

Images & Expectations

Mid October and second summer provides a few more river trips before season's end. Shorter days are offset by the quality of autumn sunlight - can it even be put into words? Golden rays slant through fall forest colors. Crisp, frosty pre-dawn air followed by T-shirt warm basking afternoons. There is a certain quietness not found in summer.

The last kayak trip was July 1st; it was 100 degrees. Then the river level dropped too low to boat. I *thought* the next journey would be in spring.

October 1st and there are faint callings, come out - the river is rising. Listening. Watching. Feeling the timing come together. Now, let's go.

Returning to the day trips done in spring, meeting old friends at each riverbend: osprey, eagle, kingfisher, trout, water, trees, sun, wind. They are all the autumn versions of what I remember. Essentially the same. Also, different.

Paddling through the Kimberly orchards in spring, trees flowering preparing to fruit. Now they are quiet, dropping leaves preparing to rest and rejuvenate.

The current is slower, hardly noticeable. With less water the bones of the river are more pronounced. Submerged boulders are now formidable gateways. In tricky places, the current weaves an unreadable, twisting path. There is much dancing with, among, bumping up against and off rocks. In very shallow areas, there is also running aground with much pushing, prying and leveraging of paddle, boat, rock and current. Not the *image* I have of kayaking. Definitely the reality of October on this river.

I fell in love with kayaking on the Willamette River. There it took some effort to hit a rock. There was a lot of dodging ocean freighters, barges, tugs, jet skis and dragon boats.

Here, kayaking is as much about rocks as it is water. On two dozen trips this year, I've yet to see another boat.

In Portland I often got on the river 2 to 3 times per week year-round. Here it is once every week or two for a few months in spring and fall. This is kayaking, that is my image. That is what I expected. This is what is happening.

A move this big and different is a lovely opportunity to observe images and expectations in operation. It is a very different climate, culture, landscape, sky.

I moved out here to continue kayaking. It's not the kayaking I imagined.

I bought a house to settle in and commit to this community. Within a few weeks a large wildfire came within a few hundred feet of engulfing this entire side of town.

I expected the myriad firefighting resources to contain the blaze. Only an unusual downpour of rain put the fire out.

The deep, indigo starlit sky - Milky Way galaxy splashed through the center - neutralizes any image or expectation.

I expected difficulties fitting in within a rural, very conservative culture. Daily, people say how much they appreciate my being here. My next-door neighbor is a County Commissioner and one of the most conservative, self-proclaimed redneck Republicans in Eastern Oregon. We get along just fine.

Sometimes, it feels a little like whiplash: image and expectations pulls one way, reality leaning in the opposite direction. Like two competing forces of gravity.

These are not new or novel observations on the nature of images and expectations. Many philosophies, religions and spiritual traditions (including Taoism and Buddhism) explore how *thinking* about life is not really what is going on.

Much, or all, of our life can be focused on images and expectations and the resulting reactions when we bump up against reality. Kind of like floating on a river and running into rocks. Hmmm... curious.

When clearly seen in full operation, without trying or effort, images and expectations can subside - at least to the point of not interfering with the reality of the moment.

When that occurs, usually spontaneously, it feels a little like those slanting rays of sun, filtered through fall forest colors. There is a spark, a sparkle, a spaciousness to life that is inclusive, touching everything.

It happens easily and continuously everywhere: the Willamette Valley, the John Day Valley, Eastern Oregon, Western Oregon, city, rural, downtown, ranch.

I thought I'd be back in Portland in July, see clients/teach classes. Hmmm... it's now November.

I expected to drive to Bend once a month for groceries; haven't made it yet. Learning to shop at Chester's Thriftway, eat beef - first time in several decades. Wait a minute... eating beef is not the image I have of my *self*! It's tempting to resist... "but, I want Whole Foods, OG, vegan, raw, etc." The resistance doesn't seem as attractive anymore. Friends bring veggies, fresh caught salmon & elk. Letting go of the images, accepting reality.

I'm still sleeping outside, down to 20 degrees last week, several half-inch snowfalls. Little wind, though. This might be another expectation that bumps against reality soon.

I'm reminded of the story of Farmer Wu, who, whatever fortune arose - good or bad - responded with: *maybe, we'll see.*

It seems much easier to clearly see the nature of images and expectations minus any pronouns: I, my, me, mine.

This is *my* image of kayaking in a river.

I expected this to happen or not...

Without the gripping personal attachment, the clamping of self-identity onto, images and expectations are just that, only that. They seem to reduce in size a little, just enough that the brilliant clarity of the present moment's reality is obvious. No effort. No trying. Obvious.

I used to play piano at night, after work. Now I play first thing on rising, dawn spreading light, color, warmth across the valley. First snowfall blankets the valley white. A few deer finish the last crabapples. Two young bucks play push horns tai chi in the snowy backyard as music finds its own natural way.

