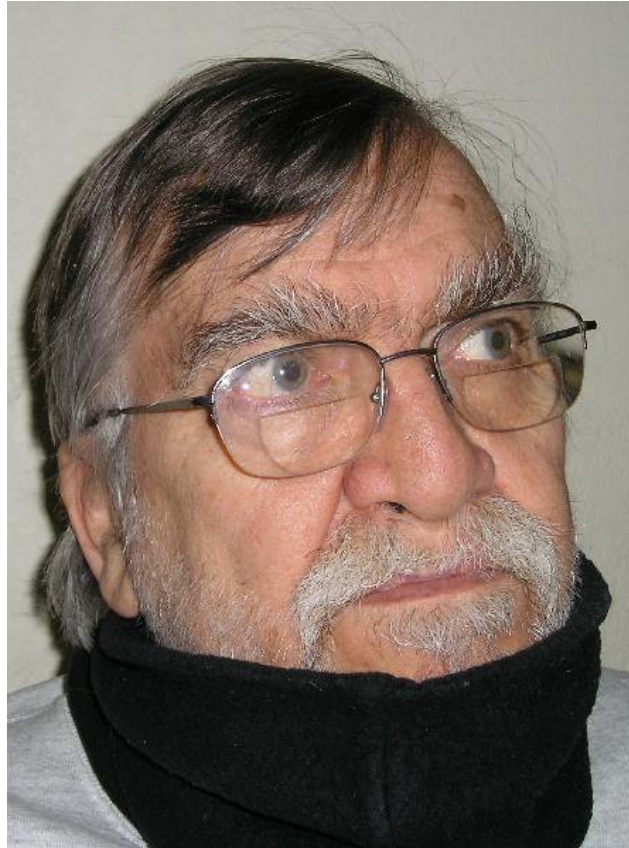


The Dreary Deer Lake Diary

Sunday, January 16, 2011 at 12:19pm



The author at less than top notch

Okay, so here's the thing. Deer Lake, Washington can be a weird place on the 13th day of the 13th month when Smokey (Nola's Italian greyhound) turns 16 and his more or less human friend turns 70. I'm tempted to say in the Y. O. T. A. D. U.¹ straight out of the book *Infinite Jest* that I was conned into reading by a friend as some kind of finite joke I suppose, an assignment on which I made slight progress during this period, but then it might be supposed that this product to which that year was dedicated had something to do with the aging writer of this tale – which it DOESN'T! It DOESN'T by God! But I suppose when one is attempting to be generic, it makes sense to use symbolic place holders for dates. So maybe 2011 should be called Y. O. T. F. C. B. D. to be avant guard about it. F is for 'F-ing' BTW, C is for 'cold', and the B and D should be obvious. I guess it should all be obvious – even though it isn't to me.

Anyway I wasn't feeling top notch, or even second notch for the whole trip, and Deer Lake is a weird place in which to not feel top notch. Whereas Hawaii is supposedly the only state in the

¹ In the book that I have only read 385 pages into of the more or less thousand page tome before I decided that since my life is not infinite I would stop, dates are labeled by products that were advertised or sold by a character in the book, such that Y. O. T. A. D. U. refers to the Year Of The Adult Depends Undergarment, etc..

grand union to never have experienced the degrading effects of a 100 degree F day, Deer Lake does – they get a month in a row of that kind of debilitating weather just three months after the lake finally thaws. (F is for Fahrenheit in this case BTW.) Last summer when we were there I made the drawing of Nola's herb garden overlooking the lake. The weather was nice.

Well, we were there this time at the antipode of debilitating heat. It was in the bottom decade of the Fahrenheit scale the evening we arrived. Kay and Nola ice skated for an hour or so over the several square mile pristine sheen of ice that is now Deer Lake, for which I have accommodated the readers imagination limitations by supplying a the photo below.

Wild turkeys pecked through crusted snow and ice behind the log house seeking sustenance. Then it snowed – not just a little mind you – a lot, covering the square miles of ice with a thick blanket of white that is also shown below.



