

Scribbler

January 2021

ISSUE 106

Editor's Note

Nothing should go back to normal. Normal wasn't working. If we go back to the way things were, we will have lost the lesson. May we rise up and do better. – Unattributed internet meme, 2020

What did “normal” mean to you before Covid? What does it now? Multiple kinds of normal means there’s one where we go to restaurants and concerts and readings and rallies, where we hug our family and friends, where we know what people we’ve just met look like without a mask. Another where we spend way too much time stuck in traffic going to work, where our job may not fully engage us or provide decent working conditions but we have to keep it because health insurance and mortgage and etc., where we have closets and garages and storage units filled with stuff we don’t need because we were being good consumers as taught, where the homeless encampments by the freeway keep expanding because the county/state/country has no money to fund the social services we thought as Americans we were guaranteed, where we’re allowed to think that because we don’t wear hoods and burn crosses we can’t possibly be racist. And so on.

Covid has along with its devastation brought us an unexpected gift: the occasion to stop go-go-going everywhere all the time, take a long breath, and reconsider our relationship to creativity, local community, society, the economic system, most of all to each other. Will you let this occasion pass, or plunge into it?

– Charlie Lenk

Blue

I sit in the garden and remember leaving out smarties for the faeries and playing in the Wendy house I always planned to sleep in but never did and sunbathing reading Howard Marks sneaking rollies while the family was out listening to Joni wanting to go to California at 14 dream weaving romance breathing lying on blankets with friends listening to Green Day eight minutes on this side then flip sun cream revising the summer before rehab where my nerves were so jangled even the marigolds were too bright and I hid in the bath for hours at a time in the dark drinking watching black and white documentaries about Marilyn Monroe and Vivien Leigh the beech tree growing its shimmering leaves witnessing it all the people who came the people who went and never came back who stay in touch but not with you you were too much too drunk too thin too unfaithful too wild too ruinous made you feel too much they went and did their things they’re artists and cook for famous people and curate galleries and like each other’s pictures on Instagram I wonder if they ever wonder what I’m doing and what about all the pictures we took with analog cameras that we took to the chemist? Of shindigs of camping of the last day of school when the PE teacher caught us with beer in our bags? We were Kodak friends friends til the end but untamed grief in this culture has a way of wrenching love away from you not towards you it gathers where it feels safe and polite and calm and civilized away from that messy business messy person but I’m still here and so are the cornflowers blooming blue every year we’ve converted the barn to live in the old stalls where I kissed a boy or two maybe I kissed you there maybe I smoked joints with you there hid bottles with you there where empty cans piled up in the corner now lies the counter where I chop tomatoes make medicine and endless tea the cans are gone those friends are gone but I am still here and I am not sorry and I am home.

– Rosie Seymour

Workshop Schedule

All events and workshops are online via Zoom

CRAZY CHILD WRITING WORKSHOPS

(fee: \$80 or any donation; included in 10-week workshops)

Let your creative self write with abandon —

based on the tutorial *Let the Crazy Child Write!* (New World Library, 1998)

Saturdays 10am to 5pm:

January 9, February 13, March 13, April 10

Register at clive@matsonpoet.com for Zoom link.

10-WEEK WORKSHOPS

(fee: \$400)

poetry prose plays nonfiction

Wednesdays 6:30 to 9:30pm

Current sessions end March 10 — New sessions begin March 17

Fridays 10am to 1pm

Current sessions end February 26 — New sessions begin March 5

Register at clive@matsonpoet.com for the Zoom link.

2-BUSY 2-WRITE

(drop-in writing time)

(fee: \$10 or any donation)

Tuesdays, 7 to 9pm

Register at clive@matsonpoet.com for the Zoom link.

POETRY CLASS

(fee: \$250 for ten weeks or \$30 per class) -

Reclaiming the Muse with discussion of Modernism, the Beat aesthetic, feminism, and the current template, while focusing mostly on our craft!

