

5TH ANNUAL WRITERS READ CELEBRATION

2023 Chosen Submissions

THEME:

HEMINGWAY AT THE BEACH

If Ernest Hemingway arrived on the
North Coast, what would he say?

Writers Read is the Cannon Beach Library's
annual celebration of local and regional authors
sharing their perspectives through writing

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WOOD

Some vacation. Who expected rain in June? They lay on their bed at the Gold Beach Motel. They twitched from the cool air splitting their bodies. They gazed at knotted paneling in place of sky.

Darn good thing they'd bought the myrtlewood chess set at the roadside stand. The man set it up on the bedspread and invited the woman to practice endgames.

Calm click of wood on wood.

Patter of rain on the other side of the ceiling.

The woman slid a pawn two spaces and said, "I have no idea what I'm doing."

"We played on our honeymoon, remember?" He took the pawn with his knight.

"No, darling, I don't."

"It was a plastic set. We couldn't afford the good stuff. We played on the bed just like this." He waved his hand. "Maybe this very same room."

The woman rolled onto her back, looked the ceiling over.

The man played with a deliberation that made the woman sigh. It was only a game, damn it, and the honey burls in the grain impelled the woman to touch the pieces and disturb assignments of rook and queen. She put the pieces on squares where they did not belong, and the man grumbled. She never gave his game a chance. He swept the pieces off the board and set it up fresh.

"Try again?"

Raindrops stuck to the cold window. In the grey light the pieces cast faint shadows across the board. When the man and woman were twenty, they had chased each other's long shadows on the golden sand.

She turned the yellow king between her thumb and forefinger.

"Pretty."

"They carve them on a lathe."

"I know."

"They call it myrtlewood, but where we live, it's a—"

"California bay, darling. Now what else do you have for me?"

"Don't ask unless you really want to know." He took the king from her, tumbled the pieces into the box, and pitter-pattered his fingers on the box like rain. She rubbed her fingers together, where the tallest chess piece used to be.

Myrtlewood's soft warm notes did not last long.

HW5

DEAD WEIGHT

She walks the edge of the tide, toeing the line between wet and dry. She walks barefoot, jeans rolled up, and the next wave climbs her shins. Her jeans stay dry. The tide slides back, and the slick wet sand looks like skin. It's a good time for picking up the rocks, pebbles small enough to pocket, stones large enough to weigh you down. She tosses them into the waves. All of them. Far as she can, she hucks them into obscurity. She hucks the rocks until her shoulder hurts.

Her husband won't drown himself today.

She looks up from her grim harvest. Her long vision isn't so good anymore, but far up the beach, a gray whale lies on the line between wet and dry. What else could be so large? It's the third gray this spring. She read somewhere that the noise from merchant ships confuses the whales to where they take this awful, hopeless turn. She will call the parks department and report the latest whale, but she won't be the only one. A whale draws a crowd.

She comes up to the whale. Its flanks are dry and still. Is it breathing? How do you tell? They say you're supposed to keep them wet to keep them alive. There is no one on the beach at this hour, but people will come. They always come.

Returning to the house, she hangs her coat on the hook. He is reading the paper. He doesn't look up. He says, "I'll just find another way to do it, you know"

"No, you won't. Your ideation is very consistent."

Then it occurs to her: she could sew shut the pockets of his clothes, his jeans, his coats, his ducking-hunting jacket, sewing shut all the pockets where you might cram a few rocks to sink yourself beneath the waves. She needs to get on it.

She says, "There's another whale on the beach. Quarter mile up toward the cape."

He processes the pain of this. Closes his eyes. Closes out the words on the newspaper page. She hates to see him like this, but it gives him purpose to care about something more helpless than himself.

"Shall I call it in?" she asks.

"No," he says, his eyes still closed. "I'll do it. Bring me the phone. Just bring it here. And get buckets. Get every bucket we have. There's probably already a crowd down there. God, if people touch it..."

She rummages buckets from the garage, from the cleaning closet, from the fishing boat. The buckets are noisy as drums, and she nests them angrily. It will be work. Her shoulder is already sore. She has pockets needs to sew shut. It will take all god damn day.

Tonight, the waves will expose new rocks, fat as grapefruit, tiny as almonds, rolling and tumbling them, muscular currents stirring up stones as easily as your spoon stirs sugar from the bottom of your tea. Waves strong enough to knock a whale dizzy. Her work starts fresh tomorrow, and it's exhausting. She hopes for a quiet night journey that leads everyone the right way, if only to where the morning light can receive them again. How much farther does anyone really know the way to go.

HW6

Papa at Cannon Beach

He was an old man who flew alone every summer on the beach near Haystack Rock and he had gone eighty four days now without lofting his kite. The first forty days a boy had been with him. But after forty days the boy's parents had told him that the old man was now definitely and finally "windless", which is the worst form of unlucky, and the boy had gone at their urging to assist a young woman who could fly two kites at once and raised them on the slightest breeze. It made the boy sad to see the old man at the end of each day with his kite grounded and his line slack and he always went down to help him coil the line and carry the kite, which was the old diamond kind and was threadbare and patched and looked like a flag of permanent defeat.

