

Reflections—Scrooby Club's Literary Publication

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Meditation on migrants along Arizona borderlands — Joy Hofer

We visited the southern Arizona desert in March. A blooming desert, alive with spring. A place where the bloody Indian Wars were fought. A place where the migrant stories of thousands of Central Americans and Mexicans are being played out today.

While we were there we tried to understand the many layers of the reality of the land. Most importantly we wanted to understand what is happening to migrants in this place. Both of us have listened for years to the stories of refugees, immigrants, undocumented migrants, people choosing to leave their home countries and come to the United States in order to save their lives.

We were privileged to be able to talk with new migrants in Arizona – a family of five from Guerrero State, Mexico, during our visit to a Catholic feeding center in Nogales, Sonora, Mexico. A mother with two sick children from El Salvador at the Benedictine Monastery in Tucson. Two fathers and their young daughters from Guatemala. We visited centers where church folks are trying to cope with the man-made humanitarian disaster which continues to unfold on the border and in towns close to both sides of the border.

The commitment of volunteer doctors, pastors, Catholic sisters, and hundreds of regular folks to this work was inspiring. These volunteers are spreading their arms as wide as they can to show love in an impossible and quickly changing situation that felt close to breakdown despite their best efforts. One UCC pastor,

working at the Benedictine Monastery which shelters over 200 migrants a night in Tucson, called the work she was involved in the “church without borders.”

During March 100,000 migrants were caught trying to cross the border, the highest monthly number in over a decade. There are so many complicating factors — including ever-changing policies, the push to incarcerate all migrants who cross the southern border (the migrant

detention centers are full), heightened racism, the recent threats to close the border, the sometimes violent and callous treatment of migrant families, and then the recent actions of “let them all come, we’ll dump them wherever we can” — have made these huge volunteer community and church efforts not enough by far. The deteriorating economic situation and increasing violence in the countries to the south, and the large number of single parents walking across the border with one or two children (who can no longer be detained or separated due to legal rulings) result in a humanitarian crisis that is spilling over in the towns near the border. A crisis that

will not be solved by bigger walls.

The bottom line is that these migrants fleeing their homes are running away from death — by starvation, by gang violence, by oppression. The question is, what can we as people of goodwill do to help the suffering of our neighbors?

The answer is far from clear.



Photo by Joy Hofer

A New Cat on the Plantation — Ward McAfee

After 14 years of living only with my own kind, I am once again a cat person. Her name is Nala, and she lives on the northwest corner of the campus.

Over the ages, dogs have been called “man’s best friend,” because they have been bred to fight and protect the community against wolves. Cats are different. They avoid unnecessary conflict. Given a choice of “fight, flight or ignore” they regularly choose from the latter two options. The ancient Egyptians knew the superiority of cats who are content to just “be.” We are termed “human beings,” but few of us really are. “Human doings” too were bred by our primitive ancestors to protect the community. But there is more to life than just that. With a cat anyone one can quickly learn the art of “being.”

Our new cat is part Abyssinian so we named her after the girlfriend of the Lion King. When she’s playful I also call her “Wild Thing” because she makes my heart sing. There’s also “Miz Kitty.” Nala is as strong as Wonder Woman. She’s got muscle in her bustle and can leap tall bookcases in a single bound.

Since the last time I had a cat, lots of technological innovations have arrived in the form of small gizmos. I don’t regard any of those as progress. True improvement can be found in up-to-date kitty litter that clumps cat urine and is dust-free as well. This is a most pleasant recent discovery.

Another improvement is that this time, I will probably not have to go through the process of deep grieving when the kitty dies. The vet tells me that she has approximately another 20 years and my probabilities are a lot less than that. She won’t have to grieve me when I depart this mortal coil either, because cats believe that if you can’t be with the one you love then love the one you’re with. They’re natural hippies.

There is no conclusion to this piece because cats have no Alpha and Omega. They have no dharma and thus make no karma. They are cosmic in their being. Nala is getting me in touch with my Buddha Nature. Come by and meet her.

Chaos of Moving — Bill Moremen

We’re in midst of chaos in the process of moving.

Is it getting worse or is it improving?

All around us is a lot of mess.

In our brains there’s a lot of stress.

In the new place can we just sit back?

No, my God, we’ve got to unpack!

Chaos while moving is not so strange.

Chaos often signals an important change.

In the chaos of our time, it may be true,

We’re moving to a new place and point of view.

In the chaos of our time, may it be:

That we are moving to a new humanity.

From the editor: Old and new: some things in this issue were written recently, others years ago. So **you** may send *Reflections* something old or something new. Our readers especially want musings about your personal life, what you have learned over the years about yourself...your likes, your loves. Write it and attach as a doc. or docx. to an email to me: jandmdenham@gmail.com. Don’t know how to do that? If yours is relatively short, just give me a copy. Thanks. — *John Denham*.

If you lived your working career mostly in the second half of the 20th century and were a Mainline person, this book would be especially fascinating reading for you: David A. Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton University Press, 2013). It is incisive, wide-ranging, eloquent, knowledgeable, elegant, and intimate. You feel like this is a fellow with whom you could spend hours at the coffee shop, delving into all the issues that churn your soul.

The strange title you understand of course: after Pentecost (or spiritual awakening now), what next? Interestingly, Hollinger gives one of his chapters – this is an anthology of essays – to his own life story, which begins in Idaho in a working-class and not highly educated family, moves through junior and senior high school in California, college at nearby La Verne University (he went to movies in Claremont), PhD at UC Berkeley, and professorship there in American intellectual history. His religious roots were “small Anabaptist sect,” Brethren, then liberal Protestant, then “none.” His wife is Jewish. Over the past 40 years he has written widely on many topics, including *Protestants Abroad*. Those receiving extended coverage in this book are James Clifford, William James and Reinhold Niebuhr.