Thursdays 7 to 9pm

Current sessions end March 4 — New sessions begin March 11

Register at clive@matsonpoet.com for the Zoom link.

THE NOVEL'S ARC

(fee: \$500 for five sessions)

Four novelists read each other's novels and examine how each works as a whole. Two-hour sessions, once a month, are devoted to each novel.

New sessions start when four authors declare their readiness.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT
matsonpoet.com or phone (510) 508-5149**

POETRY SALOON

(drunk on poetry!)

Free — register at clive@matsonpoet.com
for Zoom link.

Second **Fridays**, 7 to 9:30 pm

*Bring poems or prose by you or others
to share, or join simply to enjoy.*

January 8, February 12,

March 12, April 9

THE SCRIBBLER

PREVIOUS-ISSUE FINANCIAL REPORT

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Tim Bacon, Jim Burnett, Karen Gabrielson,
Michelle Garside, Deborah Janke, Robert Peck,
Ellaraine Lockie, Jayne McPherson

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SUBSCRIPTIONS

Workshop participants receive the Scribbler for two
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WordSwell CRAZY CHILD Scribbler

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PLEASE DONATE to keep the publication going.

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Watch for a one-day reading of the entire poem

"Hello, Paradise. Paradise, Goodbye"

at the Art House in the future,
probably on Zoom

Info will be posted at matsonpoet.com,
or contact Clive

THE SCRIBBLER may also be
found online at matsonpoet.com.

If you wish to stop receiving the print version,
please notify us at clive@matsonpoet.com.

Giving and Gratitude and Hope

That this is a hard time, and it's also clear
That that does not capture, for so many,
The loss and hunger and stress and sheer fatigue
That must be set aside each day to go on.
We knew before that those were the good days,
But for so many they weren't, and there is always
Good, still, even now: and so we learn,
And the solution is not to forget,
Alchemy of remembering to do more.

Grateful, and to make the making of gratitude
Our new purpose, to hold it out
In the hands we have, in all our days,
In the days we have, together.
Loved ones who need us, the many things
We cannot do, and the ones we can;
To remember that it matters,
In these hard days, and the ones to come;
We go, so briefly, and it all matters.

We know this, perhaps better than before,
Certainly now, of these cold days,
And gratitude, awesome and unwavering
For the ones who do so much.
We do what we can, we must,
For the warmth we can create.
Well, let us end with hope,
Another word that reaches deep,
Abiding with us, always, somehow.

— Ron Meiners

murmuration

in this murmuration
i am

the smallest tip on
the smallest feather on
the smallest of ten thousand wings

still, I press against the air
with all my being

— Andrew O. Dugas

Crazy

Two observers cannot see the same rainbow. Each eye sees its own. — The National Center for Atmospheric Research

They call her crazy at the coffee shop
Not while she sits sipping
from a whipped cream topped cup
Her out of the blue tongue-rolling trills
as surprising as the local flock of wild parrots
if they flew in for a coffee break

Except the parrots wouldn't be clapping hands
to piped-in Bob Dylan songs, slapping legs
snapping fingers or smiling their hearts inside out
Nor would they suddenly say *Bless you WOO* in falsetto
when someone across the room sneezes

I order a refill and ask about her
A woman who comes in several times a day carrying
a recycled paper cup until it protests into pieces
Arms extended from body like wings
Always wearing polyester in pastels
that dress any day in a rainbow

Other customers don't look at her
or at the definition of Tourette syndrome
I peek over the poem I'm writing about birds
Pretend I'm watching people on the sidewalk
She feigns nothing when she hawk-eyes children
like she might pick them up
and take them back to her nest for playtime

Instead she baby-steps out the door
a certain stilted rhythm in her stride
And says *Thank you very MUCH*
to whatever god guides her
No one calls her crazy until after she leaves

