Searching for Peace
The Strange Adventures of Biff and the Fox
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About the Search for Peace

About the Author

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About Searching for Peace

I started posting the Searching for Peace blogs in December 2014 and into March 2015. All two people who read my blog were astounded by the sheer absurdity of the posts and read them only so they could laugh at me. But that’s OK, I laugh at myself and the blog posts gave three people a reason to laugh.

By the time March rolled around Biff and the Fox still hadn’t found peace, though they’d almost come close somewhere in their minds. So, this is an unfinished story, serialized over several months. Boy…my two readers were pissed.

They said, unison, “We hate you, Biff, for doing this. There’s no ending. Where’s the ending? It’s like losing power just before the end of a mystery movie or missing the last five minutes of a Leafs game when they’re up 5 points and still manage to lose. We want to see how they do that. We want to see how Biff and the Fox either find peace or don’t find peace. Where’s the ending, Biff, where?”

All I can think of is this: Successful or not, if the search for peace ever ends, we’re screwed.
Searching for Peace

Yesterday morning, I woke up and decided it was time to search for peace. It had to be somewhere. I started in the kitchen, looking inside jars and bottles, under the table, in the cabinets and down the drain. I didn’t find peace, but I found some leftover pizza. Yum. I went to the backyard and looked through the grass, in the spaces between fence boards, under the steps, inside the lawnmower’s gas tank, in a deserted robin’s nest and under the eaves. Where was this stubborn thing called peace? I went through the house, stopping to look inside the umbrella holder, and into the street, looking inside garbage cans, on the sunny side of telephone poles, between the lines of advertisements on passing buses and trucks and in the sound of a dog barking from somebody’s basement. Where are you peace? Come out! Come out! I walked into the city, checking freeways and ditches along the way, and a pond in a small plot of farmland trapped between housing developments and a mall. In the city I checked out two blocks of sewer and questioned a family of rats who suggested I Google it. Which I did. Lots of confusion, but no peace. I took the elevator up to the top of the tallest building and climbed to the top of the spire and though the view was impressive, I couldn’t see peace anywhere…not in the banking district in the threads of thousand dollar suits and imported high heels, not in the cardboard beds in the slums, not in the exhaust of an eternity of cars, buses and trucks, not in a sliver of light on a mountain top about a thousand miles away. So I went to the ocean and looked under seashells and into the eyes of sharks and cod and things so deep in the ocean they lived on the absence of light and none of them could tell me where peace was. I walked into the middle of a battlefield carrying a white flag and spent a horrifying hour ducking bullets and shrapnel and I asked one of those passing bullets where peace was and it said, “Ask the guy who’s trying to kill you.” So I asked him and he said, “Go to that place where they have all those poppies on graves. Now…before I kill you.” So I went to Flanders Fields and yelled, “WHERE CAN I FIND PEACE?” About a thousand voices whispered, “We fought for it, but this was the only peace we found. Good luck.” So I went to a farm. I mean, where else? But the farm turned out to be thousands of cows in cages with tubes embedded in their bodies and they said as one, “As long as you can find us, you’ll never find peace.” But this wasn’t going to stop my search for peace…no matter how true their voice was. Peace had to be somewhere, ready to come forth and be seen. WHERE THE FUCK ARE YOU PEACE? Just on a hunch, I checked under my fingernails. Nope. So I went into the jungle where I’ve been writing a poem about for about two years and it was just as scary as the poem so far…where everything is food to something else and I asked this presence with “fur-lined mandibles thrashing in the hot monoxide air covering the jungle’s plastic-littered hide as hooded shadows with earphones and guns glided over clenched fronds and mushrooms with poisonous colors” and it said, “C’mon, man, look at these shadows. You won’t find peace here.” But I knew it was there somewhere. It had to be. It was a word. It existed. But where? I jumped up into a cloud and talked to a goose heading south. We had a great conversation about all its friends who’d been shot out of the air while flying away from the cold. “My friend,” said the goose, “you’ll have to look deeper than the surface.” And it flew
away. Yeah…needed that. I mean, I just looked under my finger nails. Where is this thing called peace? I jumped clouds for a while, looking for peace in contaminated water droplets but found only another reason to use my bike more often. So I jumped onto a train rumbling through a lonely stretch of prairie and asked fields of wheat if they knew where peace was but they just rustled in the wind waiting to become bread. I talked to a prairie dog and really wasn’t satisfied with anything it said, stuff about underground tunnels being the way to go because there was lots of peace down there and I don’t think he quite got it. But I checked it out anyway. It was dark and peaceful, but really confining, and the peace I was looking for wasn’t anywhere to be found. Even if I could have seen it in all that darkness. I thought, maybe I’m doing this all wrong. Maybe I shouldn’t be looking for peace…maybe I should just wait for peace to come to me. So I went to that sliver of light on the mountain top and waited for peace. It was cold, but the view was nice. I waited a long time, about a hundred years while war after war raged all around the beautiful view from the mountain top. It raged in ruined cities, scorched farmlands, in the poisoned wells of schools where women’s eyes cannot be seen in public, in heads falling from the shoulders of innocent people, in the factories pumping out a continuous stream of food for the beast, in the dark heart of everyone’s failure. What could I do? I checked my fingernails again. Nothing new there. I tried reading great books. Watching great movies. Attending great plays. Listening to great music. Lurking around great paintings. But the loneliness of their message broke my heart and I still hadn’t found peace. I jumped off a bridge straight into the River Styx and it reminded me of a story I started once and never finished that went like this: In the old days, there was a river called Styx with a ferry that carried the dead from the horrors of life to the horrors of death. I read somewhere that the sheer volume of dead from astronomical population growth in recent times led to impossible line-ups at the ferry, forcing many of the dead to turn back. They were the ones who, through some misplacement of heart, had not been given tickets for the ferry and would have spent the duration of their afterlives trying to argue their way aboard. On their journey back, they learned how to dance. So I tried dancing.

