



I Don't Keep Hoardly Anything

Looking at the Hoard Mentality .

Every so often, when I'm doing Spring cleaning, or having guests over I want to impress, I look around and think: Hark! I might be mental. I think I'm a hoarder. I'm reorganizing and cleaning, and everywhere I have things that need a place to go, and then I ask myself, why do I have so many things? I know it is my lack mentality. I did without, and was always broke my whole life, and so now it's a habit to hang onto things just in case. Every time I had let go of something, I needed it later, and then I had to buy it, which cost more money that I needed for other things, which meant I would not have enough money to go around... So it's more a Lack Mentality than a Hoard Mentality. Maybe I need to light a match and set it all on fire in the back yard. Then I'd get a ticket because of the burn ban, and that would cost MORE MONEY. Grr.

I'm not at all suggesting that my clutter is indicative of any real mental illness. I regularly go through things and take it to thrift stores, sell on eBay, or simply throw it away. And in the recent past, I did get on a kick of collecting odd, funny or unique cigarette lighters. Got rid of those after a while. I only need ONE after all. And then I accidentally started collecting sunglasses. It was easy because I only bought them at the dollar store, so they aren't in any way interfering with my finances. And I like being able to choose among a collection of them depending on my needs and my mood. I still

have about 20 pairs. If I break them, or scratch the lenses, I simply throw them away. Innocuous enough.

But there are many people who seriously have a problem with hoarding things. It could be papers, movies, trinkets, clothes, shoes...or even animals. I knew two women who lived together for many years, and their house was a labyrinth of "stuff"—hundreds of video tapes stored in shelves that lined the walls ceiling to floor, stacks of papers with an inch of dust on them, dirt, grime, and 5 large dogs that ran the house. They always had a roach and flea issue that was out of control.

I think there is some inherent security in this Stuff-Mongering. And I can see how animals would be one of the hardest things to let go of, even when you have way too many of them. They are living and breathing and you have some kind of benefit from them in company, love, and affection and even entertainment. I am frequently entertained by my two cats. But I'm really clear that I don't need 20 of them. Even though I am fond of making jokes about myself in that regard—that I will probably end up that crazy old lady in the big house with all the cats. But I don't really believe it will come to that. Not really. I'm way too stable in my psychology.

Contrarily, I know of someone in Texas who has 7 dogs, 2 parrots, 9 cats, 2 pot belly pigs, 17 tropical fish, and 13 Pygmy goats. While she does not yet have a partridge in a pear tree, she does speak of wanting a Fennec Fox, and is also in the market for a monkey. She does not live on a farm. And they don't all live in her house. The goats are outside.

Now if this was a farm, I'd understand. But it's not. She doesn't milk the goats and they will not let her get near them. The parrots don't talk, but they do screech a lot, and she has to keep them separated so one won't snap off the toes of the other. (That happened twice already and the vet bill was staggering—as most of her vet bills are). The cats are not declawed because she believes that removing their claws is psychologically damaging to them—and thus, they destroy her furniture. She also doesn't have them spayed because that's also some kind of crime against nature. So her cat family continues to grow exponentially as one or two of them have kittens. She hasn't been able to eat at her kitchen table in years, because the cats like to lounge there and it's full of fur. The pot belly pigs have rooted holes in the carpeting under her bedroom door because they want to come in and sleep in the bed with her. But the cats get mad. So she makes the pigs stay outside the bedroom. Where they pee, because THEY are mad.

Her tropical fish require specialized water, tank and maintenance. The dogs sleep on the bed when they want, on the furniture, where they summarily dig holes, and often take a wizz on the furniture too, if they are "afraid" of guests, or "just marking their territory." She doesn't breed any of these animals to sell. They don't produce anything in return for her trouble. Yet, she insists she could not live without them, and that she understands them as they do her, and she has this symbiotic, spiritual relationship with all of them. An erstwhile Dr. Doolittle sans medication.