Meanwhile, in addition to their pride in being 'off the grid', this little scion of the author's tribe chooses to up (well, actually *lower*) the bar set by Al Gore. The inside temperatures peak at around 64 in the daytime (upstairs) which is alright with a warm fleece, wool socks (which I don't own), hiking boots, and an overcoat, except that the hands tend to get a bit chilly and stiff if you don't rub them a lot and it's hard to turn the pages of *Infinite Jest* with mittens. (However, they do have electric lights, which is of immense help in reading.)



the sheen seen from the deck



Nola and her mother inside the log cabin gloating about something or other.



Nola's rock walls that has resulted in her being called the Rock Lady of Deer Lake.

...all this, of course, having been photographed at a much more pleasant time of year



The residents work steadfastly, which is probably an evolved trait in colder climes, although in spurts and a discombobulated asynchrony that makes time seem more like a baking powder biscuit than the normal syrup I'm used to having stream out of the bottle. Anyhow... it's Birthday for the Bobbsey twins – me and my Italian Greyhound first-born grandson who stumbles around in a blind haze at sweet sixteen. He seems disinterested in everything and everybody he bumps into anymore except for Nola, his one contact with what is left of tactile reality. I look at him and multiply it by the ubiquitous human vs. canine ratio of seven-to-one; it isn't pretty

In former days Smokey and I had been
Closest allies in assuring that he received
Good food from off the table during meals.
Now, of course, that is not possible.





**Smokey in the dim
haze of old age
that I dread**

So, for an entre for the birthday boy we have wild turkey (the bird, not the booze) for dinner. Below is the coveted wild turkey with the coveted drumsticks. It's got done hours before the entire gang can be assembled because ovens seem to work on the basis of continuous time rather than the baking powder biscuit model, which means that what should be savory ends up being very dry. Still... I'm hoping for one of the drumsticks or at least a part of one, but no... as soon as we sit down and while my sister is still saying a silent grace which I respect sufficiently to bow my head, my granddaughter has already preempted them both! Yeah, the drumsticks! Both of them! I look from one of her parents to the other. Nothing. No comment. I've already been accosted so many times in the last week for having said what I think, that I watch silently if a bit sullenly as she sits there across from me flaunting the spoils of pretty youth. I don't know why I kept silent this time, probably to endear me to the number one atheist angel in the firmament, she whom anyone should be pleased to obey, shown in all her glory below. Still, I'm not succeeding very well at that either.



It had not struck me as fair that my having told my sister that I did not need to hear every bloody detail of this or that and that if everyone spoke as long on matters that are at least as interesting... well, can you imagine? Wall-to-wall decibels 24 seven. Anyway, even though I was one of the birthday boys – albeit the vocal two-legged one – folks were just about satisfied with the number of words of wisdom this septuagenarian had already bestowed upon them and seemed to crave no more. And my granddaughter is a kid after all – nearly as tall as I am, but still. When a serial killer kills six but one of them happens to be a 'little girl', THEN he better watch out! What is it that makes everyone love kittens when so few of us love cats? Especially *tom* cats. I just ask; I don't want to start a ruckus or nuthin'.

My son had seemed to understand that although his telephoned birthday wish in the middle of dinner had been highly appreciated, it was essential that I get on with my life after a brief I'm-OK-You're-OK-even-on-my-birthday interaction. But he's no kid anymore either.



So... I'm in the middle of this Tylenol every four hours type murky headache stupor and coping in my way, but still keeping a watchful eye on the drumsticks, one of which has been virtually demolished by now and it is clear that my granddaughter's eyes have evidently been bigger, even if topologically different, than her stomach – as unlikely as that may seem. So I tentatively inquire with all the politeness of which I am capable as to whether the birthday boy who still has some teeth might get just a teeny bite of the remaining leg which is his favorite piece. That tentative exploration of the state of things seemed to go alright other than the scowls, but unfortunately the drumstick, like most of the overdone turkey was somewhere between turkey jerky and plain old alder wood sawdust.