The old man was thin and gaunt, and his cargo shorts hung baggy and low on his hips. He went barefoot which was the old way while the young new fliers wore Tevas and Birkenstocks and even Crocs made from crude oil, which the old man found distasteful. "A man should feel the sand between his toes" he told the boy often, "or he cannot properly find the wind and raise his kite as high as it can go." There had been years when the old man seemed to fly his kite on a whisper of wind and the boy believed him about the bare feet and took off his sandals and hid them in the rocks while he helped the old man the with extra reels of line and warned him of running into the other fliers.

But those days had gone and now the old man had not lifted his kite from the ground for eighty-four days and so the advice about the bare feet seemed to lose all magic.

The sun fell low behind the big rock and the old man squinted his eyes toward the west, winding the last of his line slowly onto the spindle without knowing his hands were working. His kite lay still like a landed fish as he walked slowly to it, reeling the line as he had done since he first helped his father fly long ago. The boy watched him and believed he saw in his wrinkled face the many shapes and colors of kites he had flown over the years. He was old but undefeated.

"Sandy," the boy said to him as they walked slowly toward where the kite lay just above the line of surf, "I could fly with you again. Fraser gave me time off."

The old man had taught the boy to fly and the boy loved him.

"No," the old man said. "You're with a lucky flier. Stay with her."

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"But remember how you went eighty seven days without a single lift and then you flew three at once, two big box kites and a dragon with a tail as long as Haystack Rock is tall?"

"I remember," the old man said. "I know you did not leave me because you doubted."

"It was my parents who made me leave. They explained the situation to me very logically and patiently and we wrote a contract and signed it and so I am bound to not help you by my signature and the notary stamp on the paper."

"I know," the old man said. "It is quite normal."

"They haven't much faith."

"No," the old man said. "But we have, haven't we?"

"Yes," the boy said.

The rain fell on the old man. It was cold. He looked to the ocean. He looked for the sun. He saw only gray.

Finally, he asked himself “Why the hell did I ever leave Cuba?”

HW10

Papa’s Bindlestiff

The Beaches are filled with Poets
Solitary walkers wrapped in coastal mist
Carrying their sacks of pain on a bindlestiff
Made of driftwood and carved by beaver teeth

The poets have been beaten and bruised
Their minds wander back and forth in time and place
Searching for purpose between the surf
And the cold sinking sand

One of them saw war, death and duplicity
And the insides of a warm bar where his name was known
And downed a hundred scotch and sodas, or a simple
Throat warming, amber glass of Calvados.

Collected stories in stinking places
Peppered with shrapnel from exploding mortar shells
Suffered unrequited love and a broken heart
And turned it all into something understandable

Perhaps he lived in Paris and filled his notebooks
With stories of longing, futility and despair
Living large among the literati
Expatriates of the day

Perhaps he watched sharp horned bulls
With pendulous cajones run among
Macho men with red kerchiefs around their necks
All to honor San Fermín, the patron saint of Pamplona,

Perhaps this Poet traveled through Africa
And courted death in the Congo, Kenya and Rwanda
Perhaps he took the life of many magnificent creatures
That lived in the broad and golden grasslands of the African Savana

Perhaps this poet had profound regrets
Perhaps he let his bindle go
Perhaps this poet was Papa

HW11

Hemingway at the Beach

Flying up the coast from San Francisco is taking far too long for Hemingway. He is crammed in a small plane and impatient as hell. His two fishing buddies are asleep and snoring, ignoring the coastal landscape below.

“Will we ever get to Oregon? It seems like we are going to the end of the earth.”

The pilot's smile annoys Ernest.

"Those fish aren't going to wait. Can we land on the beach and charter a boat?"

"The North Oregon Coast is a long way. Be patient; we are almost there," the pilot says, cautiously avoiding a smile.

Soon, the small plane circles Seaside's landing strip. Touching down causes a "Finally" exclamation that wakes Hemingway's friends. They eagerly hop off the plane.

Nearly in unison, they shout, "It's freezing here. Unpack our jackets."

Ernest amuses, "Toughen up, guys; we're not in Key West or Havana anymore."

A Jeep pulls up, loads guys and gear, and drives away with little attention to pilot and plane.

"Before we head to our fishing charter," the driver announces, "I will backtrack a bit to show you one of the most beautiful beaches on the planet."

"Are the fish going to backtrack, too? Where in the hell are we going?"

"Cannon Beach! Trust me; it is worth it."

"It better not take too long and have a good bar."

The fishermen are unimpressed when the driver informs, "Lewis and Clark went over the ridge to the west to trade with the Indians"—it is merely a boring footnote in a good fishing story.

Time slows, everyone's crowded, and silence is a boiling pot of ugly emotions.

The driver finally says, “We are in Cannon Beach. Wait until you see it. You will agree that it is well worth a short side trip.”

The three fishermen hurriedly walk to the top of the dune and gaze at the beach.

“You’ve got to be kidding? Where are the piers and fishing boats?”

