

A Story A Week

Volume 2

a collection of light stories
from
woodblock printmaker
David Bull

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A Story A Week

A Collection of Light Stories

Volume 2, July~December 2006

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Here is the second collection of stories from my A Story A Week website - everything that was posted for the site subscribers to read during the second half of 2006.

Since the website went online at the beginning of the year, I have been asked occasionally whether or not I will be able to come up with a continuous

If you have a reasonably sized monitor, the best way to read this eBook is to use the 'Facing Pages' function of your .pdf reader. In Adobe Acrobat, select: View > Page Layout > Facing.

This will put two pages side by side, as in a normal paper book, and when you use your Page Down key (or the keyboard arrows), the next spread will jump straight into view, with no distracting scrolling.

The font size should be clearly readable, but if it not suitable for you, Acrobat is easily able to enlarge/reduce the pages as you wish ...

allowed to become too complex.

And of course - most importantly - the result has to be interesting. I hope that at least some of the time, I have succeeded in this!

If you do enjoy the stories in this book, please consider becoming a Story A Week member! You will find information on the website at:

<http://astoryaweek.com>

David Bull
Tokyo, December 2006

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The Voice in my Pocket

I could trace my journey by the sounds ...

Story #27, July 2 2006

I'm not very good at taking notes. On those occasions when it is necessary to write down some details for reference, I sometimes try to make a few notes, but later when I am trying to read what I have written, I can understand almost nothing of what is on the paper.

It has always been like this for me; back when I was in school my notebooks were a scribbled jumble, and I still have a vivid memory of a teacher one day throwing a notebook of mine across the room in disgust because it was so illegible.

I sometimes have a chance to see other people's notebooks, for example when I am being interviewed, and look at them in admiration - clean pages with line after line of points, or numbers, or neat sentences. How can they do it? I have no idea!

I myself sometimes become a kind of 'reporter', when I visit somebody to gather information for a story for my *Hyakunin Issho* newsletter. I duly take along a notebook and pen, but when I get home and begin to write the story, the notebook tells me nothing. It is either completely empty - because I was so wrapped up in conversation that I wasn't able to write anything down - or it contains nothing but indecipherable chicken scratches.

It is because of this, that I have picked up the habit of keeping a small voice recorder in my pocket. In recent years these have become both very inexpensive, and very small, and I have become addicted to using mine! Just yesterday, while I was riding the train, I had an idea for my 'A Story a Week' series, so pulled out the recorder, spoke my reminder message into it, and then just slipped it back into my pocket. When I got home, I listened to the memo, remembered the topic, and am now writing the story ...

Last week though, I had a little experience with this recorder that I just have to share with you. The recorder was in my shirt pocket as usual, but it seems that when I left home to go out and do some errands on my bicycle, I must have bumped it when I was putting my jacket on, and somehow switched on the 'record' function, without realizing it. I went to the Post Office, and the supermarket, and then returned home. Sometime later I heard a 'beep' from my shirt pocket, and discovered what

I had done. I was about to erase the unwanted recording, but on a whim, switched it to 'play' mode, and set the recorder on the table to listen to what was on it.

What a surprise I got! It had been recording for over an hour, and I could trace my journey by listening to the sounds: the front door closing, getting onto my bicycle, the traffic when I crossed a nearby main street ... the whole journey was there 'on tape'.

So why was I surprised? Well, it's a bit embarrassing to admit this to you, but here and there on the recording, I heard a kind of running commentary on what was going on!

"At the post office, don't forget to mail that postcard for OO-san ... " ... "Hey, that's Akagawa-san's truck ... he's kind of late for work today ..." ... "OK, that's done, now what's next? ... Oh yeah, supermarket ..."

I had no idea that I was doing this ... talking with myself as I went about my daily business! Of course I knew that I was *thinking* these things, but didn't realize that they were actually *audible* too.

I think we have the idea that people who walk around town talking to themselves are kind of 'crazy'. I tell you, it's not like that! I'm completely normal ... honest!

My Green Air Conditioner

... by mid-summer my air-conditioner is ready

Story #28, July 9 2006

Here we are coming into hot summer - finally! I have written before about how my home doesn't have many 'modern conveniences'; I have neither heating system for winter, nor cooling system for summer. But although that is true - there are no such electrical appliances here - I do have an air conditioner ... of sorts!

My home faces south, and thus catches plenty of sun most days. In the middle of winter this building becomes a bit shaded by the one across the street, but in summer when the sun is high in the sky, nothing blocks the sunlight, and the room on the south side becomes very hot indeed. That is my sort of living room, and even when I open the windows to

let in a breeze, it is still very hot in there.