All these animals occupy a grand majority of her time, interfere with her life, her plans, her autonomy, and her relationships. They cost her shocking amounts of money, and not only does she shell it out, but talks of buying more land for the goats, building huge playhouses for the dogs and cats. She has to get up at 3 every morning to get all the care and feeding taken care of before she drives to the Post Office to deliver mail for the day. Once when she had to go out of town for a funeral, it cost her \$5000 to pay someone to take care of it all. Her neighbors call her home "The Ark." And I'm sure they're hoping for a heavy rain so she'll float away with her self-imposed zoo.

Forgive my bluntness, but this woman is mentally ill. Not even on the precipice of mental illness. She has leaped with no parachute into the crazy void. And she wasn't always that bad. It started small and then just continued over a period of years until it reached a point of complete and utter obsession and delusion. I believe it is the manifestation of a severe Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

Healthy people who feel such an affinity with animals usually just become veterinarians, or animal breeders, or they have animals that in some way pay for themselves as in chickens who lay eggs, Parrots that sell for \$500 to \$1000 each, Llamas who can be shorn and their coat sold for various other products to be made. Sometimes people who have lots of animals live on farms and the animals are part of that process, but aren't viewed as pets, except for the occasional dog or cat. This in no way describes those who collect animals for no apparent sensible reason.

These collections are just money pits. Fer godssake, get rid of all those animals and get a job at the zoo! I understand feeling a connection to a certain animal, but do you need to have 17 fish and 33 non-water-bound animals to remain connected?

Now, I feel a connection with dolphins somehow, but I'm not gonna build a big aqua park in my back yard and buy some dolphins to put in it. I'll just watch them on TV and say "Aren't they pretty?" And maybe one day I'll get to swim with one. But I won't try to collect the dolphins. I did that once, years ago—not with REAL dolphins, but dolphin trinkets. It started with one or two and then word got around that I "liked dolphins" and then every birthday, Christmas or freakin' Ground Hog day, I got another dolphin trinket. Then one day I was dusting that huge shelf of dolphin trinkets and I thought—why am I doing this? Why do I need all these? And it ended there. I sold some at a garage sale, and the rest I gave to thrift.

One of the pertinent questions to ask yourself, I believe, is Does this collection get in the way of actually living my life? Another question is, Do I USE this, or gain anything tangible from it, or just look at it? and another is, Do I have to spend extra money for space to store or keep these things?

In the case of those who tend to collect animals—notwithstanding those like Charles Darwin who are scientists, studying them—I think it must be some kind of coping mechanism gone awry—a live creature who loves you unconditionally, is sometimes easy to get addicted to, if you're needy that way. And pets don't demand that you look good, don't care if you're smart or a good conversationalist.

Pets don't care what you drive, what you wear, or if you're naked. Or crazy. They are happy to have food and water and a little affection. It's the simplest relationship to maintain. And also one that often leads to a degeneration in social skills and isolation.

I knew a woman who had several dogs, and several cats, and her house stank all the time of urine and feces, and there was always some present on the floor in the kitchen, and hair on the counters, and she could never go anywhere for any amount of time because she couldn't stay away that long. The piddle pads would be full, you see. And inevitably, they missed the piddle pad. Then her carpet was ruined. She'd burn incense when guests (rarely) would come by. She never had a second date with anyone after they came to her home, because they never wanted to come to her house again.

Having too many pets is a way, quite often, for people to avoid having any real human relationships. If this is the case, then there is the obvious question, Why are you afraid to have real human relationships? And maybe another question is, What gaping void in your psyche are you trying to fill? I believe that most if not all of these types of people have a history of abuse, or abandonment. So their solution is to stock their existence with many beings who will do neither.

There is paltry research on those who hoard herds, flocks, clutches, gaggles, and schools of animals. But it's an obvious problem when there are companies who can make a living cleaning up the chaos that is left behind when one of these people finally dies and is found amid the menagerie. Often, having been used as food by their beloved "pets."