If you’re interested in what forces are behind the decline of “mainline” churches, this is the book to read. He uses “ecumenical” interchangeable with “mainline.” He explores cosmopolitanism-provincialism, motivation-warrant, communalism-dispersionism dualisms,

Hollinger likes the usefulness of the word “post,” as in post-Jewish, post-ethnic, post-Protestant, etc.,

in the sense of post-war (i.e. the impact of the war has not disappeared in the post-war period). Christianity, he states is less influential now than in 1500, 1700, and 1900. He is critical of Evangelical efforts to bring their efforts into politics and universities: “Universities should not surrender back to Christianity the ground they have won for a more independent, cosmopolitan life of the mind” (p. 198). Religious ideas should be subject to the same rules for discussion that apply to ideas about economy, race, gender, environment, etc., when brought into political discussions. (contra Congressman X who insists “I don’t leave my religion at the door,” or George Bush, you know what he said). “Absence of sustained, public scrutiny of religious ideas in our time has created a vacuum filled by easy God talk” (p. 205).

Hollinger underlines the dominance of mainline Protestantism in the mid-20th century and describes the causes and impact of its decline. He contrasts the “Christian Realism” of Reinhold Niebuhr with, among other things, the “Social Gospel” and pacifism that preceded it. His final chapter is devoted entirely to Niebuhr. “This epilogue offers an historical perspective on the career of the most acclaimed intellectual within a distinctive American Protestant generation: the generation that brought the tradition of Protestant liberalism to its greatest moments of public authority, and then presided over that tradition’s decline in relation to secular dispositions on the one hand and evangelical sensibilities on the other.”

It is a good résumé of the whole book.

Surprising Me — Lowell Larson

It wasn’t supposed to happen like this
Three score and ten was the Word
Or maybe if you’re strong (or lucky)
four. And here they are—Four and Ten,
surprising me.

Somehow it seems OK. In spite of loss,
disappointment and the exploding,
burning, melting, drowning of our world--
I feel an undeniable contentment,
surprising me.

Am I brain dead? Am I heartless?
There is awareness. There is sorrow.
There are gestures of compassion and,
dare I hope, as well, the peace of Christ,
surprising me?

I knew briefly as a young man the
composer who promised that God
who was there for my “borning cry”
will be there when I close my eyes,
surprising me.

— from *The Poetry of Aging*, Jean Lesher, General Editor

Beloved — Anne Hope

You have gone away again:
Lost to me in a life of throbbing energy
caught in a vision that consumes
your time, your mind, your heart.

I envy those pursuing with you
your demanding dream.
I watch you go, and know
I can no longer keep your pace
no longer gallop at your side
jump hedges or wade streams.

I feel alone, abandoned
desiring to be there,
desiring peace and quiet,
longing still to share
the joy of action,
sense of achievement
of a common goal.
Dreading the compulsion
to stretch beyond
my aging strength
or face mortality.

—from *Moments of Light*, a book of poetry by Anne dedicated to Sally Timmel.

“The Confrontation” in *The Compromise, a love story* — Eleanor Scott Meyers

His loud and seemingly inappropriate laughter confused them as their puzzled eyes met surreptitiously around the close-knit circle. A few whispered.....

“Why is he acting like this?”

“I don’t know.”

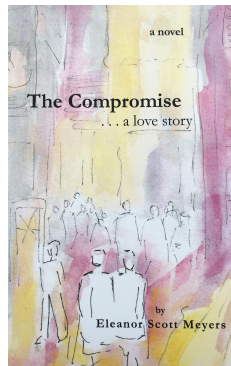
Everyone was there — friends, neighbors and family circling out, generation by generation, from the family matriarch — forming a random collection of small-town folks who had set aside their everyday tasks in order to be present. Women in the quilters group at the Methodist Church postponed their monthly morning tea. George, the respected conservative Republican mayor, left his son, Tom, in charge of the gas station for the first time. And Bev, Ruth’s hairdresser for more than twenty years, canceled her morning appointments. Life around town had ground to a halt.

Children could be seen chasing one another around the old cedar trees scattered over the cemetery knoll at the east edge of town. Those who knew this piece of land well were grateful for the morning breezes that had whisked away the odors from the region’s refinery. Those same breezes now bathed the early spring air with fresh moisture from the night.

Adults gathered in small groups under the trees, their new leaves heralding the change of season. They talked quietly about the warm, heavy air and their calculations regarding rain, the condition of the winter wheat in the fields, and the bond for the proposed new

Essex middle school on the upcoming ballot.

Except for those who had sensed something amiss, the small talk allowed many to disregard the bronzed casket set just above the fresh cut, dug into the dark Midwestern soil.



The brief service had ended; the time to depart had arrived. Yet a particular awkwardness continued to hold them, like surreptitious lovers not knowing how to walk away and return to their other well-ordered lives.

These folks made regular trips to the cemetery and knew the drill. They had anticipated conversation to halt as the minister opened his service book, read scripture, and said a prayer committing the loved one to the earth and back to God. They knew to stand around in a cordial and reverent manner, just a bit longer after the final “Amen.” They also expected the pastor to make his rounds, shake the hands of the close family members, and then quietly disappear.

All that they expected—but not this...

“My dad will not stay one more night under the same roof with that woman!” The son’s loose and edgy laughter now took the form of a startling outburst, his words tumbling out haphazardly over the gathering.

At first, there was a deathly silence. Then an elderly woman, standing just beyond the edge of the small group, felt some confusion around her and shrilled, “W-w-what did he say?”