

Island Pathways, March 2008

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Notes about living on an island, living our dreams,
surviving the storms, and finding the treasures
that wash ashore.

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unsubscribe in the subject line.

Just a reminder that our Spring 2009 Manuscript Camp will
be held April 30, May 1 and 2.

To see a description go to www.islandpath.com and click on
writing camp in the middle of the home page

We have only ONE room left at the Lightkeepers Guest House
Contact ruth@islandpath.com for details.

ISLAND PATHWAYS

In this issue:

*** Recession and Art

Quote of the month:

“Art is the desire of a man to express himself, to record the
reactions of his personality to the world he lives in.”

- Amy Lowell, US critic & poet (1874 - 1925)

“J.P Morgan, when asked what the stock market will do, replied,
It will fluctuate.”

“I merely took the energy it takes to pout and wrote some blues.”

- Duke Ellington

US jazz bandleader, musician, & songwriter (1899 - 1974)

Notes from Ken...

February is almost over. The Super Bowl, the Inauguration, and Groundhog Day are all behind us. Ruth's birthday was last weekend and mine is in a few days. Aquarius is sliding into Pisces. Can spring be far away?

This morning, as I write this in my school apartment in Virginia Beach, there are snow flurries outside. The weather report for Ocracoke calls for rain and possible frost tonight. I ponder the fact that summer goes by so fast and winter hangs on so long.

This summer will bring changes. I have stopped my full time work in medicine. I will finish my schooling as a massage therapist in mid-April. By the time the summer visitors arrive on the island in full force, I will be earning at least a part of my living in my new career.

Everyone all over the country is worried about the economy. Ocracoke wonders how great an impact the current situation will have on tourism. Will people still come to the island? Will they still spend their money when they are here?

In times like this we have the opportunity to re-evaluate our priorities. In the presence of hard economic times does one still take a family vacation? If so, where? What are the things that are most important?

The comedian Robin Williams said in one of his monologues that cocaine and pet horses were God's way of telling you that you have too much money. It is now easy to spend \$100 or more per month on mobile phones service. Satellite TV and internet access are required items in our budgets. What do we need? What do we value? How do we choose?

Spring will come. The cold will pass and winter will give way. The beach and the sun and the sand and the wind will still be here. The island and its special environment will still be here. Perhaps fewer people will vacation here this year; perhaps more will come because, for what it costs, Ocracoke is still a bargain.

None of the small businesses here will directly benefit from any federal bailouts. None of the local businesses have gotten so greedy or so out of touch with the consumers that they are billions of dollars in debt. We will just go on like we have in the past. Working to harvest what we can from the place we are. Like the old fishermen and the traders who settled this place, we take what we can and adjust what we have and need. We still retain a sense of humor.

Villagers still retain a sense of humor.

Art and Recession

Humans have always expressed creative energy. From the earliest cave paintings to the multiple expressions and medias of today, some deep force deep within us drives people to create interpretations of the beauty and mystery of life.

When survival comes into question, whether from drought, storm, recession or war, less attention is given to the arts. When survival is in the balance there is little energy left for beauty and insight. Tasks are reduced to the most practical needs, concentrating on the things required for the tribe or family or individual to persevere. It is easy to loose track of art.

Hard times are upon us. I don't need to remind you about job losses, foreclosures, and lost savings. The 24-hour news stations keep that in front of us every minute of everyday. Many in this country and the world are struggling to get by.

There have been hard times before and there will be good times again. I think back to an exhibit of paintings and sculpture I saw at the Canadian National Art Gallery last fall. It was an exhibit of the art of the Great Depression through the rise of fascism and into the Second World War. In the presence of the horror of those times artists created amazing works. This exhibit juxtaposed the "political" art of the fascist governments with the works of the "resistance". Both schools of art were emotional and powerful.

I once read that there are three kinds of art. The first is decorative and makes a place more attractive. An example of this is the paintings one finds in a hotels room. The second kind of art makes one remember an emotion from the one's past such as a movie or song that reminds us of the feelings of falling in love. The third kind of art makes us experience an emotion we have not felt before. Examples of this might be Michaelangelo's Pieta or the photo of the earth taken from the moon.

The first type of art makes us comfortable. It makes the place we are prettier. The second kind makes us warm in the knowing that others have felt the same way that we have. It reminds us of a moment, good or bad, that we share with others of our kind. The third type of art encourages us to move beyond our experiences and ourselves to examine perspectives we have not yet had.

In the presence of hard times we need art more than ever. Simple beauty, a glorious day, can remind us of the joy of being alive. I find the simple beauty of the environment means more to me now. While I wonder what the financial future will bring, the beach and the sea and the sky are just as beautiful as ever. The beauty of this day I am in distracts me from my worry about the future years away.

Woody Guthrie's songs of the depression remind me of the strength of the human spirit. Paintings and novels from the 30's and 40's and 50's remind me that here is beauty and joy in life in spite of the current events.

Workers do what they do to survive.

Artists do what they do to remind us of what it means to be alive.

We need both now.

Many blessings during these challenging times,

Ruth and Ken