Ernest stands with hands on hips, “I’m not interested in surfing or kayaking! That is for those pretty boys who want tans and women. I’m not taking my shirt off to get sunburned!”

“Let’s get out of here,” one friend yells.

“Far too many tourists scare the fish away,” Hemingway murmurs. “I bet the locals don’t even own fishing poles.”

Another friend adds, “Let’s find a bar. This beach does nothing for me. It can’t get me to the fish—if there are any left.”

“Forget the bar. Grab some cold beer, head to the closest harbor, charter a fishing boat, get a cheap hotel, and find rare marlin steaks,” Hemingway says.

In disgust, Hemingway turns away from the beach, shaking his head, “No docks, no boats, no fish, and no fun—I can’t believe it.”

The driver, dismayed at their reaction, informs, “There are no marlin steaks to be had, only salmon or cod.”

“What the hell,” shouts Ernest, raising hands to the heavens, “What kind of place is this?”

Eel Grass

I met Hemingway at the beach. I didn't know him, but he appeared to know me. He walked beside me for a while. I had my walking stick in my right hand. I grabbed his arm with my left. I could feel the oily warmth of his wool sweater and he provided me with a nice wind break.

"You don't like me," he said.

"Why do you say that?" I asked

"You have my books all over your house, but you never read them?"

"I like your titles. They read like lines of a poem," I rattled off a few favorites,

" 'The Sun Also Rises,' 'For Whom the Bell Tolls', 'Islands in the Stream', I could go on. They are all beautiful," I said.

"Thank you, I think. I used to write quite a lot of poetry after I came back from the First War. War is revolting but it has inspired some powerful poetry," he said. "It kept me from losing my mind. War has made some very fine poets. I don't count myself among them."

"You know you should give me a chance. I can tell a good story." I looked up at him. He had a sort of half smile and was more charming than I expected him to be.

"So, you want to be a writer?"

"I do."

"Well, do you want some writing advice?"

"Advice from you?"

"Who better?"

I remember one of your quotes on writing where you said, "There is nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and bleed."

"I don't think I ever said that. I'm not that much of an ass."

"Well, it's been attributed to you."

"A lot of things have been attributed to me. I'm known as a drinker, for example, but I don't drink while I write. People think I must hold a pencil with one hand while I hold a drink in the other."

Hemingway stopped in front of me and turned to face me. He put his hands on my shoulders and dug his fingers in.

“Hold still,” he said.

I looked up at him and held utterly still.

I could feel his fingers fishing through my hair.

“Got it!” he said as he pulled a strand of eel grass from my hair.

“See this,” he held out the piece of seaweed between his thumb and fore finger. The wind tugged at the green strand. He let it go. “don’t know how you ended up with that in your hair, but it doesn’t belong. You see, that’s the secret to telling a good story. Get rid of the extraneous and keep it moving.”

“But I can’t write like you,” I said.

“Why do you want to?” You are not me. You have your own stories to tell and your own way of telling them. You just need to pull the seaweed out of your hair, brush the sand off your knees and head out into the wind.”

I looked up into deep set China blue eyes. His sun scarred face seemed unexpectantly merry.

I reached up and kissed him on the cheek. “Thank you, I said, and left him standing there.

I walked down the beach. A pink tinged light reflected off the wet sand. I saw clumps of wet eel grass at the wrack line. I thought of that one stray strand that landed in my hair. I looked back at the spot where we had parted ways, I expected to see him and wave in his direction but there was nobody there.

HW13

Nothing’s going to happen

They sat at the window, a pretty little table for two. The table was very small. He was anxious where to set his feet. The entire dining room seemed cramped and a little mean and yet at the same time, somehow elegant. He couldn’t complain about the view. They could see the ocean. He tried to catch her eye but she kept her face in profile, staring intently at the white caps breaking far out off the beach, towards the horizon.

So, what do you think, he said, toying with the display card of drinks on offer clamped into a flimsy metal tabletop menu holder. They've got some nice craft cocktails.

You pick, she said.

Two mojitos, he told the server.

Are you on to this again he said.

I'm facing reality, she replied.

Reality is what we have right now, he said.

But it could all vanish so quickly. They say it only takes 17 minutes.

Seventeen minutes, he said?

She turned to stare into his eyes. And that's if you're a fast runner.

He fiddled with his napkin, wishing he had a cig. What a bore no one smoked anymore, let alone inside beach cafes and bars.

I wonder what the pasta special is tonight, he mused. I heard they forage their own mushrooms.

All you think about is mushrooms, she said.

The server appeared to take their order.

There were no specials. She ordered a hamburger, he got the Ling cod.

You bury your head in the sand, she said when the server left their table. When it happens, it's not going to spare you, either.

He shrugged. Don't be a bitch, he said.

She returned her gaze to the ocean waters. I don't want to die here, she said.

He laughed.

What makes you think you're gonna die here, he said. You're relatively young. You've got your life, or at least half your life, ahead.

I've read those geology reports, she replied.

