



## SOME RAINY DAY THOUGHTS



Hopefully when you read this it will be a pleasant, at least partially sunny day. However as I write these words we have had two weeks of heavy rain at Starcross, accompanied by high winds, downed trees, power outages, and many other less than delightful conditions! Our cat Tigger looks out the window at the rain and then stares reproachfully at me. I think he believes that weather conditions are something humans turn on and off for some inexplicable reason.

Friends who live at a distance are almost always delighted when they hear we are experiencing heavy rains. Of course they are thinking about the serious lack of rain in the past few years and the negative effects of the California drought. However a series of rainy

days can leave a person quite gloomy. As one Buddhist friend remarks frequently, it is important to become comfortable with our uncomfortableness. She is right. So I thought it would be interesting to think of some important things that have happened to me or others in the rain.



I grew up and came to adulthood in western Oregon where rain was winter's default. I had a demanding law practice in Portland. Those were the days of Sen. Joseph McCarthy, the Vietnam War, egregious violations of human rights, and in my case, a concern for indigenous people. Our law firm represented labor unions, people accused of being Communists, etc. etc. It was a stressful time. But when there was a downpour it was often emotionally helpful. When I left the office or the courthouse and came in sight of my home, the rain was like a curtain closing on the drama of day. I really appreciated that.

Years later, I wrote about a day in Boston when I was visiting my children, David and Holly, who were in school there. This became a chapter in my book *A WINTER WALK*. It seemed to me that the isolation that one often feels in a big city was overcome by the rain. I especially remember one morning when I was riding on the T, Boston's underground subway system. College students had their heads in different books but the wetness of their hair and clothes was a kind of commonness between them. It was the same with the grade school kids dripping in the aisle and an old man trying to maneuver his umbrella through the door. I have a very strong memory of coming up to street level when I saw, framed in the exit, a pine tree with a drop of rain on every needle.



It is always comforting to read a few lines from Emily Dickinson (1830–1886),

A drop fell on the apple tree,  
Another on the roof;  
A half a dozen kissed the eaves,  
And made the gables laugh

A few went out to help the brook,  
That went to help the sea. . . .

Now let us spin around the planet —

The Japanese painter and poet Buson (1715–1783) wrote many haiku about rain. Perhaps his most famous is translated something like, *Spring rain / when the pond and the river / are one*. Buson is often thought of as simply a nature poet. But there was much more to this man who saw ordinary things from many different angles.



The Buson haiku that has haunted me for many years has just a few words, *Spring rain / ball on roof / being soaked*. There have been many different interpretations of that scene. Perhaps most people see this melancholy scene as having a happy ending because the child's colorful toy will burst forth like springtime. For me it has been quite the opposite.

We look out the window and see a cloth ball trapped in the gutter. Perhaps a child was throwing it up in the air but it ended up on the roof. The rain is merciless. I'm with those who see the ball as something put together from rags and from my experience of things trapped in the rain, I would expect that eventually the ball will fall apart.

I see all manufactured attempts at happiness reflected in that unraveling ball. The rain and other facets of nature will eventually destroy them.



Today people are becoming increasingly worried about children, and adults, who forsake the world of community and nature and live instead on digital devices, which attempt to transport us to another reality. So instead of Buson's colorful rag ball I can see some new device from Silicon Valley laying in that gutter getting soaked and destroyed by the spring rain. For true contentment we must look elsewhere.

There are an increasing number of expensive "retreats" to help people "unplug" from iPhones, iPads, and the like. And a few brave souls attempt to do this on their own. It's easier in my age group because we never really got the hang of this new technology. But for those who grew up in the digital cocoon, unplugging is much harder.



What happens if we lose our various rag balls? What are we left with for happiness? People and nature. And in both cases, there are rains and storms. Occasionally we must plunge into those wet and troubling times. Or at least we have to accept that there is a time for rain and a time for pleasant sunshine.

*Caught in a rainstorm  
the raven finds a high branch,  
folds his wings and waits.*

## ***BROTHER TOBY***

*\*The drawing at the top of this reflection is by our good friend and neighbor Dorothy Beebee © 2006*