(To be continued.)

“What?” said the fox. “How does this story end?”

“Well, fox,” I said. “I’ll just have to dance a little more until I find that ending.”

And I will.
Searching for Peace (continued)

I danced on the ferry that carries the dead across the River Styx in hopes that death couldn’t get any worse than life. I danced until my arms and legs were ready to fly away from my body. I danced until my head spun and my eyes popped out of their sockets. I danced for a hundred years as the dead were ferried to another way of thinking about themselves. I danced a fevered search for peace but peace was just a one two and a one two three away somewhere in the mantle of the earth maybe? So I scoured the rock and iron intestines of the earth but peace was somewhere else. Maybe in a song, in the cadences and rhythms, the ebb and flow of sound arranged in meanings that touch the darkest heart in a way that’s different, soothing like coming out of the acid rain into a hookah bar. I opened myself to the vibrations of song through the centuries and physical distances of the world and I heard gurgling up from the bubbling stew of life…a 21st Century ballad:

   My burger’s got E. coli and it’s gonna take me down
   My girlfriend’s got ebola and she’s wearing a black frown
   My doggie’s got the canine flu and his piss is turnin’ brown
   There’s a germ on my finger tip
       Doin’ a flip
       He’s really hip
       A sensational hit
   In a world where everyone’s sick
   And I got the I’m-afraid-to-eat-touch-drink-smell-or-fuck-anything-cause-it’s-all-out-to-kill-me blues

Maybe it isn’t in song. Maybe something similar to song, and what would be similar to song? Maybe a nice long swim across the oceans of the world would reveal peace. I swam into the Atlantic and down and around and into the Pacific leaving a giant fishtail in my passing that got me on the five o’clock news in a dozen countries: ‘In today’s news…giant fishtail looking for peace. Good luck.’ It was like immersing myself in a timeless bowl of alphabet soup. Every algae and herd of plankton had its own meaning. Every current and weather front had its own voice. The depths and shallows emanated their own heat even if only the thermal singularity of a single cell exchanging energy with the world around itself that somehow creates a balance long enough for peace to show itself in that natural relationship between all things. Just as I was becoming certain that peace was a breast stroke or two away, my mouth filled with the taste of something foul and unoceanlike. It was both gritty and slippery and tasted like the sludge from all the world’s sewage. It was plastic, leagues and miles of plastic, a pregnancy of industrial effluent gestating just under the surface of the water. I pulled myself out of that demonic water and walked across its surface to an island that I was sure had no name and had never been seen by human eyes because there were no beer cans on its pristine beach. I walked around for a
while, letting the sun dry my body as scabs of congealed plastic dropped from my arms and legs. I thought about peace as I walked. I wondered why it was so damned hard to find. It was something we talked about so much. The leaders of great nations met often to negotiate it. Enforce it. Impose it. So why was it so hard to find? Maybe I could find it in the documentation of nations. In the treaties and deals and lofty words of legisalese and bureaucratic precision. Maybe peace was hiding in an appendix or footnote in some well-meaning testament to the frailties of living together in a world in dire need of mutual acceptance and tolerance. And less fucking plastic. But peace wasn’t in any of the documents in the libraries, in the vaults of classified documents, in the classifieds of the latest scandal sheet. It was often defined in terms of bringing it into being and enforcing it, but in all these schemes and plans and dialogs, peace was three definitions and an endless negotiation away. Right where I couldn’t find it and, apparently, where no one else could find it.

But I wasn’t going to let that stop me.

(To be continued.)

“Aw, c’mon, Biff,” said the fox. “Finish the story.”

“I have unfinished stories that I started three or four years ago, fox,” I said. “One story took me ten years to finish. A story will only finish when it finds its ending.”

“But, this could go on forever, Biff,” said the fox.

I hope not.
Searching for Peace (continued, again)

We all have oceans of unfinished stories and we can’t escape them. The pages are given to us the moment some tough little sperm creature bashes its way into an egg and starts a journey that releases ink onto the pages. Given this, some would say our stories started with the first of these meetings a thousand worlds ago… and that we’re all part of the same story with each of us contributing our own sequels to a Grand Telling with all the voices of every storyteller through the ages brave enough to exit the womb. And this makes each of us a storyteller, continuing an epic with the stories of our own lives… the same story… from infinite perspectives. And I can’t believe that peace can’t be found somewhere in that common denominator of the epic. So I opened myself to the telling, to the voices, to the daily finishing and finishing and finishing of each chapter in each story in each voice…and I heard a voice resounding through the ages, crossing the potholes of time and the waterslides of the temporal universe. It was loud enough to shake the ground and rattle my soul into thinking… this is so fucking cool… peace has to be somewhere in this voice. Problem was… I couldn’t make out what it was saying. The words were disjointed and slurred. Confused. Desperate. And just a little bit pushy, like a drunken panhandler stepping out of the boundaries of politically correct begging. But who was I to judge a voice that could rattle my soul and shake the ground? I opened myself to the voice, to all its blustery bits of verb and noun and split infinitives, none of which could arrange themselves in my ears in such a way that I could scrounge a shred of coherency from that jigsaw puzzle of verbal diarrhea, and I was beginning to think that peace was a bit confused about how it should sound. That’s about when the sound stopped, the voice died away, leaving a miniscule pattern of labored breathing. I waited a few minutes, listening to the labored breathing as it gained a slight rhythm of stability. And it occurred to me that it was finished. It had delivered its message in all the entirety of a unfinished movie. So I said the only logical thing that came to mind:

“Could you repeat that?”

I sensed a vile exhalation of disgust and the voice evaporated into someplace where I’m sure nothing made sense.

“That was weird, Biff,” said the fox.

“Yeah, not exactly what I expected,” I said.

“What do you think it was?” said the fox.

“I’m not sure,” I said. “But I have a feeling that peace is beyond any arrangement of words into a story.”
“So…” said the fox.