Brain Dump: Mortality & Meaning

Okay, I know this is going to be less a blog, and more a journal entry, but whatever. Consider it the first in a series of brain dumps.

Onward...I usually try to see the bright side of things, and when I can't do that, I try to see the funny side. Anyone who reads this blog knows that. And often the dark side can be funny, if you know how to manipulate the data.

But this morning, I think my brain is in some other gear...PARK, maybe. It hits me like this every so often when it gets triggered by news from loved ones, or dreams I have.

I dreamed I had my ex girlfriend's parrots. Like they were mine or I had inherited them or something. Maybe in the dream she had died...I don't know...(and no, I don't wish any ill toward any of my ex's. They all tend to merge after a while anyway...E Pluribus unum.¹) But I was enjoying the parrots. I was always playing with the Cockatoo, named Sophee (that was her real name) but in the dream she wasn't crippled and her personality was more like Keegan's—the African Grey of the pair, who was talkative and personable. I was living in my father's house—have no idea why. A few days ago, I dreamed my father died, too...I'm sure all this came from finding out that another one of my ex girlfriends lost her mother. And once you hear that, there's this mortality bacteria in your brain...and it sort of

¹ *Latin for "out of many, one."

infiltrates your life for a while, until you get back into the bliss of ignoring all those harsh realities.

When I woke from all this, I lay there with Shoes curled up with half her body on my shoulder, purring softly. (Yeah, my cat. Women don't seem to purr well, okay, if I'm doing it right, they do.) For a long time I just laid there, and thought about things. Like you do when you're sleepy and just waking up and the brain starts to make that trip back to rational consciousness again.

I felt sad. Like why doesn't my ex, the one who lost her mother—why does she feel she can't be in my life somewhere? Why can't I be one of those friends to her that she seeks out during times like these, for support? Why does she continue to judge me by the person I was 10 years ago? And why does it still matter to me at all? Because she was the only woman I was ever so madly in love with? Because it was the only time I've ever had my heart ripped out of my chest and handed back to me as that person walks out of my life, while I hold my bloody thumping, dying heart in my own hands? Is that why? (Okay, that was graphic, but that's what the emotion surrounding it is like for me).

And I thought of how sad it is that I am alone so much. Is it mostly my choice, or is it just part and parcel of being an author-artist-songster-type person? Everything I do is something I do alone...And I stayed sad as my thoughts wandered to the two dreams of my father.

How tragic that I have a biological family who rejects me on the basis of who I am, (an oxymoron in and of itself) and that it somehow offends their sensibilities to the degree that they would abandon

their own child; and I thought maybe it wasn't their sensibilities. Maybe they were all just selfish, shallow people, and I can still feel good about my decision to remove all toxic people from my life. Maybe it's a blessing that I might never know when any of them die.

And I thought of my own mortality. I coughed. I thought for the umpteenth time, that I should quit smoking. It was the last thing left on this "take good care of yourself" train. Addiction to cigarettes is so hard to conquer. I've stopped smoking a large number of times, (yeah, quitting is easy: I've done it a bunch of times) and it was okay for a while, but then I would need that—what? comfort? is smoking really like having a Friend? And I know it makes my brain feel better. It's like I can't think clearly without cigarettes. A crazy excuse from an addicted smoker?

And then I thought about all the weird things that happen to your body as you get older, and how it's a little frightening. The older I get, the more frightened I become. I lament the lost years—wishing I'd known 20 years ago, what I know now. Wishing I had more time. Wishing, as I've mentioned before, that I really could live forever. (Ironic, since there have been so many times that I wished to die). So many things on the horizon, other than a mushroom cloud (if we're lucky). Things I'd like to see and experience...but as each birthday comes and goes, I find myself lying about my age more and more...and I get this dread in my gut...knowing I won't grow old gracefully. That I'll be kicking and screaming the whole way. Never mind all those big personal cosmology questions that arise about death and life and life after death. Just dealing with your own

declining vessel is enough to worry about...Like when you're driving a car that starts to have problems, and then there's a whole list of problems on its heels and you know at some point it won't be worth fixing and it should just be given over to the great junk heap. Is that my fate as well?