I return to the birds that sing
flutter and feed from my fig tree
Oblivious of the cat still as a garden statue
under the lowest branch
But I'll wait for this woman every morning
For the call of the wild that frees
a coffee house from its cage
For the cleansing flush of a rainbow
Its antidote for impending storms

— Ellaraine Lockie

Her Love: A Declination

When we were together
she would never hold my hand.
She rarely looked at me.
Always left at inopportune
times to go pee. Throughout
the day she would spit,
go really deep into her throat
for a phlegm to hawk for distance.
Almost as if to embarrass me.
Almost as if to dare me to love her.
She grumbled most of the time.
Burped when I moved to kiss her.
In general, she pulled into a shell.
Intentionally made herself unattractive;
Incessantly inaccessible.
Her presence was the risk of love.

*Why do I fall?
Why do I rise?
Contempt for myself
I'll never despise.
So which is the love
that loves the most:
the one at a distance?
Or the one up close?*

But after a day of tit-for-tat
silent constipated spats
fits and slurpy spits
she would go home
turn off the lights
curl up in the corner
cuddle her stuffed bear
then begin to rock back
and forth—back and forth
convulse and horribly lurch
cry and curse herself

Adderall

If I ever feel sad at all,
I just take myself an adderall,
Then I feel so glad about it all,
When I take myself some adderall.

If at night you see me standing in,
A field, I probly took some ambien,
'Cause I lie awake a-cryin',
things are in the wrong direction.

*I've been diagnosed with a ghost from my past
And it haunts me,*

*Why do I fall?
Why do I rise?
Contempt for myself
I'll never despise.
So which is the love
that loves the most:
the one at a distance?
Or the one up close?*

The police phoned me this morning
They told me a naked girl jumped
from a local bridge last night. My phone
number was scribbled on her thigh
with bold black ink they believe
came from a permanent marker.
She'd also drawn and colored in
a fist-sized heart above her left nipple.
A black-hole black-heart suicide.

*Why do I fall?
Why do I rise?
Contempt for myself
I'll never despise.
So which is the love
that loves the most:
the one at a distance?
Or the one up close?*

I dressed and went out to my car.
I saw it from my porch.
Her clothes piled beside the driver's door.
And under the windshield wiper-blade
a dew-soggy piece of paper waited,
flapping in the crisp morning wind.

—Joe Loya

*I went to a shrink and he thinks I've got the symptoms
On the packaging.*

Some nights I think that I have had it all,
So I take a drink of alcohol,
I'll just bang my head against this wall,
And say good night to all a y'all,

If I cannot face another day,
Oxycontin takes the pain away,
All the colors start to fade away,
The sky it slowly turns from blue to gray.

(continued on next page)

If I had myself some vicodin,
I'd feel better 'bout the state I'm in,
Some people lose while others win,
The wheel of fortune takes another spin.

*I got a tip on a script from a doctor
in old Mexico,
I get 'em shipped and I sit and I wait
By my front door.*

Lord knows it's got the very best of me,
This better living through chemistry,
But I ain't got nowhere else to be,
I'll take that sample if it's free.

—Howard Rains

Plague in Spring

April

Lilies bloomed in the wet grass.
Instacart total wine
Planted more okra
Watched a droplet of sweat fall from your forehead into my
mouth.
Thank you for being alive!
When will we dance together again?
If nothing else, maybe we will get some okra,
Apples from the tree we planted for Miss Monica's mother,
18,586 total deaths.
We have entered worlds we did not know existed
Just a few more months.

May

Flags in the grass
"They've got bad energy. Mama, they've got bad energy.
Mama, I love you!"
Sparkling apple juice and sidewalk chalk; tear gas, pepper
spray, and rubber bullets.
Grits and eggs for breakfast
Another railway bridge, a drainage canal, a tunnel;
Turtles and lizards and waterbirds, a fucking mask.
She saw my son up there, she says, with the protesters.
Get off the highway!
"U.S. Deaths Near 100,000, an Incalculable Loss"
Guys don't want to date you when they learn you are an
ER nurse.
But we are blessed here in the parking lot of an abandoned
Home Depot,
holding the Bible.