“I think peace is the story,” I said, “and when I find peace, I’ll find the story.”

“So?” said the fox.

“The search continues,” I said.

(To be continued, once again.)

“Awww…” said the fox. “Not again. You can’t keep…”

“Think of it as…an adventure,” I said. “A story unfolding…chapters winging it mindlessly through the days.”

“In other words, you really don’t know what you’re doing,” said the fox.

“Does anybody?” I said.
Searching for Peace (yeah, still)

“So, Biff,” said the fox, “you’re really taking this search for peace seriously. Do you really think this search is ever going to end?”

“The only time we don’t finish the search is when we give up on the search,” I said.

“I don’t think that’s true, Biff,” said the fox. “I know lots of people who searched and searched for things and never found them. I mean, what if you die before you find what you’re looking for?”

“Then the search is over,” I said.

“That’s a pretty grim take on life,” said the fox.

“Life is grim, fox” I said. “But I’ve always thought there was a glimmer of hope somewhere in it. A pinpoint of warmth in all the coldness we create and surround our lives with.”

“So that’s where you’re searching next?” said the fox.

“Yep,” I said.

So I set off in search for hope. I went into a place with broken windows and ceilings and walls devastated by time and uncaring. In dark corners, the floor vibrated with the movement of things that would disintegrate in sunlight. I heard the labored breath of the half living and saw their eyes, clouded by the half tones of worlds they could never really escape to with their bodies so painfully entrenched in their lives. I called out: “Is there any hope left in this place?” I held my breath and listened. A layer of silence drifted down from the watermarked ceiling and choked the half living deeper into their half worlds, far beyond making any kind of sense out of my question let alone the answer. I wished them all a Merry Christmas and I went somewhere else in search of hope…that maybe peace could be found in that fertile soil we keep throwing cigarette butts and bullets into. Curtains surrounded a bed and the smell of death’s approach permeated the air with the stench of roots into the living world rotting and releasing fiber by fiber. A voice faltered from behind the curtains. I heard the sound of a great inhalation of air displacing the impossibility of such a breathing in. I sensed a wellspring of courage stirring up from a vortex the size of a pinhead, gathering momentum and assurance in the certainty of one last message: “Nobody finds hope. It finds you. Just like the end of a story.” And the vortex evaporated as the inhalation exhaled into oblivion. The stench of the roots drifted into itself and disappeared. I said, “Gee. Thanks for the clarity. And a Merry Ho Ho to you.”
“Little harsh, don’t you think, Biff?” said the fox.

“I think I’ve just been lied to,” I said.

“Sorry to say this, Biff,” said the fox, “but that sort of had the ring of truth to it. Like something you would write.”

“No, fox,” I said. “I would never write something like that. Hope doesn’t look for us. It’s the most uncaring thing in the world. It flies by us, ignoring us, until we reach out and grab it and make it care. And maybe that’s why my search for peace seems to be taking me further away the harder I look for it.”

“Hey look, Biff,” said the fox.

“What?”

“I think a balloon of hope just floated by your ear…grab it!”

“Fox,” I said. “You’re so fucking weird.”

(To be continued…until it’s finished)

“Aw, c’mon, Biff. Just chalk it in and give it one of those questionable existential endings you love,” said the fox.

“Not this time, fox.”
 Searching for Peace (a story about pizza) (and peanut butter) (on hot dogs)

“So, Biff,” said the fox. “Where are we off to now?”

“I’m not sure,” I said. “Any suggestions?”

“You’re asking moi for advice, Biff?” said the fox.

“No, Fox…I’m asking that crack in the wall behind you,” I said, with great relish. And mustard. And peanut butter. (I worked with a guy, a long time ago, who put peanut butter on his hot dogs. Gross.)

“I’m sensing a lot of animosity in you lately, Biff,” said the fox.

“It’s Christmas. It brings out the worst in us,” I said.

“I don’t think you really believe that, Biff,” said the fox. “I know how much to love to stare at the decorations and be still with your soul when everybody else is in bed.”

“Not putting a tree up,” I said.

“OK, Biff,” said the fox. “You want moi’s suggestion?”

“Kind of interested in what the crack in the wall has to say,” I said.

“I’m going to ignore that because I know you don’t mean it,” said the fox. “So…let’s go to the beginning.”

I thought about this and it occurred to me that maybe the fox had an idea. So, I rubbed my new worry stone and presto…I was at the beginning. And…oh shit…

Yesterday morning, I woke up and decided it was time to search for peace. It had to be somewhere. I started in the kitchen, looking inside jars and bottles, under the table, in the cabinets and down the drain. I didn’t find peace, but I found some leftover pizza. Yum.

“That’s where this search began,” I said. “We’re right back where we started. Shit. I was expecting something a little more esoteric, something like universe’s exploding into being, ancient columns stretching into the red timeless sky…you know…shit like that.”
“Hey, Biff,” said the fox. “You know as well as I do that it’s always a good thing to return to beginnings when the story starts hitting too many potholes. It keeps the boat straight.”

“Fox,” I said. “I have no idea what that means.”

“Hmm…me too,” said the fox. “Try reading it again.”

So I read the stuff I’d written a few weeks ago and it occurred to me that this whole thing had started with me finding pizza. I love pizza. It’s one of those things that can adapt to infinite tastes. Almost like a canvas or an empty screen, and you create a new one with every mixture of and combination of toppings.

“Biff! You’ve got it!” said the fox. “Life is pizza!”

“Yeah!” I said. “Pizza! Pizza is PEACE.”

