was losing the battle. A red Toyota 4-runner from the early Clinton presidency pulled up alongside me in the parking lot of Pig ’N Pancake. The window came down, and I beheld a somewhat young bearded man with tattoos covering both his arms. He lit a cigarette and asked me, “How far are you going brother? I’ll give you a lift.”

“It’s all right,” I said, “I like walking in rain, but thanks for the offer.”

“I’m 27 years old, and this is the first vehicle I’ve owned,” he said. “I want to help people when it’s raining and give them rides.”

I looked at him. He was weathered and must have walked hundreds of desperate miles in coastal rain before getting it enough together to own a ve-



Photo by Henry Meiners

hicle or not have to walk down Highway 30 in rain unless you do so for pleasure.

“I appreciate that, but I’m fine,” I said.

He waited a split second. I don’t think I convinced him.

“Okay,” he said, and splashed away, trailing cigarette smoke out the window.

My next encounter occurred standing in front of Godfather’s Books. I waited for the light to turn red so I could cross Commercial Street. Rain was moving north, south, east, west. It couldn’t make up its mind where it wanted to go, which is the perfect direction for embracing rain as a personal metaphor.

An older man came up to me. I’d never seen him before. He said, “Do you know what the Grinch

should have done to end Christmas in Whoville?”

“Tell me!” I was clamoring for the answer. Sometimes I’ve wanted the Grinch to have won.

“He should have enslaved beavers and then turned them loose on the town!” said the man.

Only in rain would I have ever heard such a maniacal ridiculous plot, and I relished hearing it. You hear nothing of rain if you walk around with ear buds in.

“It would have worked!” I said, practically yelling to be heard over the oceanic rain.

The light turned red. We started walking in rain together to cross the street, and then we parted company.

My final encounter happened on my couch with my old husky snoozing beside me. Rain battered the house in multiple pulverizing methods. I was searching the recesses of mind for totems and cultural landmarks of my youth when I inexplicably recalled the classic television sitcom from the mid ’70s “Barney Miller.” I pulled out the tablet, dialed up YouTube, and the episodes were there.

The first show I watched, season two, episode 11, originally aired in 1975. As the program unfolded, my astonishment ratcheted up to giddiness. I could not believe what I was seeing. How had this translucent gem of rain’s cultural history escaped me?

It was a show about rain; yes, rain: undoubted-

ly the greatest half hour meditation on rain in the annals of American network television. It was a downpour of existentialism, meandering reflections, absurdity and semiotics, via the unlikely medium of an analog cop sitcom set in a dilapidated New York City precinct building staffed by a team of multi-cultural detectives from the era when President Ford told New York to drop dead.

In the episode, rain keeps falling and falling and

threatens to collapse the roof of the precinct. The ceilings drip, and the filing cabinets fill up with water. One of the detectives, Nick Yemana, observes that rain never falls on Nelson Rockefeller. He also makes coffee with rainwater. Other detectives drift into a hazy

state of melancholy as they stare at rain through a window and muse upon the better, alternate realities that could have befallen them.

Isn’t that what many of us do when we stare at rain? I’ve written an entire book on the subject! I almost feel I stop contemplating life when it doesn’t rain.

There was plenty of contemplation time for me in December, and I can only dream the rains fall even harder the rest of winter.

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Matt Love is the author/editor of 14 books about Oregon, including “Of Walking in Rain.” His books are available through coastal bookstores or his web site, nestuccaspitpress.com

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