And will I face this progressing disintegration by myself, with no one to support me, care for me, love me? (I am so thankful for my best friend). Will I live out this timeline of mine without being able to give my heart to someone who deserves it? And why is it so hard for me to give my heart away? Why don't I fall in love easily? Why is it so rare for me to even be sparkin' on a woman? That's only happened a grand total of 2 times in...god...how many years? And the first spark was doused with water pretty quickly. Well, not water. Wine. The second one—I don't know about that. It's current. I have no idea what this woman feels toward me, and I'm too chicken to ask, so I'm focusing on the friendship, which is very important to me anyway.

But amid this, The same questions continue to arise. Will I never find my PERSON? Will I meet my ultimate demise without knowing what it feels like again to be so in love with woman that the thought of her not being there aches like a case of restless legs and angina, combined. After all I've done to evolve and become the type of person who would be considered a valuable discovery for some lovely, evolved, intelligent, and funny woman out there, will it not matter? Is fate just fate? How much control do we really have over how our lives go? And I wondered if maybe my high ideals and constant concern for the practice of sound ethics has gotten

me here. Is it just subterfuge? Does it really matter if I'm a quality person? Finding love seems to have almost nothing to do with how great a person you are. Rude awakening, that. Maybe I'm having a mid-life crisis.

So today I must try to coax myself back over into my concerted efforts to ignore these things that simmer on the burner at the back of my mind.

R. D. Laing, a British psychiatrist noted for his alternative approach to the treatment of schizophrenia, once said, "Life is a sexually transmitted disease and the mortality rate is one hundred percent." I wish I didn't resonate with that quote quite so much.



Coffee, Stupidity, Insanity & Germs

Amazing, how she can write so much about coffee and the mundane moments within her domestic trivia. Go ahead and say it now and get it over with. I know you want to... Domestica^{TM2} is one of my subjects, because I'm a domestic sort. Or domesticated. In my domicile, independent and cut off from the outside world. Except for the Internet, which IS the world, really, so ... notsamuch.

Anyhoo, moving on...My first sip of coffee today was too hot. I just burned the hair off my tongue. I hear you saying, "There is no hair on your tongue."

To which I respond, "Not Now!"

See, this happens frequently. You'd think I'd learn. The definition of stupidity is doing something the same way and expecting a different result...some say that's the definition of insanity, but I think it fits stupidity better. Insane people do much more interesting things, and sometimes I write about that too. But I don't consider myself either stupid or insane, so there has to be some other reason why I have burned my tongue on coffee more than once.

Masochism?

No. I don't like pain. I don't even like spankings when they're sexual. (Freak! stop hitting me! You're supposed to be trying to bring pleasure, fer chrissakes!!)

² Domestica (tm) is one of my past websites, which I intend to resurrect at some point in the near future.

So the best explanation I can come up with, is that I'm forgetful. I think I wrote a blog about that before, but...not sure. Note to self: take more Ginkgo Biloba.

I'm uncertain as to how this current burning happened though. Maybe it had something to do with the release of heat from my cup since I put it in the microwave, because I cleaned the skin off the inside of it (residue from yesterday), and then imagined all the germs one can get from swishing around a sponge on a stick, after it has been swishing all over everything else in the kitchen...I was reminded of that compelling and oddly disturbing commercial where the housewife (sorry, Domestic Engineer) was gleefully wiping down her kitchen with a raw hindquarter of a chicken. Point taken. (Who says we are immune to advertising?)

So I put the mug in the microwave, soon followed by the sponge-on-a-stick and the dishcloth... because I read on Web M.D. that nuking wet sponges and dishcloths in the microwave for two minutes, destroys almost every germ known to woman—99%, according to the study. So of course, I had to put the coffee cup in the microwave too, since it had been contaminated by the germy dish- sponge-on- a-handle-acting as-a-raw-chicken-leg.