And suddenly everything made sense. Life is pizza. Pizza is peace. Really. Think of it. How many possible toppings and combinations are there for a pizza? Salami and pepperoni, mushrooms and cheese are just the beginnings. I’ll bet some people would eat peanut butter on a pizza. (Gross.) (Not that I mind people putting peanut butter their pizzas. I know people who put it on their hotdogs.) (Still….gross.) I rubbed my worry stone a little more and I was suddenly standing on a plain of pizza dough. It spread, golden and moist into every horizon. It spread beyond the horizons, oozing into the viaducts of infinity. It spread across an ocean of possibilities. It was as deep as the earth. I was standing on the past, present and future of all the…

“Did you hear that, Biff?”

“Yeah, fox, I did,” I said. “I don’t know what it is, but I don’t like it…interrupting my pizza dough reverie. There it is again.”

The fox looked up. I looked up. The sky was deep blue, stretching into…you know…the horizon thing. But it appeared to be split right over us, a giant gash in the sky, something like when you see war movies with some guy lying on the ground with his stomach sliced open and his intestines spilling hopelessly out of his body. Something like that.

“Holy shit, Biff,” said the fox.

“Ditto that, fox,” I said.
It gurgled out of the gash in the sky in spits and spurts at first and turned into something like vomit from the bowels of hell. It was every pizza possibility of all time: pepperoni, salami, cheddar cheese, mozzarella cheese, peanut butter, bananas, ham, pineapple, tomato sauce, anchovies, bacon, hot peppers, goat cheese, red onions, ground beef, chicken, apple, tuna, roma tomatoes, zucchini, hot banana peppers, feta cheese, parmesan cheese, sliced wiener, chicken beaks, orange slices, pomegranates, moose meat, pork chops, vitamin pills, lost souls, late trains, overdue promises, missed chances, long goodbyes, passings on the sidewalk of something that might have been beautiful, the color red spreading over a symphony of regret, guilty eyes rising like moons of darkness in the blue sky, songs from the beat of drums around midnight fires, whispers gliding through hot breezes, fingers losing their grip around a thread of truth, minds blazing into full realizations, sorrow spilling like sweat across the keyboard, joy sinking into the skin like the roots of a tree searching for a last outpost of…what?

I was sinking in toppings. The fox was sinking in toppings. Drowning in toppings. Awash in toppings. Battered and bruised by toppings. Kicked in the stomach and bashed over the head by toppings.

“Hey, Biff,” said the fox.

“Yeah, fox,” I said.

“Pizza analogy didn’t work,” said the fox.

“No kidding.” I said.

“What now?” said the fox. “And better make it quick…I’m drowning in pizza toppings.”

“The middle?” I said.

“You’re still searching for peace?” said the fox.

“Nothing better to do at the moment, fox,” I said.

“But, Biff…it doesn’t get any better than pizza,” said the fox. “If we could just get a menu and order a few less toppings.”

“I like my new worry stone,” I said. “Maybe we’ll let the stone find a good place in the middle.”

(To be continued. Without pizza.)
(And peanut butter.)

“Aw, shit, Biff,” said the fox.

“Language, fox,” I said.

“Yeah, look who’s talking,” said the fox.

“I didn’t hear that.”
Searching for Peace (the path of the worry stone)

So, what’s a worry stone, you ask?

“I know what it is, Biff,” said the fox.

“Fox…I’m talking to my two readers,” I said. “Are you sure you shouldn’t be hibernating?”

“Foxes don’t…” the fox tried to say.

It’s a stone, a polished stone. Mine’s light ochre with striations and fissures that make it look like something from a cave wall just discovered by a team of archeologists looking for the Cup and not finding it, and one of them says: “Shit. No Cup here.” And another one says: “But, hey, look at that wall.” It’s smooth and concave on both sides. Some are circular, but mine’s oval. What you do is…you rub it. With your thumb. This is a sensual motion that relaxes you and causes all your worries to evaporate. I’m not really worried about much though. I just like rubbing the damn thing and it beats sucking on my thumb, which I’m told helps to relieve anxiety as well.

“Hey, fox,” I said. “Sucked your thumb lately?”

“Foxes don’t have thumbs, Biff,” said the fox.

“Just joking, fox,” I said. “Where’s your sense of humor today?”

“You tell me, Biff,” said the fox.

Anyways…I have a really big worry stone. So big that, maybe I won’t lose this one. I’ve lost a few of them, including my favorite…one that I bought it in Salem, from a witch. I swear that stone was filled with magic. Sometimes, I’d rub it very lightly and the world around me would dissolve and I’d be walking down a city street in someplace Europe and it would be a lightly drizzly night with the sounds of festivity emanating from the windows of buildings that had escaped a history of wars and our will to destroy everything of beauty that we’ve created. And I would always have a book in my hand. Not sure what it was…just…a book. I never felt alone at these times. There was a female presence. A beautiful woman, either a few steps ahead of me or a few steps behind me, playing hide and seek with my head. It was fun. It made me smile.

Sometimes I’d think about this thing called peace while I was walking down that misty Euro street, smiling.
“Hey, Biff,” said fox. “We finally getting back on track?”

“Yeah, let’s do that, fox,” I said. “Let’s get back on track and find this thing called peace. Let’s see if this worry stone can take us there. And…tell you what, fox…you rub the stone.”

“Biff, I don’t have…” said the fox. Well, trying to say.

“Got a nose?”

“Biff…you really want me to rub that stone with my nose?” said the fox.

I’m not going to describe what a fox looks like rubbing its nose on a concave ochre stone because I don’t want either of you to wake up in the middle of the night screaming like I will for the rest of my life. But it worked. I was sitting on top of a garbage pile with the smell of all humanity’s refuse searing my nose. There were clouds below me and the garbage spread for thousands of miles in every direction. The air had an orange tinge and looked, in some places, like I could stick toothpicks into it and they would hang in the air like grotesque decorations in an absurd room in an absurd play written by someone whose brain was hanging in the air. Everything was here…everything we want, everything we crave until we’re done with it and shit it out like the burger and fries we ate last night.

“Thanks a lot, worry stone,” I said. “Just what I need at Christmas.”

