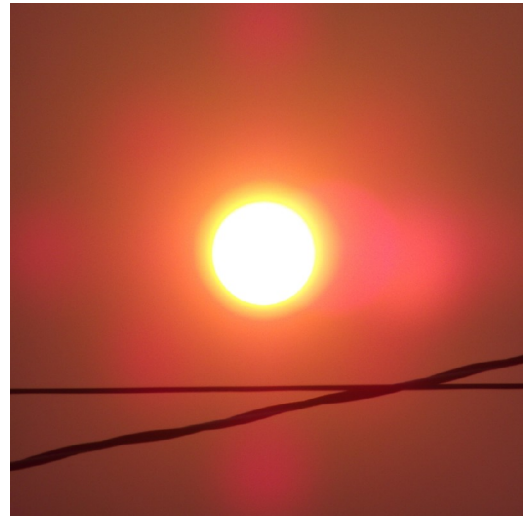


Greetings from the Burning Desert,

I sit myself before my computer to produce one of my very infrequent letters, infrequent not because of a lack of friendship, but due to a personal flaw in my communicative drive and also writing seems to be getting the short shift from me lately what with rebuilding the back porch, dealing with the smoke, wrestling with my diabetes trying to bring my blood sugar within the normal range with insulin once a day and my normal life of morning, therapeutic walks with Willy which includes my journal and photography from which recent entries and images grace these pages.

the image is the new Zia,
the morning sun seen through smoke



When moving here we considered what we thought were all the major geographical and environmental factors: basically no earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes or floods. We could handle the effects of climate change being at a higher elevation and next to the mountains with their cooling breezes and with seemingly endless prairie down wind of us to absorb any dust and environmental pollution which builds up in a bowl like Vegas, NV or even Santa Fe. We figured we could handle heat and drought after Nevada, though we were surprised by -20° F temperatures but handled it a lot better than the peach trees, but somehow I never thought of wildfire with all the time I spent in the woods of Wisconsin and California. We have been living with more or less constant smoke lately and it is hard.



doorway on Moreno st

On Sun 6/11 I wrote in my journal —

I declare it to be summer slightly in advance of the calendar, today I have seen a brood of ducklings in dark camouflage with mom heading downstream toward the sanctuary of the big pond cattails where the air is alive with the increase of the redwinged blackbirds and the swallows gathering breakfast; the summer flowers: sweet pea, red clover, chicory and narrow-leaved globemallow are in bloom, though due to the drought sparsely; the trees are in full leaf, with the locust finally in bloom. [Though, I saw the sweet peas in greater abundance than ever before, most likely because last year was the wettest I have experienced here.] Today the sky is clear and free of smoke. the humidity is gradually increasing with the anticipated formation of a flock of Georgia O'Keeffe's little sheep clouds around four o'clock.

On Thur 5/12 I wrote —

DRY! I cannot remember when it rained last, some time in the fall I think, there was a snow storm on Dec 17-18 that gave us measurable precipitation and another in early Feb, but that one was so cold and dry that it didn't melt but sublimated and blew away on the seemingly constant winds. That was the storm that was 20 degrees below zero, the coldest here in 40 years, that kept the plumbers non-stop busy for three weeks restoring all the busted pipes. We luckily had just replaced all our old rusty leaky iron pipes with new plastic PEX plumbing which froze in the poorly built inadequately heated enclosed back porch but it did not break, a little heat restored our water without Sal the plumber who used the same method to restore his own water supply. That storm left many small towns that got their power from Texas without power for up to a week in the worst cold in two generations, not here but a couple of blocks away a gas pipe broke under the street with the gas finding its way under the frozen soil until it reached the dry unfrozen soil under an old adobe, then up up until it reached a pilot light, BOOM, went the house awakening the man who escaped unscathed but with the loss of everything he owned. On May first the litany of our precipitations was concluded with a light snowfall giving us a trivial amount of moisture. We hope and pray for a normal monsoon season beginning July forth, our Fiestas.



garage on Moreno st june 21,2011

and then on Thur 6/23 I wrote —

SMOKE! It has been smoky for a month, with the new Pacheco fire northwest of Santa Fe we get smoke from the north, west and southwest (the Ariz Wallow fire burning since may 28th and at over 800 sq. miles soon to be the largest fire in that state) Yesterday was pretty good, seemed excellent, Willy and I did an extra long walk, but we left the windows open when we went to bed and awoke at 3am coughing, gasping for breath, throat raspy, eyes burning, we staggered around in the dark turning on the air purifiers, closing windows and *poofing*. [Poof or poofing is an onomatopoeic word first used by Kathryn—I've never heard anyone else use it—meaning to use an inhaler.]

...and so it has been, except now we have a new fire added to the mix, the large, fast moving Las Conchas Fire, soon to become the largest in New Mexican history and for added excitement it is burning toward Los Alamos and the national atomic energy laboratory where they fool around with atomic and hydrogen bombs, adding the possibility of radioactive smoke. All of this sort of makes me nostalgic for the Dark Ages, alchemy, even the Inquisition. That fire is already burning Bandelier National Monument's Frijoles Canyon, home to Pueblo people from 1150 to 1550 where Hans and I went last year, the year that fire destroyed the bridge on the historic Cumbres & Toltec RR on which Kristin, Kathryn and I rode the narrow gage rails the year before. I hope I don't see a trend here, I want no more historic sites I visit to burn the following year as the same trio plan a return to the Cumbres & Toltec RR but from Antonito, CO and then visit Las Golondrinas, an historic rancho just south of

Santa Fe, a completely restored living museum.