The drinks arrived. The recipe called for lime and sugar and mint leaves but it looked like the bartender substituted something else. She tasted her drink and it was good but it wasn't a mojito.

Want me to send these back, he asked after trying his drink.

She shook her head and took a deep sip. Don't bother. I prefer to talk about the matter at hand.

You think we should sell our house, get the hell out of here, he said. Worrying about something that might never happen.

Who says it's never going to happen, she said, defensively. They say it's overdue. Maybe by a few hundred years. It could happen anytime.

Well, if it hasn't happened yet, what makes you think it's going to happen now, he said. I think you're being silly. This is paradise.

Paradise you say! Our home washed away, everything we own destroyed, you're willing to risk that? We could die, you know. There's only one road out. The bridges will fail. There is no infrastructure.

I think you exaggerate, he said. Nothing's going to happen.

HW15

Castaway

I am told there are sturgeon in the river. White and green. And the rules for catching, keeping and releasing them are enough to drive a man to drink.

Which is not necessarily a bad thing.

Already I miss the marlin. That leaping, cerulean monarch of the sea who duels to the death and, in defeat, can take a boy who is strong enough to muscle it into a boat, and turn him into a man.

The sea, even when calm and serene is a wild, monstrous beast, easily provoked into seething fury by wind and currents stirred to life by forgotten storms thousands of miles away.

Today I find myself a castaway, thrown up as if by some unseen typhoon and stranded far from home on a Pacific Northwest beach.

If the sea dashes madly about, the beach merely yawns as it lolls in the sun on a cloudless day.

For unlike the sea, the beach is tame and passive as it slowly wastes away; its sand blown by the wind; its stones polished by the surf; its larger rocks and pools a home for urchins, starfish, and dark, translucent blennies that flit and flicker their way from one small crevice to another.

I dig toes into warm sand and dream of warmer, whiter beaches in Key West where finely-ground coral turns the sea into more shades of blue than a man might count in a lifetime.

Yet there is beauty here as well, although of a different kind.

Sea stacks and precipitous cliffs that shatter waves into water-diamonds sparkling like crown jewels, but only for a moment before they return to the gray monotones of the sea that spawned them.

Old-growth cedars, when they could still be found, hoary with age, unbent and unbroken until reduced to stumps by men wielding axes and saws.

Elk and Black Tailed deer, Bald Eagles and cormorants, picas and porcupines, Rock Fish and salmon, each a part of the once-wilderness that surrounds me.

And the Columbia. The second largest westward-flowing river in the world. Only the Congo is bigger.

As I lie on the beach, I pass through time like a grain of sand in an hourglass set to Pacific Standard Time.

Back home in Florida the marlin are not as big or as plentiful as they once were.

Perhaps it is the same with the sturgeon in the river.

But in one sense the sea is the same, for the horizon stretches just as far in both places.

HW16

**What May or May Not be Ernest Hemingway's Written Account
of his Son's Seventh Birthday Party in Seaview, Oregon,
Shortly before his Return to the Spanish Civil War in January 1938**

There is a cake on the table. Flat, square, blue as Moroccan tile. Oozing sweetness like sweat on a Kalahari afternoon. With seven frosted rosebuds the color of Martha's lips. She who kept me warm during the autumn nights we spent in the Sierra Nevada south of Granada as we covered the fascist advance against the Republic.

And the sound of diapered infants, like the high-pitched, screeching whine of lead passing overhead. Like the screams and mewling cries of Miguel as he lay dying in the dust at my feet.

And there is a donkey, too, without a tail. Like Pedro, who carried Miguel's body to Dilar where we buried him in the cemetery next to the church of Our Lady of Sorrows.

A piñata shaped like a bull with white cardboard horns is hung from the trellis above the patio. It is filled with toys, candy and coins like the giant paper burro that took seven hits with a heavy stick before it

broke during the siege of Madrid. The night Martha and I embraced one final time before I left Spain with a promise to return before the spring.

The bull is dashed from the trellis with a mighty swing by a boy who removes his blindfold and stands as proud and tall as a matador celebrating a kill in Pamplona.

Presents wrapped with colored paper and ribbon, torn open like wooden crates of carbines and ordinance supplied by the Soviets in support of Loyalist volunteers.

Children's smiles as wide as Diego's when he detonated the explosives that destroyed the railroad bridge at Segovia.

And laughter, happy laughter, unlike the riotous prattle of starving artists and expatriates drowning their sorrows in new wine at Les Deux Magots in St. Germaine. Innocent, mindless laughter of children that makes one long for the *camaraderie* of Les Deux Magots.

Cramped, oppressive clatter and chatter that drive a man mad if he cannot find a reasonably good excuse to flee. Yet tolerable with a glass of whiskey in one hand and a glass of rum in the other.

The cake, like tobacco, fit to be chewed but only with the intention of spitting it out without swallowing it.

Slap on the back.

"Happy Birthday, Son."

The beach house empties.

Life—if such can be called by that name—returns like a rainbow in the eye of a passing hurricane.

HW17

An Old Man Surfs

The old man should have stayed home and read a book or worked on replacing some loose planks in the upper deck. Instead Sandy grabbed his board and headed down to the beach.