“Biff,” said the worry stone, “You let the fox rub its nose on me.”

“Sorry ‘bout that,” I said. “I had no idea how gross that was going to get.”

“The phlegm, Biff, the phlegm,” said the worry stone. “Now, take a look around.”

And this is what we’ve done. In all its grandeur and hopelessness. Cans and cartons and yesterday’s tablets and enough plastic to wrap forever into a non-biodegradable past and fleets of cars and trucks rusting into the air and tires staring from the bottoms of translucent pools and…

“Do I really have to look at this, worry stone?” I said.

“Where does it come from, Biff?” said the worry stone.

“From people,” I said.

“But how, Biff?” said the worry stone.
I thought about this. And I thought about it a little more. And then some more. I thought about it from different angles and perspectives. And then I pondered. Yes…pondered. Do any of us do that anymore? Do we even look at things anymore and actually see them? Do we know our realities, our lives…do we actually feel our presences without having to dress up in the next high resolution app-loaded fifty-thousand mega pixel phone that will confuse our lives until the next one comes out? But the worry stone was right. This is the surface, the product of something deeper.

“You got it, Biff,” said the worry stone.

“Can I take a break now? It’s Christmas. I need beer, wine, sushi.”

And I was suddenly at Read’s Coffee Shop with a white cup that seemed to have emptied itself. And a worry stone that was, thankfully, silent. And I know where I had to go next.

“Where’s that, Biff?” said the fox.


“When did you start drinking eggnog, Biff?” said the fox.

“Recently, fox. It’s not bad,” I said. “By-the-way, fox…”

“Yeah, Biff?” said the fox.

“Merry Christmas.”

(To be continued. Until I find it.)

“This is turning into a lot of to-be-continueds”, Biff,” said the fox.

“Kinda like life, isn’t it, fox?”
Searching for Peace (getting ready for the next trip)

“Hey, Biff,” said the fox. “Wake up!

“Wake up, Biff!” said the fox.

“WAKE UP!” said the fox.

“Hey, fox,” I said.

“Uh..um…wha?” said the fox.

“You were dreaming.” I said. “Telling me to wake up.”

“Oh…yeah,” said the fox. “Too much eggnog. Where’s the worry stone?”

“Taking a shower,” I said. “For a year.”

“Was I really that gross?” said the fox.

“New record,” I said.

“So, Biff,” said the fox. “Where to now?”

“Under the surface,” I said. “Remember the garbage heap?”

No way was I going back to the garbage. I could still smell it steaming and splintering in my soul. But I didn’t have to go back. I had to get to the source of the garbage…the source.

“And what would that be?” said the fox.

“Well, fox,” I said. “I was just about to know that when some furry animal interrupted my thought train.”

“Sorry to be such a burden, Biff,” said the fox. “But maybe you should just try thinking a little harder. Like you do in coffee shops.”

So the fox did it again. Something in what the fox said.

“You mean, I actually…” the fox tried to say.
“Are you sure...are you really really sure you shouldn’t be hibernating?” I said.

“Biff...” said the fox.

And suddenly I had a thought.

“Shh..” I said.

“Biff,” said the fox, “don’t you ever shh me again. I really hate that.”

“Fox...be still...I have a thought,” I said.

“It better be...” the fox tried to say.

“Why don’t you go and apologize to the worry stone?” I said.

(NOTE: Notice how many times I say “I said” and “the fox said” and, my favorite “the fox tried to say”? I tell my writing students not to do this shit...but it just seems so appropriate here.)

“It was that gross?” the fox said.

“It was sad country music played backwards with large women and men wearing jeans far too low from the beginning of the crack as they danced on the heads of screaming hippies. Reminded me of my past,” I said. “Go. Go and apologize to the worry stone.”

Damn. Writing at home without a coffee shop around me is so weird. But that’s OK. Saw something on FB that made me chuckle today. A picture of Christ, who apparently, just wanted to go out and party, but everything was closed for his birthday. Hey, God...stop tormenting this guy. He is actually cooler than you. Yeah, you know what I mean...Old Testament. Ever read it? I mean...you turned people into salt. WTF? But...hey...I went to church last night with a friend and saw the other stuff you can do. Focus a little more on that.

Oops...wine bottle’s empty. One eggnog left. Need sleep.

“Hey, God,” I said. “Ease up on him. Ease up on us. We’re only what you’ve made us. Tomorrow, I’ll let you know what we’ve made of ourselves. Not pretty.”

“BTW...God...I sang last night,” I said.
“YOU SANG!” said God. “In one of my churches?”

“Yeah…and it felt good.”

(To be continued…maybe forever)

“The worry stone told me to fuck off,” said the fox.

“Wanna watch some Fight Club while I finish that last eggnog?” I said.

“Yeah…what the hell,” said the fox.

“Language?” I said.

“Yeah…look who’s talking,” said the fox.
Searching for Peace (mindlessly)

I’ve searched for a lot of things in my life. Some of them I found. Some, I realized, I would never find and abandoned the search. Some searches changed course when I realized that what I was searching for wasn’t really what I was trying to find, but another path into the search. It’s kind of like mindless writing…the stuff I teach my writing students. It goes like this…you start writing about something, mindlessly, without thinking, without judging or revising or changing your mind about anything…just letting it all pour out in a pure state, the unadulterated truth because you don’t have enough time to lie to yourself…you have to keep writing whether or not you like what’s coming out.

“Hey, Biff,” said the fox. “I tried mindless writing once.”

“How did that go?” I said.

“I learned a lot about myself,” said the fox.

“Like what?” I said.

“Like…you know…stuff,” said the fox.

“You revised stuff as you wrote, didn’t you, fox?” I said.

Well…” the fox tried to say.

“Whatever you got out of it, you really didn’t get out of it,” I said. “You censored the truth.”

“I’m a fox, Biff,” said the fox. “My truths are simple.”

“Tell me one of your truths,” I said.