Then, desert and the annual "Happy Birthday Dear Boris!" procedure. After that melodramatic melody, for which the requisite copyright fees went unpaid, and the blowing out of the symbolic seventy-candles-in-one that sat smack dab in the middle of the whipped cream aloft the wine Jell-O in the attractive goblet – and yes, I did get the flame out in one puff – I had a very pleasant

repast. Oh, there was a doggie bed shower present for our prospective new arrival and a well-conceived fleece for birthday boy.

We did play a few games including a couple of games of pinochle in which my son-in-law and I proceeded to get way out in front of our combined spouses only to blow huge leads and go down to miserable defeat. In one game we were up like 127 to minus 77 and with male chauvinistic dalliance allowed the 'girls' to beat us to 150. Jesus!

Then to bed in the basement. My god it was cold! So we preheat the covers and take our clothes off in a rapid exchange for jammies. Big mistake! God almighty! We hop into bed with involuntary convulsions of shivers that last a half hour. This is not symbolic for something else BTW, although I have no idea what the reader might take it to be symbolic for. It wasn't. It was just... Brrr!!! The way a wrathful god intended men and women to 'sleep' together.

Next morning we arise to find that the water pipes in the bathroom have frozen solid. Our son-in-law is already at work dispensing drugs so Nola helps get these pipes operational again using a hair dryer and says that if we hadn't shut the bathroom door, the pipes wouldn't have frozen. Say what? In other words their not freezing will depend on our providing sufficient body heat? But how has she become so skilled at thawing out the pipes if it's our fault?²

As the week rolls on, the excessive snow turns into freezing rain and then just plain rain throughout the icy plain as seen above and everything that was slippery is turned to super slick, the ruined ice skating from the snow is on its way to recovery, the entire lake is now a sheen of water on ice. Then a day or two later we wake up to an ice-restored lake. The sky is clear and we are on our way home. We have escaped.

I slept much of the way, Kay getting us the hell out of Dodge. We arrived home to a house whose heat has been turned down to preserve energy at a more traditional level while we were gone and it feels balmy, warmer than anything we have experienced since we left. It's like we've just arrived back on Maui where I want to die. And I remember again that poem I liked so much growing up in the Alaska that I hated, *The Cremation of Sam McGee*.