Because I don't want to live in a chilled environment such as we get from using an air conditioner, for the first couple of years I lived here I just put up with this; I didn't really see any alternative. But starting about three years ago, a very natural solution to the problem started to just 'grow' on me ...

There is a strip of land about one meter wide between the front of the house and the street. A maple tree that was there when I moved in died a few years ago; I think the soil is not so good, and it was also under constant attack from ants, who seemed to be using it as an aphid farm. After it was gone, other plants started to grow in its place, and among these was the one known as Bushkiller, or Sorrel Weed; the Japanese name is *Yabugarashi*.

Now any gardeners who hear that, instantly understand the situation I am faced with, and they know why I no longer have a problem with the south side of my home becoming too hot! This plant is a vine; it climbs ... and it climbs ... and it climbs some more! Each year, dozens of shoots spring up from the soil in May and start to stretch upwards. If they find a support, they climb straight up as far as they can, but even where there is no support, they manage to stick to the wall as they grow higher and higher.

The first year it showed up it became a huge tangled mess, and I had to slash it away bit by bit to be able to even get in and out through the slid-

ing door on that wall. But these days I am ready for it, and know what to do. When I see it start to sprout, I prepare a number of strings stretching from the second floor down into the garden area. The vines of course eagerly grab onto these, and follow the route I have planned. I trim away vines that don't follow the rest, and by mid-summer my natural air-conditioner curtain is in place, complete with a pathway to walk underneath!

It makes a tremendous difference in the temperature of the room; I of course keep the windows open for a breeze as well, and the combination of the two makes for a very comfortable environment.

I think though, that some of my neighbours may not be too happy about this. I did a bit of research on the internet about this plant, and found that it is listed on the 'Red Alert' page of a website devoted to 'Invasive Weeds' in the US. The description says that the name 'Bushkiller' came because it grows so aggressively that its weight can collapse the tree on which it climbs.

Hmm ... now I'm getting a bit nervous ... this house isn't all that strong, you know!

Musical Soirée

A comfortable place for a session of chamber music

Story #29, July 16 2006

One day last month I had a chance to attend a small private piano recital. One of the collectors of my work, an American woman who lives in Tokyo, had asked a British pianist to perform in her home, and had invited some of her friends and acquaintances to attend. I was happy to say ‘yes’ to her invitation, because it’s been more years than I can remember since I had a chance to attend a gathering like this.

When I myself was a young musician, I was for a time on the roster of a booking agency that promoted living-room concerts of this type. People who live in smaller communities around Canada don’t have much chance to see live music other than rock and roll bands, so are usually eager to play host to young classical musicians who are willing to travel to their towns to play.

Our concerts were sometimes held in community centers or church halls, but most often in somebody's living room. They would push back the furniture, bring in some rental chairs, and turn their home into a comfortable place for a session of chamber music. After each performance, we would have dinner with our hosts, and then the members of our group would be billeted for the night with local people, before getting into our car in the morning to move on to another town for the next concert.

I enjoyed doing this kind of concert very much, as it was the best possible combination: audiences that were always very eager to hear the music, and young performers who were just at the beginning of their careers, and full of enthusiasm for making music.

So this concert last month was quite interesting for me, as I have never had an opportunity to be on 'the other side' - to be part of the audience for an afternoon of music 'at home'. It was a bit different from the concerts I had given, because the pianist this time wasn't a young 'up-and-comer', but rather a more established performer in the middle of his career. Happily though, the performance wasn't the rigorously formal and highly polished sort of affair we usually associate with piano recitals in Japan, but was much more casual - no white tie and tails this time! This suited me fine, as these days we can hear 'perfect' recital performances anytime just by

popping a CD into our player, but what we miss is of course any sense of personal contact with the performer.

My brother, who is a professional musician making his living as a saxophone player in Germany, is convinced that recordings have 'killed' live music. Part of this is that because we have access to inexpensive recordings we no longer need to hire live musicians, but over and above this is the way that repeated exposure to those 'perfect' recordings has raised standards so high that to be a 'merely average' musician is no longer acceptable.

During the concert the other day, we could tell during the first number that the pianist was struggling a bit with an instrument that was strange to him, and a few wrong notes flashed by. But he soon settled down, as did we, and the afternoon passed very pleasantly.

I do have to admit to a little bit of daydreaming during the performance; I was trying to imagine what I would look like up at the front of the room with a flute in my hands, but I had to shake off such thoughts. After all, more than twenty years has now passed since I last opened my flute case ... and you had better believe that there would be more than a few wrong notes flashing by if I ever dared to try again!