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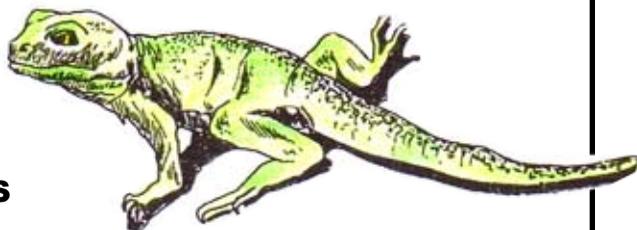
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Point Blank

“REPUGNANCE FOR THIS LIFE”

By CYNDY HODO

I'm staying at a friend's house near Park City, Utah. He recently purchased what can only be described as a mansion: seven bedrooms, two kitchens, a three car garage, a large moose head over the front door, an entire room just for a pool table, stunning views from all the large windows. Such homes are the norm here. What makes this one unique is its proximity to I-80. Here in this beautiful home we are intimate with the interstate. There are no sound absorbing walls or berms of earth. The vehicles flow by day and night, endless streams of cars and trucks traveling one of the great ribbons of asphalt that cross our nation. My friends call it "the river." I've not had any problems sleeping. After five years of living nomadically out of my pickup truck, the road is a part of me now; it seems to flow in my blood.

The oil from the Gulf spill has begun coming ashore onto the white beaches of the Alabama coast. I watch the newscast from Perdido Pass, where the oil is making its way up the Inland Waterway. The sand along Orange Beach is mottled with oil. As the reporter squats in the sand, in the background are the Phoenix Condominiums, Phoenix IV, Phoenix V, Phoenix VI, marching off in a line, behemoths sentinels who gobbled the shoreline years ago. These condominiums are where every July for the past 15 years we have had the Hodo Family Reunion.

Much of my life I've come to the Gulf for vacation. As a small child, playing in the cool white sand under the pier, racing with my brothers into the pale green waves; sunburns, I knew the smell of Coppertone and left sand in the sheets. Once, walking up the beach my brothers and I came upon a monkey in a cage, sitting among the dunes. I do not remember how it was there or who it belonged to; I only remember that, as I bent down to look at it, the monkey reached thru the bars of its cage and snatched my eyeglasses away. It tried them on, poked out the lenses, broke the frames in half and began chewing on them. I ran back to our vacation unit in tears crying, "Mom, MOM, the MONKEY ATE MY GLASSES!"

One spring at the University of Alabama, the week before finals, instead of studying, Robbie Yeager and I ran away. His old car would barely run. We slept in the dunes out past Pensacola Beach, waking in the morning to the waving of sea oats, the sun, the white sand and impossibly blue-green waters. Or I remember the time my brother Paul locked himself out of the car near Destin. My other brother and I jumped at any excuse to drive to the beach, to bring Paul his keys and sleep out in the dunes next to Spinnakers, where John Prine was playing that night.

There are so many of these memories, stretched out between Gulf Shores and Panama City Beach. Many, many of us have memories of the fun we have had along these beautiful beaches. I wonder now what will become of them; will there be any more good times at the beach? I think of the brown pelicans, the endangered Perdido Beach mice, the sea turtles, the sea oats, the jellyfish, the rays, the dolphins, the sharks, the shells, all the beautiful living creatures of the area. They are all endangered now.

I am sad to be human; there is repugnance for the life I am living in this culture, and now, every time I gas up, I feel remorse. I try to enjoy the wide loveliness of the relatively unspoiled west, the time I have spent traveling the back roads of Arizona, Utah, Wyoming. But the thrill has gone out of it for me. I see two mountain men re-enactors, riding horses and leading mules along a road near Jacob Lake, Arizona, and I want to be them. I do not want to be driving my sweet little pickup truck; I do not want to be weeping over the fate of the Perdido Beach mice.

Outside my bedroom window, I-80 is roaring, the unceasing river of traffic. There are so many of us in movement; where are we all going and why? The monkey has eaten our glasses and we are racing frantically toward nothingness. If I could trade my life for the life of the Gulf of Mexico, for the lives of the oil soaked brown pelicans, the dead fish, the Perdido Beach mice, I would do so gladly, without hesitation. But such a trade is not possible. I can only move forward with resolve to live with more integrity, to find a way of moving thru the remaining time I have in search of a way to be free from consuming oil.

I've heard it said by Native American wisdom keepers that oil is the blood of the earth. It does not want to be spilled, does not want to be burned for fuel. The consciousness that exists in oil (for yes, consciousness exists in everything!), that consciousness wishes to remain within the earth. We are paying the price now. Mother is bleeding. Oil is the Bernard Madoff of energy investments. Our long exciting national road trip has exacted a high price. The Gulf of Mexico was a precious place. "What we are witnessing is nothing less than an extinction level event." That's a line from some disaster movie about an asteroid hitting the earth. But we didn't need an asteroid. We did it ourselves.

Cyndy Hodo, Park City