I swear my coffee tastes a little different than normal. Less germy, maybe.

Still, my cup runneth over...into my mouth. Or onto the floor. I'm always spilling it...either way, time for refill. Or as I prefer to call it, another brain infusion.



Immortality or Something Like It

The concept of Eternal life (aside from the usual religious variety, and that of the usual vampire tale) is one fraught with profound implications. In the novel, *Steel Beach*, by one of my favorite authors, John Varley, these implications are explored in a unique way. After an Earth invasion, and the escape of survivors to the Moon, humankind again thrives, though they are now living on Luna, and their environment is provided inside high tech bubbles that maintain breathable air, and when they venture to the surface outside, they have to wear special space suits.

What if modern technology could provide us with instant medical cures and corporeal repairs? What if people could live 200 or 300 years, and almost everything could be fixed? What if you could have your gender changed as easily as you can go get a spa treatment? In *Steel Beach*, this gender switching, elongated lifespan, an Artificial Intelligence of a "Central Computer" that monitors everything and takes care of it, even on an individual basis, along with a government that provides for the needs of all its citizens, has resulted in a wave of depression and suicidal tendencies. These people find that there is no challenge, no sense of life as something tenuous and precious. The least creative of the bunch seem to suffer most, because they run out of things to be interested in, saddled with such a long lifespan.

Still, were those glitches somehow removed, I can say I would love the idea of living, without the aging process, a life of hundreds of years. I've always felt there is never enough time to do and be and investigate all that life is. I can always find something to be interested in and am sometimes depressed by the idea that I won't have enough time in one life to explore it all. It sort of pisses me off.

In the real world I live in, people who are okay with their lives, at peace with these things that don't exist for them except in some future incarnation, also seem to be those who have vivid memories of childhood. It's as if they are more aware of all the years they've lived.

But since I can recall only scant snapshots of my younger years, I wonder if there's some correlation between those who can remember their current past and those who can't. Those folks can really feel their accomplishments in a visceral way—watching children grow, seeing the results of their parenting, getting the gold watch, seeing their stocks pay off, getting a raise, having the house, the new car, the financial security, the deepening partnership with a mate...my only sense of accomplishment seems to rely on the next book I have in print, the song I write and record, the next picture I paint, sculpture I create...and without those trappings of "success" to go along with them, it's an exceedingly personal accomplishment, without a great deal of validation given by others—it would take major validation like having a mainstream publisher and contract, or having my art placed in a gallery (I've only done that once), or someone famous recording one of my songs, though I am not chasing that musical fame train

anymore. Why is validation important? I suspect it is because it helps engender a sense of PURPOSE.

Common among the usual variety of people in Varley's future world, is the statement: "I can't wait for a day when I can have a vacation, sleep in, stay up late, watch movies, socialize, rest, do what I want." That's MY LIFE EVERYDAY. So I am missing that purpose they get in day to day activities...they are missing that free time to do what they want, but I am missing the purpose. The grass is always greener syndrome.

Why can't just doing it for the sake of it be enough for me right now? Is it because life is so limited? Is it because I can't remember a lot of it? Or because I feel I've lost those years and will never have them back, because my body will change, and I will get older and feel the effects of aging, and not enjoy things as I used to? (I'm actually in better shape physically than I have been in the past). Where does this mortality fear come from? Why is it so hard for me to be peaceful in about the limited time I'm given?

In one of the original Twilight Zone stories, "Time Enough At Last" the author (who is, incidentally one of my relatives) writes about how the world as it was known, has pretty much ended, and there's one man left on Earth, with nothing to do but read.

Finally, he can just camp out at the huge libraries and read all those books he would have never had time to read before...

Then his glasses get broken. He can barely see without them.

So, our bodies betray us, and the Universe or God often seems to betray us, when all we want is to do what brings us joy; to just wallow in the Pursuit of Happiness. Is that too much to ask? Why do we have to trade something we don't want to trade to have it?