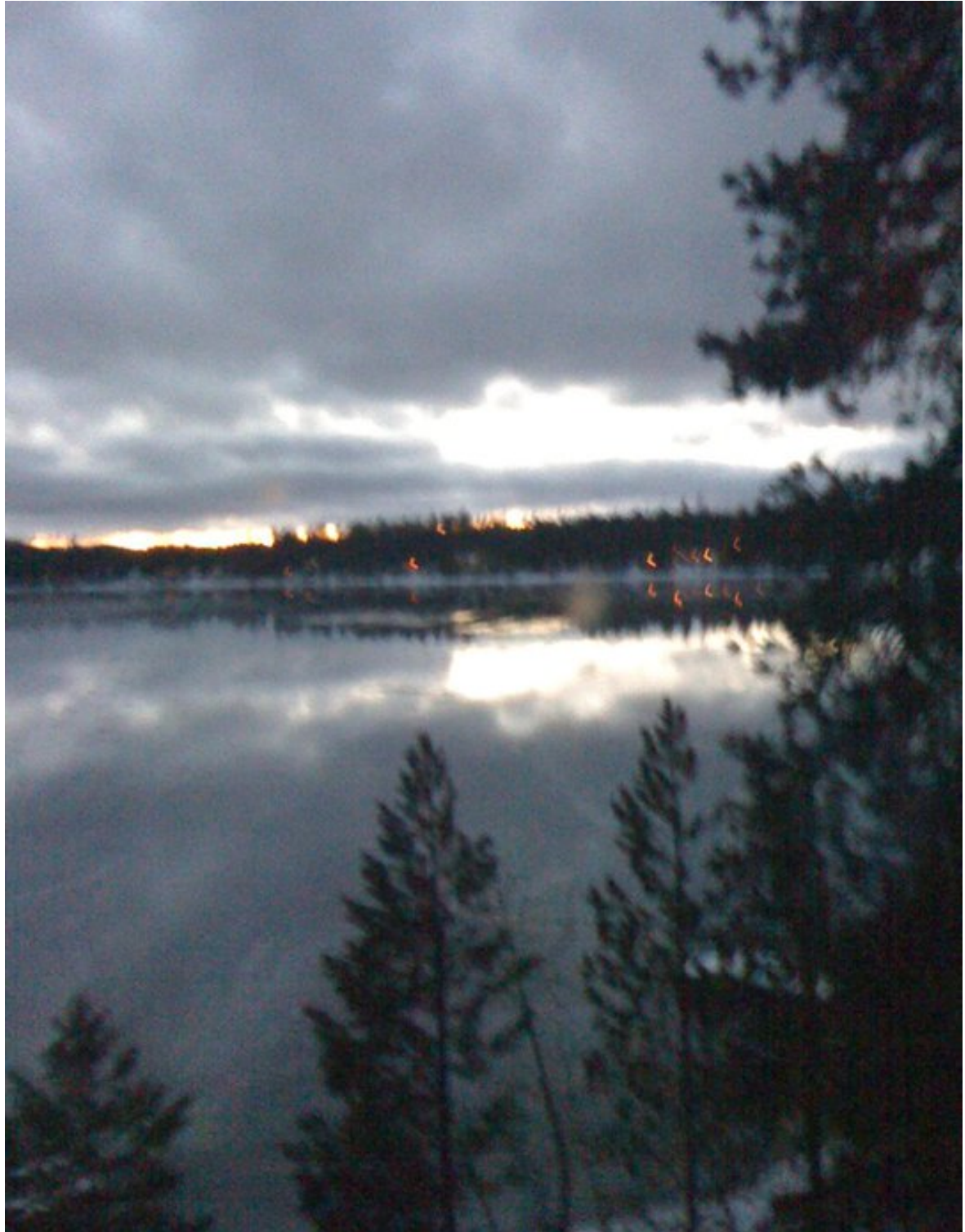
“He was always cold, but the land of gold
Seemed to draw him like a spell,
Though he'd often say in his homely way,
He'd rather live in Hell!”

Did I say I wasn't feeling very well on this trip?

Epilogue:

I mentioned that I would be getting a dog for my birthday. I love dogs and they like me. I guess that's the way it is with pets and women when you feed them – being casually liked in exchange for complete devotion.

² I guess honesty requires a slight explanation here. I apparently misunderstood – my hearing is going, or as my grandfather increasingly complained, “People talk like they have mush in their mouths anymore.” What was later explained to me is that it was the furnace (which I don't think runs at night) vent, *not* the bathroom door itself that must be left open in there. And yes, quite honestly, I do make a point of standing on the toilet seat to shut that damned vent when we first get there because cold air blowing down on my sickened bare head bothers me when I get up to go to the bathroom at night. So, yeah, it was I who screwed up.





Anyway, Kay had held off on letting me have a dog after we had had to put Buddy down. She said, they're messy around the house with the hair and inevitable drip or two – especially when they get upwards of 17. But still. So ever since I escaped the race track and the terror of believing that I would be gumming it out in a tack room down at Longacres tolerating Kay's penchant for race tracking until my eventual demise, I always thought it would be a nice touch to rescue a greyhound from just that fate. And to be honest I wasn't pushing too hard for another dog until I was seventy. I have wanted my last dog's lifetime to be synchronized to my own expected duration. I was now seventy and Kay had mellowed considerably over the years, so she consented. We signed the totally obnoxious promises required for rescuing a greyhound from the greyhound gestapo. They checked our fence. We qualified for making the donation!!! We got him – a champagne brindler about which an entire book of praise could be written. We named him Che for various reasons but didn't go quite so far as a last name of Quivara.



Che, a democratic dog, in repose