—Annie Hartnett

When The Bomb Drops

One: when the bomb drops, expect to wait an appropriate amount of time in a shelter. When you think it might be time to assess the outside damage, wait another day.

Two: check windows and door sills hourly for ventilation, as you do not want what is outside getting inside.

Three: busy your mind with reading to your shelter mates, or reading out loud if you are alone.

Four: drink water and avoid salty packaged foods at first.

Five: conserve battery energy when possible, to reserve energy for communication devices.

Six: monitor communication devices, i.e. the radio, walkie-talkies, ham or CB devices, television or internet if available. Hourly at first, then four times a day.

Seven: when you see her... tell her you love her.

—Cori Crooks

In Your Absence

in your absence, the strawberries
you purchased with such joy
at the farmers market, grew moldy then dark,
collapsing into themselves, blackened, with
no hint remaining
of their once bright character

in your absence, your friends
all in black, cleared our refrigerator
of all the food that had, in your absence, gone
bad, filling the compost pail twice,
dispatching a random husband or bored child
to take the pail out to the compost bin
and dump it

in your absence, more pronounced
now with the house empty,
I open the refrigerator and look for
the strawberries, peering over and around the
invasion of unfamiliar tupperware, foil covered
baking pans,
containers of soup,
all meant to sustain me

in your absence, but the strawberries
black and cloudy, collapsed into themselves,
are gone, along with all the other fruit
we had so looked forward to enjoying
together

—Andrew O. Dugas

Why do women shave?

Why do women shave?
Eddy loves my body hair
When he tells other men that he thinks it's sexy, they act like he's weird
But he loves to tell them it's weird that they like women who make themselves look like little children
And they can't really argue
The most beautiful woman is a woman comfortable in her own skin, Eddy says

He wanted to know *all* the places I remove it from and I could hardly bear to tell him
Have you ever had armpit hair? He asked me
I only then realized the answer was no – and told him so
If it were me, I would want to know what my body looked like, he replied
I had never let my body be me

I used to think body hair on women was for hippies
Even though my mom is a hippie and she raised me to believe beauty means being unique
Shaving is not unique, it is for sheep, people who are asleep, to please the male gaze
Even though we tell ourselves we like it better that way
How did it take me 33 years to understand this?

When it first started growing I wondered what it would look like
Now I have swirling forests of hair in every crevice it dares grow
Right where it belongs

Funny that it took a man to love me this much to love myself enough to be, me
Why did I need permission?
Men don't need to shave to be loved
There is nothing offensive about their armpits or legs simply existing as they are
They are not hippies or stinky or outliers
It's normal

I've stopped shaving
Everywhere
Even the extra-long stragglers on my inner thighs
When I'd first stopped I had on a dress. I said I didn't feel as sexy.
Why? Eddy asked
It just doesn't feel very feminine, I replied
But this is what a woman looks like he told me, so there's really nothing more feminine than that
And now I am free from the lunacy
I save time, water in the shower, plastic from razors

Now I can't understand why I ever did it
And when Eddy and I see other women with body hair we slyly nod at each other and whisper
"Look, another liberated lady"
Like we're in a special tribe, a sisterhood united in body positivity

I wonder what Kellyanne Conway's armpit hair would look like
Or Kim Kardashian's
It could be normal
Women could save so much water and
Fuck Gillette, anyway
They've had enough of our time and money

Why do women shave?
What if everyone thought it was disgusting to remove something that belongs to your precious ecosystem
Like removing a shell from the beach

(continued on next page)

What if people looked at you as if you had plucked out your
eyelashes and removed your eyebrows for fun?
What if the way you are wildly turned your partner on?
If it were okay to wear a bikini with a bush spilling out the sides?
If people were jealous that your locks were the most luscious!
Your hairy legs were on the cover of vogue
If being yourself, didn't mean going rogue

