



John Moir

My Huckleberry Friend

Visited my mom at Twilight Manor this morning. She can't remember my name, although she knows I'm someone meaningful to her. I hold her hand, listen to her fragmented stories, tell her how Jeff made the all-star team. After a few minutes, I hear a tenor voice, singing from the hallway: *Moon river, wider than a mile, I'm crossing you in style*. It's Walter. An aide pushes his wheelchair into the sunroom where we're sitting with other residents. When he sees me, he smiles: *Two drifters, off to see the world*. Walter sings everywhere he goes, on his way to meals, when his catheter is drained, to my mom last week to celebrate her birthday. I tell him how one of the first albums I owned was Henry Mancini's *Moon River*. He hums the melody from *Baby Elephant Walk*, we laugh with delight. When I shake his hand goodbye, I say: *Wherever you're going, I'm going your way*. I hug my

mom again, tell her I'll be back tomorrow. As I walk away through that assembly of slumped and broken bodies, I still hear Walter singing into the teeth of the wind.

Beginner's Mind

I'm sitting on a garden bench while my six-month-old grandson crawls around on my lap. This morning Des has discovered how to flex my watchband and is uttering small murmurs of delight. I imitate his sounds back to him, and we observe how the second hand circles the clockface amid the shifting silver and pearl and dove-gray reflections. As I hold him, Des feels light, supple, buoyant. Soon he turns to the camellia bush next to us, touching and examining the leaves. Although I've walked past the camellia countless times, today I notice tiny serrations embroidering each leaf edge, see the burnished sheen of the leaves arcing toward the light. Des is unhurried in his investigation with no sense of time or obligation. When he gets hungry, he'll let me know. As I follow his explorations, I begin to recognize brief interludes where my adult perception of reality tilts to the side, the names of the things around me soften and fade, my watch or the camellia bush no longer need a label. In these moments, with Des in my arms, we are in a place filled with shapes and colors, alive with textures and movement, brimming with uncomplicated love.

The Giant Behemoth

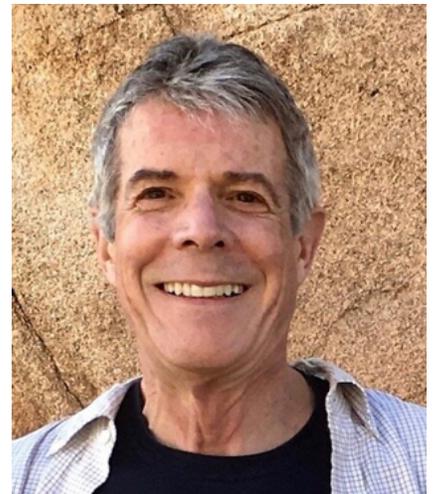
It rained on the day of Greg Margolis's 10th birthday party, which is how I ended up with a monster in my closet. Because of the wet weather, Greg's parents took a dozen of us to the movies. Greg picked a British horror film called *The Giant Behemoth* about a monster that threatens London by emitting lethal clouds of radioactivity. It was the late 1950s, and I had never seen a horror film before. Sitting on a red velvet chair in that darkened theater watching the rampaging behemoth terrified me. That night the rainstorm intensified, and I lay in bed imagining the monster lurking in my closet, radiation curling under the door. The nightmares lasted for days. Because of that movie, I've always avoided horror films. But recently, I was intrigued to find *The Giant Behemoth* online. What would it be like to watch it now? What I found was a low-budget, black-and-white effort with cheesy stop-action effects featuring a rubber monster model. It was not scary, just bad. In one part, the film shows ominous scenes of the river Thames from which the monster emerges. I recognized that dark river from my own life. For decades, I've had my own personal underground waterway of worry that flows through my thoughts and from which monsters can materialize. It dawned on me that more often than not, my self-created behemoths turn out to be mere rubber puppets and all that's in my closet are freshly washed shirts and several pairs of shoes in a tidy row.

Taking a Stand

I ascend the bell tower's spiraling stairs, open the wooden door. The belfry smells of copper and age. I gaze across the sleeping landscape, breathe in the quiet. Here in this place the time is always now. I feel safe and protected. I have decided what must be done. No one else can ring this bell. With the rope rough on my palms, I pull with all my heart, I pull with all my memory. The liquid sound floods outward, twisting and writhing into the world with its unmistakable message. The tones fade and fade and fade to an unsteady silence. There is no turning back. What will happen next is out of my control. I don't know what the cost will be. But in this moment, the fetters are broken, the mask removed. I am naked, but I am free. I wait.

John Moir

All my life I've been attracted to contemplative and meditative practices. Early on, long distance running was my first mindfulness teacher. It not only made me feel good but calmed and steadied my thoughts. Later, yoga introduced me to a more structured and intentional approach to mindfulness, and it's a practice I have continued for more than 30 years. But the



contemplative practice that has been most significant for me is Vipassana meditation. I am deeply grateful for our community at the Insight Santa Cruz meditation center as well as my other teachers who have made such a difference in my life.

John Moir has written for the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Smithsonian*, *Audubon*, *Catamaran Literary Reader*, and numerous other publications. He is author of two books, including *Return of the Condor: The Race to Save Our Largest Bird From Extinction*. John has also contributed to four anthologies and has received more than two dozen writing awards. These poems are part of a larger project called *Shards of Memory*.

More on John Moir's work can be found on our Links page (</links1#John-Moir>).

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