At home we have three air purifiers going pretty much constantly with the noisy one in reserve. I also overhauled the portable swamp cooler for those hot times in the afternoon with no cooling monsoon action like today. We keep a bucket under the shower and a bowl under the kitchen tap which collect water for the few plants we are saving, for it is forbidden to use drinking water outside. The city hauls reclaimed sewage water by tank truck to the parks and sells it to anyone for a very modest price thereby saving some lawns and flowers, all the pickups delivering wood in the fall now have non-potable water tanks in their beds. Everyone is conserving and the river keeps on dwindling. We've had a few minor showers but the monsoons are slow in getting started just when we desperately need them to put out these fires and relieve this drought.



fiestas 2008



fiestas 2009

The Forth of July Fiestas have concluded, but quietly due to the lack of those big monsoonal thunderstorms and the extreme fire danger forcing the cancellation the fire works both civic and the wide spread, month long personal fire works. Willy says that even drought brings some benefits. Neither Kathryn or I even made it to the celebration this year due to smoke, heat and disinterest.

We are great homebodies, seldom going out, a few musical evenings a year, a movie, a dinner at my Mom's or with some fiends. This year. I will go to the opera with with my sister Sally, while Kathryn will have dinner with us but declines Berg's Wozzack, she likes the music but objects to the story. Sally is here for a while, got a job and a room in Santa Fe and commutes here on weekends, where she stays with Mom as does my brother John who flits between here and Milwaukee and his family. To round out family, Sally's grand daughter Amalia and her boyfriend have moved here and already have jobs.

It is great being retired and having the time to read all those big novels put off in the past. When I first arrived here I reread Melville, Joyce, Lorca, books from my own library that I hadn't read in a while or hadn't read at all and local history, natural history and fiction. Later I gravitated to Iberian and Latin American authors such as Saramago, Vargas Llosa, Borgas, Roberto Bolaño and Neruda. Then at a used book sale (we have some really good ones) I picked up a copy of Günter Grass's To Far Afield and I was off to German lit. Now it is Proust! About 30 years ago while living in the town of Washington I visited North Beach, staying with Matsumoto I read some of Swann's Way and elsewhere in the novel and decided I would read the thing when I had more leisure. Now is that time. I've finished the forth volume, Sodom and Gomorrah of the new Penguin translation, unfortunately the final two volumes are not available in the US until 2018 due to an obscure copyright law. I'm not worried, the previous translation is available a the



fiestas 2010

university library here, currently I'm reading Balzac (the characters in Proust's novel were discussing his books) but I certainly won't read all 91 books, Balzac is no Proust.

On Thursday May 5th I wrote in my journal—

Last Sunday, May 1st the weather turned cold, into the 20's and we got our first bit of moisture since the cold spell in early Feb. I decided not to take my camera due to anticipated operator discomfort. When we reached the big pond amidst the snow covered cattails I saw a white heron, what looked like two black curlews and a small sandpiper. These were not the usual suspects! I had seen the sandpiper a couple of years ago and tentatively decided it was one of two species of Peeps, the heron was probably a Snowy Egret (he was hunched down with no neck or fluttery feathers showing), and poring over the book and a sighting at the LVNWR convinced me that I had seen two White Faced Ibis. On Tues I returned to find two Snowys hanging out with a pair of Mallards giving me ample photographic proof; then on wed I saw three Egrets and the little sandpiper of which I managed to get one good picture giving me a firm identification of not a Peep but a Solitary Sandpiper; the White Faced Ibis identification will stand because there is no other possibility.



Egret contemplating breakfast

5/6/2011

And on Tue 5/10 I wrote—

For the last three days no egrets, today c. 8:30 four egrets, three flew immediately, photos of the forth, probably the constant one who is used to me and Willy.



Ratty of the Gallinas

may 19, 2011

Over those 10 days on numerous occasions I saw from one to four Egrets (nesting somewhere on the LVNWR I understand) having breakfast, but nevermore.

This muskrat lives in the river Gallinas along which Willy and I walk most mornings. He always reminds me of the first book I fondly remember my father reading to me, though only faintly, *The Wind in the Willows*. I've always referred to Ratty in the masculine and alone as that is how I remember him from the book. Yesterday Kathryn took Willy for his walk and

reported that Ratty was a couple! Today, Sat 7/9, I went and discovered that Ratty was a whole family, possibly confined to that small pond by extreme low water. One of these days I am going to get that book and relive my childhood in the frozen north.

The frogs are so far not in evidence this year, the river is so low that this former pond is filled with cattails and other aquatic plants leaving little open water, I've not heard their amorous calls this year as in the past. Then again maybe the egrets ate them all.

And so it goes...



Froggies from the past *July 2008*

Long ago at the Tuxedo Bar, my local in Milwaukee, some nameless railbird opined that I was merely an observer of life not a participant, this same pontificator stated that it was an outrage that some took their life in hand to race their kayaks and canoes outside the of the breakwater in weather well of deserving storm warning. I had come in third that first year of racing. Years later Charles McCabe in a column in the San Francisco Chronicle on the monikers of North Beach mentioned that Kayak Peter had retired from his wild life of kayaking the Yukon to a life of quiet contemplation in North Beach. Several copies of the column were sent to me at the Sierra Club where I was cooking for the membership and cross country skiing the mountains. They should see me now in my little mud house in a somnambulant village, a ghost of its past vibrant violent cosmopolitan self. Not that mountain skiing and wilderness kayaking can't be contemplative, but this is the true contemplative life.

Well,
Willy and I
have to
hit the trail...



Ciao!