That's the report from east of the mountains. The hay is baled and the cattle are in winter pasture. There's snow on Canyon, Aldrich and Strawberry mountains. The sun daily sinks a little lower on the horizon on the way to winter solstice.

The first year goji berry plants are mulched. There may be time to build a few raised garden beds.

The river levels are rising, the temperatures are dropping. There might be another pilgrimage to the river before Thanksgiving.

Maybe, we'll see.

Postscript to *Images & Expectations*

After finishing the Autumn newsletter, another river opportunity unfolds on Sunday; sunny, 60 degrees, river level rises another few inches. *No wind*. That rarely happens. Perfect.

Head for a section further downstream. Leave the kayak & gear at Spray. Drive with bike 14 miles to Service Creek to cycle back to Spray, get in kayak, paddle down to waiting Subaru. It's a full day, my version of a biathlon. Sun's out, warming up from 30 degrees. Jubilant.

Everything's in order. Take the bike off the rack... with a flat tire. Goathead horns. Tiny little seeds with razor sharp points. The nemesis of inner tube tires in this area.



Pause.

Many miles from nowhere, no chance to fix the flat. Can't walk back, not enough time. Drove 80 miles to get here. *I want to be on the river*. There's a small rapid right behind me, singing... singing...singing. Regroup.

OK, hitchhike. Catch a 15 minute ride back to Spray, allowed 2 hrs. to bike. Get there by noon, still can pull out by darkness. Maybe dark:30.

Walk a quarter mile to the intersection: highways 207 &19. Stand.

Wait.

Not a lot of Sunday traffic at 10 a.m.

Stand some more.

Wait some more.

Plenty of time for the inner smile to all internal organs.

Wonderful opportunity to embrace the tree, as well as sun, rocks, rolling hills and the constant river rapids song.

Practiced the line and swing dance steps learned at a gathering the previous night. Wouldn't *you* pick up a line dancing hitchhiker on the side of the road in the middle of nowhere? I *thought* it would be a good advertising strategy. The sound of passing cars accelerating as they come near is very distinct. Almost like the click of automatically locking doors.

Patience.

To the left, a black, fluffy caterpillar with an orange stripe around the middle begins slowly inching toward the highway. Takes 5 minutes to get to the edge, when a car comes around the corner and right over it.

Motionless, looks like it might have been squashed. A few minutes later caterpillar begins moving, makes an 180 degree turn and heads back for the river. Takes quite awhile. Guess we won't learn why the caterpillar crosses the road.

More time to smile. A few cars go my way; none slow down. Hitchhiking can be a great meditative practice. Noticing the resistance to constant rejection of self - the image standing on the side of the road. *Hey, I'm not a scruffy transient, I'm a **kayaker!*** The drivers don't seem to make a distinction.

Wanting to be somewhere else; patience with what is occurring in the moment. The persistent voicing of *I'd really rather be paddling on the river.*

To the right, fluffy, black caterpillar reappears and heads out toward the highway again, this time a few feet upstream. Hmm... 5 minutes to the edge. A few cars pass. 5 minutes to the centerline. A few more cars. 5 minutes to the other side. Hmm... curious. Maybe it is not about getting to the other side. Could be about where/how we decide to cross.



Two hours of meditative hitchhiking; time to surrender.

Drive back to kayak, who is wondering why she is going back on top of Subaru and not in the water. She is all about the water. Heading home, it's still early, trying to come up with Plan B. This lake, no, too far. That river, no.

Passing through Kimberly and the fossil beds, signs to hiking trails beckon. Every other trip through here there hasn't been time to stop. Today...there is time.

Hike a few trails. Nice views. Lovely rocks. Not like paddling, though. Pulling into the last trailhead, simple little 1/2 mile, probably not worth much. Go anyway.



Nice walk up an almost dry creek bed, occasional small pools with blue-green water, minerals from the rock formations.

At the end of the trail, the energy noticeably changes. Here is a natural amphitheater, maybe a few hundred feet across, enclosed by fluted blue-

green rock columns/towers, maybe a hundred feet high. Ahhh....

Two junipers flank a wooden bench, perfect for sitting meditation. The resonance of this place, connection to earth & sky vibrates the physical body like harp strings.



Sit.

Just sit.

It is so quiet, a curious voice wonders if I went deaf.

Hmmm....

Ahhhhh.....

Thank you fluffy, black caterpillar with an orange stripe. We *think* we are going off in one direction; if listening, a natural way appears that is much more nourishing of spirit.

Listen. Quietness that nourishes the spirit. Held in the womb of the earth, sky an embracing blanket above.

Filled with the energy of this place, levitating back to Subaru. At Dayville, another subtle calling, turn off along the South Fork to Izee. A couple hours of driving dirt roads through the mountains and along the river, dusk flowing into cold, crisp night with a bright half moon guide. Walking along the river edge, touching the headwaters. Yes.

On through Bear Valley to Seneca by starlight on the way home. Returning home. Always returning home.

Thank you for reading.

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