— Michelle Silver

starring david attenborough as the observer

the buddhist monk asks me
who is the one observing my thoughts
i imagine it's david attenborough up there
scratching his chin
before they mic him up
for the nature documentary starring me
the script he reads begins:
"what a peculiar human specimen,
part of a species
trying to evolve past its warring tribal history.
but try as they might, sometimes the forces of nature
are just too great for anyone of them alone to face."
and he watches me do some
awkward mating ritual at a bar
trying to get that whole "alone" thing fixed
flaunting my plumage to uninterested patrons
before sauntering off homebound
to my habitat of solitude again.

the observer pipes in,
saying "the human species is built for socialization
but not everyone is so in touch with their instincts."
and it's a good thing i can't hear the narrator
or i'd punch him in the face
i mean, david attenborough would never be judgmental
just stating facts and reading the script, you know
which makes it

worse

oh so very worse

the buddhist monk says
observe the one observing your thoughts
but not like that, little spiral
not like that

— Suzanne Yada

Reflections in a Drought Year

The tease of December sprinkles,
even a few weeks of roaring storms,
floods and deep snow drifts,
before the sudden quiet of January
desiccated February, clear
but for the scanty writing of white clouds,
sparse symbols of a parched spring coming
down on us like a withered cactus.

The judgment is coming, not from some
old white bearded man on a throne,
but from all the known wisdom of the ancients:
you reap what you sow.
It's a law older than karma,
older than the wisdom
of prophets sages and shamans;
it's a rule written in our bones,
drawn in every heartbeat and breath—
but we move blindly into our doom
like children playing in a schoolyard
in the minute before death takes them all away,
leaving only the wind to churn
the dust over their graves.

— Clif Ross

The Crowning Race

If mankind finally goes extinct
on some fine spring day
like many nondescript others

no brother and sister creatures
will grieve the empty throne
for very long except
some old dogs

and

soon

even their feral pups will
forget the folk tales of
a mythic higher race

and

a Kindly Master

who always knew

best.

— Ron Myers

WRITING HIGHWAY 395 EXCURSION

(With masks and social distancing, of course. We'll reserve two sites.)

Join us for eight glorious days in the Eastern Sierra. Escape the summer heat for the fresh air and inspiration of camping in the mountains, plus the Perseid meteor shower and natural hot springs. Intensive focus on your writing; and exploring the eastern side of the California Sierra.

August 7-15, 2021 June Lake, California

Cost \$700 (\$50 discount to the first three people who register). Check out our Facebook page.

For more info and registration, see Writing Highway 395 on the website or contact Clive.

WordSwell embraces writing from the truth of our hearts.

Our fledgling organization proposes "**WordSwell**" as its name. Anyone empathic with our vision is welcome to join.

Who we are: We are artists who find joy in writing our personal truth and in seeing that truth communicate itself to others. We write poetry and prose in the flood of courage, freedom, and wisdom of our hearts. We seek to foster this joy in ourselves and in others.

What we do: WordSwell mentors beginning writers, teaches workshops, hosts readings, arranges writing excursions, and publishes work, all with these soulful joys as our mission.

Mission: WordSwell embraces and celebrates any prose or poetry written for the sheer joy of writing.

We foster and celebrate the ability of each writer to search for, discover, practice, and speak in their own voice. • We embrace and celebrate writing that buoys us with the same content, emotion, and excitement that buoys the writer. • We embrace and celebrate writing that does not need to be deciphered. • We encourage and respect writing that includes vast fluid input from the creative unconscious, as outlined in *Let the Crazy Child Write!* • We embrace and respect writing that aspires to raise consciousness, whether of the reader, the writer, or both.

happy
birthday

PARTY!

**MARCH 12 POETRY SALOON
will double as
Clive Matson's 80th birthday party.**

THE SCRIBBLER
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472 44th Street
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