"Maybe today," he muttered as he walked the few blocks to the surf. Then the sight and sound of the surf brought his thinking to a halt. Sandy set about waxing his board, pulled on his booties and hood and made his way down the rocky path to the beach. There was no one else in sight. No other surfers to acknowledge. This was Sandy's beach, his place. He'd claimed it over the years. He was out

here every day, no matter the season or weather. "You just have to be patient," he told his wife, Lilly. "Eventually the waves will come. They always do."

"Is that some sort of philosophy?" she asked, smiling. "A guide for living."

"It's not a bad one, you know," he replied. Sometimes Lilly would go with him to the beach and walk while he was in the surf. But not today.

It wasn't until he had made it out past the first set of breakers that he realized the waves were bigger than usual. There had been a heavy rain the night before. Sandy would wait for the manageable waves. Though none seemed to fit that description and he was anxious for a ride. That was the thing that brought him out here when all good sense said not to. It was the rush, the excitement. He wanted that, still. "Never too old," he told Lilly more than once.

"Keep telling yourself that." Lily laughed and so did Sandy.

But maybe he could manage this big roller surging toward him. He paddled into position and waited for it. "Here goes!" Sandy yelled, as he felt the force of the wave catch him up. He looked down the slope and tried to stay calm as the board slid down the peak. Then he was up and pulling hard to the left to get into the curl. For the next 30 seconds he was at one with the wave, the ocean, his life. Perfect. He turned out and began paddling back.

The tide was filling out, and with it came the larger swells. "Just one more," he told himself. And there it was. About thirty yards off, a major gonzo of a wave, rising up behind a set of smaller breaks. Sandy paddled into position, wondering if he should go for it. But, then, like all good days surfing, he forgot about thinking, and swung the board around.

He knew from the first moment that the wave was too big, steep as the side of a cliff. Sandy was looking straight down a slide of more than 20 feet. He clutched the rails in fear, forgetting all form,

hoping he could somehow slide through, ride the break like he'd done so many times before. But he also knew what a wipe-out felt like when it was coming. The wave was not going to let him ride, it was going to smash him down without pity, like a kid with a toy he no longer wanted. It was in that moment before he was driven down that Sandy relaxed. In that long second he felt released from all the darkness and disappointments of this life. He may have even smiled. Sandy was finally at peace. He was ready to let go.

HW21

The Passing Visitor

At his home in Ketchum, Idaho, on July 2, 1961, Ernest Hemmingway, the winner of the 1954 Noble Prize in Literature, used his favorite shotgun to kill himself. The macho sportsman, adventurer, and famed American writer was dead. His rough and tough life blown away by inner demons. This larger than life, feast of a man no longer would move about the far corners of the world. Except for one brief, forgotten episode of the Hemmingway legend.

In a small coastal town on the upper left edge of Oregon, folks who would never admit to sightings of Elvis tap a finger aside their nose and tell the tale of a hard drinking, gray bearded man who held court one afternoon in a local haunt. Some say they saw him for real. Others wonder.

It all began on a gray, misty July morning when a man wearing a brown tweed jacket over a red plaid shirt suddenly appeared on a bench in the town square. His gray flannel slacks ended atop a pair of brown loafers. His gray hair hung down to his shirt collar, and a short gray beard with a white mustache covered his face. After giving thought to where he was, he rose, shook himself with a shudder, and walked across the street toward a sign that said Driftwood Tavern. The bell on the church tower tolled out twelve.

I know this story for true. I was eating lunch inside the Driftwood when a large figure filled the doorway. A dark silhouette framed by afternoon light. He entered, took the empty, round table in the middle of the room, ordered a double

bourbon with water, and tossed it back in one large gulp. Then ordered another. His voice was loud and brusque.

“What place is this?” He suddenly said to no one in particular. “It seems a quaint little town. I do not like crowded places.” He took a large swig. “They are stifling. I like the open West. Wyoming, Montana, Spain, Africa. And Idaho. Does it rain here? Goddam, I hate to go out in the rain.” He was not a man to be rushed. He paused. Ordered another bourbon and water. He noticed the folks crowding in from the street. “What do you do here? You look like a bunch of old loggers and beatniks. I fish, hunt, travel, write. Also, I’m up early. I write best as the sun rises. My mind starts making sentences. I write them down as fast as I can to get rid of ‘em.” He gulped his drink. “Are you good people? Do you treat each other right?” He waited, then continued. “Writing is lonely work. Without loneliness, writing would suffer. Each day I face eternity alone. Friends cannot help me put the words to paper.” Slumping his bulky body, he looked down at broad hands holding a glass and muttered, “Writing is a terrible responsibility. You feel dead afterward.” Silence filled the room as he drained his glass. Then quietly, almost to himself, he said, “But no one knows you’re dead.” And with that he rose, stretched out his arms, and bid farewell.