“OK, Biff,” said the fox. “I exist.”

“How do you know that, fox?” I said.

Because you just asked me, Biff,” said the fox.

“Confirming your existence through me is existence on pretty shaky ground, fox,” I said.

“Back atcha on that one,” said the fox.
“Sometimes you talk too much,” I said.

“I call it mindless talking, Biff,” said the fox.

For once, the fox made me laugh. But I think this talk of mindlessness could be the next portal in my search because, to a degree, we all tend to lead our lives mindlessly, some more than others, maybe to the extent that they never have a clear thought throughout their lives. And I wonder about this…where it comes from…why we do it…where it’s taking us. I remember listening to a woman talking at an environmental meeting years ago, telling us how we need to be more mindful of the things we do that pollute the air, the land and the water. She made some interesting points, like separating our garbage so that it could be…you know…when company comes over they can see how environmentally correct you are and run home immediately to separate their own garbage. She talked about composting, car pooling, eating local produce and all sorts of neat shit that made us all want to do the right thing and save the world. After the meeting, I was standing outside with some friends talking about how we were all really impressed and were going to start separating our garbage and buy hemp clothing. I saw her leave the building looking so earth-friendly that my heart burst like breaking water as she walked to the parking lot where she got into the biggest most gas-guzzling SUV I’d ever seen and drove into a brighter future for all of us.

This is what we do. On the one hand, we talk fervently about things we believe in; on the other, we do what we are. And we don’t even notice. We do just enough of the things we believe in to keep ourselves convinced that we are who we think we are and ignore the rest. It’s like ordering our lives in a cafeteria: “Let’s see…I’ll take three helpings of compost, a ladle of phosphate-free dish soap, a side of bicycle for riding to work, the marinated extra large anti-fracking sign and, for desert, the latest lithium-powered cell phone…with an extra helping of shrink wrap, please.”

“Hey, Biff,” said the fox.

“Yeah, fox?” I said.

“What does all this have to do with searching for peace?” said the fox.

“It’s the search for the search, fox,” I said.

“You mean…mindlessly writing about mindless stuff?” said the fox.

“Bingo,” I said.
“You play Bingo?” said the fox.

“No, fox, I knit,” I said. “Now...if you don’t mind...”

When it comes to our beliefs, we partial package ourselves, but there are people living the full package out there. I know a few of them. They live in the woods. They generate their own electricity. The use handsaws and dowels to build their homes. They grow their own food. They trade with neighbors for things they need and can’t make. They watch stars instead of television.

“Sounds like a good way to live, Biff,” said the fox.

“I suppose it would be,” I said. “Let’s take a walk.”

“Where to now, Biff?” said the fox.

“One of the craziest places on earth,” I said.

So the fox and I spent the next month walking through barely snowed provinces and states and into places hot enough to barbeque a snowman and finally arrived in Texas, home of the coal rollers.

“What’s a coal roller, Biff?” said the fox.

“Just look over there, fox,” I said.

The fox looked in the direction I pointed, at a half ton truck with what looked like two small chimney stacks rising from the bed. A blue Prius approached from behind, closing in on the truck. When the Prius was about twenty feet from the truck, two huge black plumes spewed out of the chimneys, covering the little car in a thick black cloud of smoke. The Prius swerved madly with brakes screeching and pulled over to the side of the road as the truck continued down the highway, the sound of crazy laughter rolling out of the windows.

“Biff?” said the fox.

“Yes, fox?” I said.

“What was that?” said the fox.

“That was coal roller, fox,” I said.
“You mean that was deliberate?” said the fox.

“’Fraid so,” I said.

Coal rollers…our latest expression of a world doomed by the things we don’t want to see, the package with last year’s expiry date. They’ve declared war against the environment and anyone who’s trying to save it. There are thousands of them. Thousands.

“Not much peace here, Biff,” said the fox, dodging a bullet from a 45 sticking out the passenger side of a passing truck.

“Close call, fox,” I said.

“Why I’m a fox,” said the fox.

Damn animal made me laugh again.

(To be continued. Somewhere else.)

So, Biff,” said the fox. “You really knit?”

“No, fox, I don’t knit,” I said.

“Didn’t think so.”
Searching for Peace (a matter of energy)

“Hey Biff,” said the fox. “Can we get out of this place? Kinda hot here in Texas. And they have a lot guns. Why do they need all those guns, Biff?”

“To protect themselves from themselves, fox,” I said.

“That doesn’t make any sense, Biff,” said the fox.

“You’re right, fox,” I said. “It doesn’t make any sense at all.”

“So, where to now?” said the fox.

“Not sure,” I said. “Maybe we should ask the worry stone.”

“I don’t think the worry stone is speaking to either of us, Biff,” said the fox. “Ever again.”

“Probably not,” I said. “How about some all the energy in the world, fox?”

“What’s all the energy in the world, Biff?” said the fox.

“Well, you know how everything is energy, right?” I said.

“Right,” said the fox.

“OK,” I said. “We open ourselves to all the energy in the world…the peaks, the valleys, the good, the bad…everything, without thinking about it…just letting the energy enter us and take us wherever to see whatever whenever it feels like it.”

“Mindless energy, Biff?” said the fox.

“Would it be anything else?” I said.

“Go for it, Biff,” said the fox.

So, I opened myself to all the energy in the world and believe me, that’s a lot of energy, and I was hoping that I wouldn’t be blowing any fuses or shorting any circuits or spontaneously combusting because that would be a crummy way to start a new year.
It was a really weird sensation…and kind of personal. I mean, you have to give the entire world access to everything you are and trust that the world won’t get nasty and tear you apart from the inside, starting with your soul.

And look at the world I was letting in.