The afternoon sky was dull gray. The summer sun glowed hazily behind the shroud. The strange man strolled west along Second Street toward the sea wall. Then down the steps onto the sand. Crossing the beach, he stopped a moment at water’s edge. A boy suddenly stepped from the mist, took the old man’s hand, and together they disappeared into the sea.

HW25

THE LIBRARY

The old man’s head bobbed several times as he sat behind the large wooden desk in the coastal town’s library. His arms were crossed, his breath shallow. The smell of the books had reminded him of an adventure, and he had returned to that place, which at times had seemed more real to him than even the most vivid memories of his youth.

A boy stood in front of the desk, glancing at the covers of several books as he waited in silence until the old man's eyes opened, and then he waited a bit more until he was sure the old man had returned.

"Do you have any books by an author named Hemingway?" the boy asked.

The old man shifted in his chair; his latest adventure gladly interrupted by someone with far fewer memories. "Yes, we do. Are you looking for any of Hemingway's books in particular?"

"I have a list of stories to choose from," the boy answered. "My grandfather said I could find them here."

"You have come to the right place."

The boy pulled out a piece of paper from his front pocket and handed the list to the old man.

"This is quite a list."

"I only have to read one of them," the boy said. "Then he promised to take me fishing. Have you read any of them?"

"I've read them all," the old man replied.

The boy had a surprised look. "Really? All of them?"

"All of them."

"You must read a lot."

"I read every day," the old man said. "Sometimes even more than one book."

"Is that why you work here, to get your books for free?"

"I volunteer here once a week, and the books are free for everyone to check out. Have you been to a library before?"

"Just the school's library, and I know the books are free, but I don't know anybody who reads every day."

"Is that right?"

The old man led the boy down several aisles where rows of shelves had been filled with books. Then he stopped at one of the shelves.

"This is where you will find Hemingway's adventures. Some of the stories on your list will be here, but some are not."

"Which one should I choose?"

The old man handed the list back to the boy. "Just pick a story from your list. They are all worth reading."

"Are there any short ones?"

"Some are shorter than others."

"Which is the shortest?"

"I have read them all, so for me one is not necessarily shorter than the other."

“What do you mean?”

“Memories of the stories I’ve read have nothing to do with the number of pages.”

“But some took longer to read.”

“Some took longer. But I enjoyed the long ones as much as the short ones.”

“And the short ones as much as the long ones?”

“Just as much.”

“I think I’ll like the shortest one the most.”

The old man smiled. “Would you like your fishing trip to be short, too?”

“What do you mean?” the boy asked.

“If you had to choose.”

“I would choose a longer fishing trip.”

“Are you sure?”

“I am sure.”

“What if during the longer fishing trip there was not even one bite, but during the shorter trip you caught your limit in the first few minutes? Would you still enjoy the longer trip more?”

The boy thought for a moment. Then he smiled. “I would enjoy them both.”

HW27

Salmon Prophet

We weren’t designed for
gray concrete raceways.

Our ancestors fought up
wild rivers 10,000 years

to emerald pools and giant trees
below snowy peaks.

Each fall they sent their strength
through us to the great ocean

keeping the circle alive.

Forget about plastic buckets,

red dyes, and barcodes.

No matter what anyone says,

or wants you to believe,

we are more than food.

HW28

Resilience

Some guys I fish with
in deep river canyons
tell me after putting down
their old labs

pain is so huge
and enduring,
“I will never get
another dog.”

Of course they do
when time is right
and silence
turns to song.

HW32

NORTH OREGON COAST DIARY

Ernest Hemingway

April 15

The wind is always blowing. You must resist it to survive. Once that's done, you can enjoy the beauty. But it will eventually wear you down.

April 18

I like pelicans. They see what they want and go for it. Folding their wings, they relinquish all control. Down they plummet until they crash into and pierce the water to reach their goal. I admire their total commitment.

April 19

A seal barked angrily at me today. I was looking down and didn't see her and her calf before she felt threatened. She hurled insults at me. I had it coming. I wasn't paying attention.

April 22

A disjointed crab skeleton rolled sloppily in under a wave. It perched right at my feet. Another reminder of the fate of all. It pissed me off! I double down on my intention to savor as much of life as I can, while I can.

April 25

I sat on a log of driftwood. A seagull, old and tattered, landed and sat at the other end. We considered each other for a time. I imagine he thought much the same of me. I nodded to him and he returned the gesture before flying away. Kindred spirits.

April 27

Down on the beach I saw a crowd gathered. I went over to check it out. A dead Killer Whale had washed up on the beach. A marine biologist and his swarm of students were busily dissecting it. "We have to learn as much as we can before the tide comes in to reclaim it." I watched as three increasingly

digested seals were pulled from its stomach. A stranger told me, "Don't go around to the other end. The stench is unbearable." Shit! Now I have to go over there. He was right! It all felt disrespectful. Like when a critic tries to dissect my psyche after a book is finished.

April 30

On the beach today were thousands of small creatures I've never seen before a few days ago. They are little more than a one inch circular platform with an upright triangular sail. They are vibrant indigo blue with no means of willful locomotion. Apparently they drift passively with the wind and currents. The first day I saw them, there were only a few in sight. The numbers have increased daily and now they cover the entire shoreline, dying and drying up. I find it disgusting! This is what happens to those who just drift through life. If you're not on the hunt, you're on the menu.

HW42

On First Seeing

We had travelled a long distance and I was tired. Then we came through the trees and closer to where we were going. That's when I knew that the long road over the mountain pass would forever stretch behind me like an occasional memory that leaps out of the unexpected. I wasn't prepared though for the gap in the trees or the surreal distance, near and yet so far away. A citadel. A citadel or giant rock that lifted itself into the heights. I was struck by the mass against the grayer than gray sky. We came closer and the hump of the hill proved to be the last barrier. I was finally here in a place I'd never been, and I was glad in a way that I hadn't been for too long.

We did not take the first turnoff through the trees into town. We went on. Past the second entrance until we reached the third. My companion informed me that this particular road would take us right to the edge of the water. He had assured me that winter is best for an introduction to the wild Pacific in this part of the world. The waves are highest, and the full fury of the ocean is palpable even on just seeing it.

We edged the jeep in the direction of the visible sea. A sign said Tolvana. It's an Indian name I'm told. So many of the places in North America are named for Indigenous people and that is its own honoring. My companion eased our jeep closer to the water and, without warning, the white crest of

peaking waves filled the horizon. My imagination took hold. In that moment, the waves became an invading army, the cresting peaks an entire battalion moving forward in a mostly straight line. This battalion was meant to take and capture the beach it was rushing toward. A battalion like I had seen in Spain. A battalion where I followed with an ambulance. The army now rushed ashore and broke ranks. They were followed by the next wave of soldiers behind them. They were intent on their mission and eager to win. Determination was always our motto. That day was no different.

My companion eased the jeep into position, close without becoming swamped by the rush coming at us. Something went silent inside of me. The sight ahead of the jeep became awash with memories of where I'd been and what I'd seen. The devastation of what it means to be human. Like a meditation, my mind quieted. I had no wish to speak or describe what I saw. But something impelled me to leave the calm inside the jeep and step out into the wind and the rain lashing the air. A cold chill ran beneath the wind. I knew then that I was encountering the spirit of something I'd only felt, had only guessed. I didn't need to understand, and I didn't need to explain. The rain, the wind, the ocean's tumult stilled what had been restless and unsettled inside of me. I stood in the elements as though I was standing in prayer. There was a reverence I would not know again until the day I gathered my thoughts to write *The Moveable Feast*. I will always remember that day.

HW45

A Dog's Tale

A dull, leaden sky mirrors the steel gray of the Pacific today. The beach doesn't welcome me in winter. Not like it does in summer when warm sand coats my toes and playful waves beckon. No, today cold white caps foam and chase me, reminding me that the Pacific still ebbs and flows and sometimes crashes, no matter the color of the sky.

I refuse to run from the waves. And because of my refusal, each of my feet now weighs twenty pounds as water soaks my jeans, fills my shoes, and freezes my toes. Oh God, where is the joy of the beach hiding in these winter months?

After a few sodden, weary steps I see a dog off to my left. Small. Shaggy. Of unknown breed, it runs hard and then takes an enormous leap right into the cold cruel waves. A second later, it emerges.

Grinning.

A dog's grin is a glorious sight. This dog grins with his whole body – face, paws and tail – as he races back to a woman standing away from the water's edge. And being a dog, he yips and yaps and wags his inner dialog in words that even I, a human, understand.

“MOM! WE'RE AT THE BEACH, MOM! THE BEACH, AND I WENT IN THE WATER. DID YOU SEE ME? DID YOU SEE ME? THROW THE BALL THIS TIME AND I'LL GO GET IT FOR YOU!”

The woman, his mom I assume, loads her Chuckit and throws. A neon yellow tennis ball arcs gracefully before it hits the surf and the dog races to own it before the waves can.

Soaked proud, grinning, he returns and to a shower of praises. And again, his words are easy to translate.

“MOM, YOU SAW ME, RIGHT? I GOT IT. I GOT IT. THROW IT AGAIN. THROW IT AGAIN.”

The ball is duly thrown and the wet pooch races back into the drink. This goes on for several minutes and the dog's unrestrained joy fails to diminish. Rather, his full-body grin grows bigger with each baptism and each soggy ball return.

I watch until my frozen toes remind me it's time to go. But as I turn to trudge back to my car, I believe the sky has lightened a bit. My feet feel lighter too though they remain water-logged. And I grumble and pray, “God, can't you give me some of the joy that dog has at being on the beach today.”

And then I stop. And I realize.

She just did.

HW46

12-Step Famous

They were famous in 12-step meetings across Tillamook County as Carla, the female human who identified as a male crow. Thus, the nonbinary pronoun.

They/them pronouns, no problem. Crow, weird but we thrive on weird. But Carla's shares were hard to take.

We suppressed our groans when they began to recount The Dream again. If you were 12-stepping in those days, you know The Dream I'm talking about.