At first, it felt like something nudging lightly at the membrane of my being. I have no idea what I mean by that, but that’s what it felt like and this is my blog so I’m leaving it at that. Then I felt little footsteps tiptoeing into my head and into my eyes, nose and ears and the tiptoeing turned into marching and the marching turned into stomping and the stomping turned into thunder and rain and snow and heat waves and it became a tsunami of pure energy tearing through every cell in my body. I was on the verge of saying fuck this when the tsunami abated and I felt this great settling…a stillness that could calm the boil of Victoria Falls. It was sort of like an acid trip from back in my hippie days.

Let me tell you about that.

Christmas was a few days away and my roommates (the craziest gang of misfits I’ve ever shared a Kraft Dinner pot with) had gone home to do the family thing. I was alone and decided it was a good time to clean out the drawers in my desk and see that was in them these days. I found pens, a couple of roaches, a roach clip, a book I thought I’d lost, a condom with an illegible phone number written on it…a few other things I can’t remember, but what caught my attention was a tiny translucent square, like the kind of plastic bits that fall off new stuff when you finally manage to detach them from those impossible plastic structures that hold the stuff together for no apparent reason than to drive us crazy when all we want is the stuff and not have to take a course in mechanical engineering to get to it. Fortunately, this piece of plastic-looking thingy wasn’t anything like that.

Now, back in those days when I was an unwashed dirty hippie with hair down to my ass, there was a type of acid called Clear Light. It came in a little translucent square. It was a heavy hitting trip that could put you on another planet somewhere inside another planet revolving around a sun within a sun. Something like that.

I rolled about ten menthol cigarettes and made some coffee, put on a Doors album and settled in for suns within suns. It took about half an hour before that familiar feeling of lightheadedness arrived and the fire in my cigarette started glowing brightly. I sipped some coffee and sank deeper into the armchair with a big happy smile on my face. We had a black light poster of Jesus hanging on the wall. When we turned the black light on, his eyes glowed and looked right into our souls, especially when we were on acid. We talked for a bit…not sure about what, but I’m guessing it was good stuff.
I think it must have been about an hour into the trip when I noticed that my right arm was acting weird. It was sinking into the arm of the chair. I thought: This is interesting. I looked at my left arm. It was sinking into the chair as well. Cool, I thought. And then my body started sinking into the chair so that soon, I couldn’t tell where my body and where the chair stopped being body and chair until I was the chair and the chair was me. You kind of had to be there.

I, the chair and chair and I (had to be there) looked around at the room and noticed that we were sinking into the floors and walls and ceiling. I’m not sure how long it took, but suddenly I couldn’t distinguish between myself and the room. This led to one of those life-changing thoughts…you know…the ones that, once you know something, it’s there forever…you can’t get away from it because it’s always right there staring down everything you try to think against it. This was my thought:

Martin Heidegger, you sweet existential visionary…you were right. We’re all one big happy smile.

“I’d like to do acid sometime, Biff,” said the fox. “Just to see what it’s like.”

“Fox,” I said. “You don’t ever have to do acid. You’re already there.”

“Is that a good thing or a bad thing, Biff?” said the fox.

“A good thing, fox. A good thing,” I said.

So…back to letting all the energy in the world into me.

It was a stillness like the kiss of a butterfly that settled along the plains of my existence right up to the borders of everything I was and would ever be. It was like morning light seeping through the cracks of infinity…

“Hey, Biff,” said the fox. “Getting a bit maudlin, aren’t we?”

“Sorry ‘bout that, fox,” I said. “Let’s try this…”

It was a slow ebb and flow, like my entire body was shifting in slow motion at different speeds of slow. Maybe like tectonic plates moving across…

“Biff!” said the fox.
(To be continued. When the blogger is feeling less maudlin.)

“What are you smiling at, fox?” I said.

“Can’t picture you with hair down to your ass, Biff.”
Searching for Peace (back to a matter of energy)

So, I let all the energy in the world into me, which of course, meant letting the whole damn world in, which is kind of a scary thing when you think about all the weirdoes out there…the murderers, religious fanatics, dictators, the uncaring, the cruel and the helpless…and that’s just the people. Spiders…out there. Big ones that bite. And tornadoes and earthquakes. And I was letting all this into me and so much more, but…

All I felt was an immense calm.

“Maybe you just never came down from that acid trip, Biff,” said the fox.

“You, fox,” I said, “you could start a whole new tradition with foxes.”

“What’s that, Biff?” said the fox.

“Hibernating foxes,” I said.

Back to the energy. I half expected to be physically, spiritually and emotionally shredded. I mean…spiders. Big ones. So I wondered about this…all that turbulence, all that ebb and flow like a living pulse on the surface of the planet (not to mention one helluva hot magnet at the core of it all). But maybe it was all that diametrically opposed energy where a seed planted lovingly here cancels out a tree bulldozed with indifference there that balances everything out into a universal equilibrium and creates an awareness of everything at once…and it’s calm.

“Looks like you might have found peace, Biff,” said the fox.

“No, fox, not even close,” I said. “Just a thought…but…shouldn’t you be foraging or something?”

“I’m not a squirrel, Biff,” said the fox.

“Just asking,” I said.

Energy. It’s all the same. There’s no good energy or bad energy. It’s energy. It appears different though in the way we channel it, and the way we cause it to be channeled around us. The energy of a bullet tearing through a chest and shutting down everything to stop a life is the same energy flowing through a surgeon’s hands to keep the life going. This is what I was learning as all that energy flowed through me…firing up all the synapses of my brain, every cell and organ in my body, the surface of my skin and the marrow of my bones. Peace will only be possible when we
learn to channel all that energy into the surgeon’s hands. But why can’t we do this? I thought as I felt the energy of a legion of bullets tearing through flesh and bone faster than all the surgeons in the world could repair the damage. I felt babies being born into loving hands, and wrinkled faces staring into empty days as they waited for angels to carry them away. I felt dandelions growing out of cracks in pavement in spite of every effort to pave the life out of the earth. I felt magic and disbelief, wonder and the rumblings of a thousand thousand empty stomachs stretching into the first neutron to take a joy ride around an atom and the last photon to flicker out in the final depletion of all energy. But I didn’t feel an answer to why we can’t channel all this energy into peace. I felt calm, but I didn’t feel peace. I didn’t feel it in the signs of protesters begging for the world to listen to reason. I didn’t feel it in all the waves washing sand castles off the shores of the world.