*The crow formerly known as Carla wakes up and feels the wings on his back.
Crow's bones, long since sloughing marrow in human form, are now fully hollow.
Famished for roadkill, Crow, now covered with iridescent obsidian feathers,
soars into the dawn.*

That was it. Nothing else happened. Not a word ever changed in the telling of it. Obeying 12-step etiquette, none of us ever asked Carla whether they got bored dreaming this dream — night after night, always the same. We did not ask why they shared it in meeting after meeting, from Tillamook to Seaside, over and over.

Carla was ours, a fixture, always there, like that one chair with the broken leg newcomers invariably sat in. An exercise in tolerance. A topic of gossip during late night calls to our sponsors after the danger of using had passed.

What did Carla want from us? None of us, not even the most codependent, ever knew.

But when Carla stopped showing up during a stormy week in January, everybody noticed. Everybody wondered why.

I knew.

I often walk the beach, especially during storms. A storm on the Oregon coast puts everything into perspective, I always said.

Carla never said anything about it, but I often saw them at the beach during storms. I saw them running in front of the wind, as if they could beat it. I saw them spread their arms and leap, as if they could sprout dream-wings and fly.

Carla always fell hard, landing in a heap, another knot of dulse left behind by the tide.

I took care to tread sand upstage left if they crumbled downstage right. I slowed down or sped up if we happened to nearly cross paths on the trail through the dunes. We choreographed enough distance to preserve the illusion of not recognizing one another.

Until that January.

That storm brought the highest winds in five years. Power went down half an hour into it and there was nothing to do but head for the beach, to give our flesh to the ravenous elements.

I was not surprised to see Carla. They stood at the summit of the dunes, arms out, lime green jacket unzipped and flapping wildly.

I walked up the hill behind them, safe from notice. Close enough to see their chest expand and contract. Near enough to see them go up on their toes and then succumb to gravity, their legs barely catching them with each step.

I ran after, their urgency contagious. I almost lost sight of them in the stinging sideways rain.

Halfway to the shoreline, Carla stopped at a puddle of driftwood. Carla's jacket, attached only to their wrist now, snapped like a flag.

I was almost close enough to touch Carla when a fist of wind snatched the soul out of their chest along with a feral scream. Carla's body yielded to gravity as a crow the size of my thigh galloped away. Crow circled me, fighting the wind, laughing, and then it was gone.

A heap of dulse dressed in lime green nylon and brown Carhartts and black rubber boots flopped on the sand, unsure of what to do with arms and legs and a face.

I couldn't help. I ran away. It's what Carla would have wanted.

HW34

THE YOUNG BOY AND THE SEAGULL

The morning wind coming off the ocean was bracing. It was the northern tip of the Oregon coast. The sun was up and the chill was leaving with the fog.

It was then I saw him. A young boy, perhaps 8 or 9, but small for his age. He was kneeling down, tying something to the end of the line of his fishing pole. I assumed he was baiting his hook.

I walked up to observe his technique more closely. To my surprise, there was no hook. Instead he was tying a strip of tough bacon rind directly to the line. His head turned only slightly towards me as he noticed my presence, then went back to his work.

"You're not going to catch anything that way", I said.

"Not trying to catch anything", he responded. "I'm in it for the fight."

"Well, no fish is going to hold on to that very long."

He stood up and prepared to cast his line. "Who said anything about fish?" I'd only vaguely become aware of the gathering of seagulls in the air around us. The boy cast his line straight up into the air. One of the circling seagulls veered towards it and grabbed the bacon rind in its mouth and attempted to fly away. Then began the fight.

I've done a lot of deep sea fishing in my life, but I have seldom seen such a fight. The boy ran up and down the beach as the gull swooped and turned, causing the pole to bend wildly in various directions. The bacon rind broke and the gull flew away.

"Wow, that looked like fun!", I exclaimed.

"You a ranger?"

"No."

"Look there."

I saw a huge seagull larger than any I'd ever seen. It was almost a freak of nature, easily two or three times the size of a normal gull.

"I think I got his attention."

The lad then combed through his rinds and picked the toughest one, wrapping the line several times around the rind and finished with a double knot. Many gulls gathered in the air near us, attracted by the previous action. As the large gull neared, he cast and the monster grabbed it.

Then began the fight that made the previous contest tame by comparison. On and on it went with the boy running all around following the bird's aerobatics. He must have run 100 yards away from me and back several times, reeling him in and letting him drag the line out as the situation required. At one point the line reached the end and the boy jumped just as a gust of wind hit and the bird soared upward. The boy lifted off the ground and was carried through the air all the while pumping his legs, before landing at a run! On and on this went for 10 minutes or more, though it seemed like hours. Neither were willing to let go of their prize or lose the contest. I could tell both were tiring when the gull headed straight out to sea, dragging the boy into the water. Yet still his grip held. Just then, the line went limp and it was over.

We both gazed out to where the gull disappeared for what seemed an eternity. Suddenly the great gull rose into the air and we cheered. Our eyes met for the first time, mine looking like a child's and his like an adult that's seen more of life than most. I've met many people, most of them uninteresting, but this boy I remember.