But I knew it was there. Somewhere. So I let the calmness of everything that was right and everything that was wrong in the world tickle my innards for a few more minutes and then booted it out at about the same time I noticed that I was upside down, balancing on my head in a lotus position with people screaming all around me and flames and smoke filling the air with terror.

“So the energy thing didn’t work, Biff?” said the fox.

“Naw…didn’t think it would,” I said. “Cool feeling though. Where is this place and what’s going on here?”

“Someplace in India, I think,” said the fox. “A long time ago.”

(To be continued. In India.)

“What are you smirking at, fox?” I said.

“How about hibernating humans? Might make peace a little easier to find.”
Searching for Peace (in India, a while ago)

I did some yoga years ago right after college. I did it for a couple of months before I was caught up in the war between rock and disco and needed to devote all my time to sex, drugs, disco and rock & roll, especially after the instructor tried to get me to put both my feet behind my head so far they could shake toes.

I wasn’t having any of that. Maybe a few years before when I was a hippie, but at this point I was a party animal with a hard on for pushing my mind and body into the wee hours of the night and thank you George Carlin for all the laughs at Saturday night wine and cheese parties.

So it came as a surprise to me that I was sitting in the lotus position. Upside down. Balancing on my head. I’ve never done that before and I don’t know of anyone who’s done it. I can’t imagine anyone living through it. And my concerns were definitely not assuaged by my sudden realization that I was in upside down in full lotus at the top of a trapeze in a burning tent with thousands of screaming people in it.

“Fox?” I said.

“Yeah, Biff?” said the fox.

“WTF?” I said.

“Beats Texas, Biff,” said the fox.

I had to agree with the fox on that one. I looked down at a scene of pure insanity. Men, women and children ran in every direction toward exits from the tent as flaps of burning canvas spiraled through the air to land on bales of hay and clothing, igniting new fires.

A large flap of burning burlap wrapped itself around a woman fleeing with a child in her arms. I heard them screaming through the flames as the woman ran with sizzling eyes into a post, hitting it so hard the impact knocked her off her feet sending herself and the child sprawling like burning embers and ash shoveled from a coal fire while children with flaming hair ran around them screaming for their mothers.

Clowns on fire gesticulated horror with macabre dances pounding their bodies with their fiery arms as their colorful costumes tore shags of skin from their chests and faces. Jugglers juggled balls of fire from hands dripping into their last act. A man with wide eyes stared through the flames surrounding his head, wondering why he hadn’t just stayed home today and made a delicious curry dinner for his family…and where were they? Where were they in all this terrible
mess? A brother and sister gripped each other as they lay on the ground being trampled to death by crazed-eyed people running mindlessly into the horror.

It was about that time when the fluids in my body stopped being fluids and became steam and I felt myself explode into a shower of lotus bits with the realization that I was crossing from my next novel to my blog and the two worlds were becoming indistinguishable from each other.

“Hey, Biff,” said the fox. “Take a look around.”

I looked around. I was in the woods with a camera in my hands and snow shoes on my feet surrounded by snow-piled evergreens soaring into a sunny sky.

“This is where you’ve always found peace, Biff,” said the fox.

“Yeah…but I need to find it for everyone, fox,” I said. “And I will.”

(To be continued. With my camera.)

“How’s a camera going to take you anywhere, Biff?” said the fox.

“You wouldn’t believe, fox, you wouldn’t believe.”

(NOTE: This scene was based on the circus fire in Bangalore, India in 1981. I’m certain the world shuddered that day.)
Searching for Peace (with my camera)

“That was a pretty wild time in India, Biff,” said the fox. “And you seemed a little confused.”

“There was a time when I wasn’t confused, fox,” I said. “And then I was born.”

“Not gonna get all melodramatic on me again, are you, Biff?” said the fox.

“Hey, fox,” I said. “I don’t know who, or what, let you in here but this is my blog and I’ll write whatever I want.”

“But you always tell your students to get someone to look at their work before they send it off…to get that OBJECTIVE perspective before a heartless editor like J sees it,” said the fox.

“This is my blog, fox,” I said. “I’M the editor.”

“Ooookay, Biff. So what’re you going do with that camera you’re holding?” said the fox.

“Take some pictures, fox,” I said.

I squeezed the cool metal and plastic body of my 5D2 and gave into the will of the camera to take me anywhere, anytime, anyplace in my search for peace. I knew that if I left this up to the camera it would think, Cool. Biff’s going to shoot Auto for a change and trust me to get the settings right.

No bloody way.

I was standing in my hovel at the edge of the world about to break my camera’s heart, but I wasn’t telling the camera that yet. I closed my eyes and a moment later opened them with my head inside the mouth of the biggest animal I’d seen in my entire visit on this planet. It was a tiger and it’s mouth was big enough to fit both my head and camera inside and still have plenty of room for condiments.

“Gonna fiddle with the settings, Biff?” said my camera. “Or just leave it on Auto?”

Guess I’ll settle for composition, I thought. I took the shot. On Auto. Don’t know how it got on that setting. Suspect the camera had something to do with that. And I closed my eyes.

Shithead camera.
I opened my eyes and I was floating a few feet above a window with a huge beautiful spider web in one corner.

“Get the shot, Biff?” said the camera.

“Dunno,” I said. “I was just about to have my head bitten off by a tiger. Not much time to think.”

“Which is you at your best, Biff,” said the camera.

“I’d think about that, camera,” I said, “but I guess that would be me at my worst.”

“Ceeegar for the bald guy,” said the fox.

“I recognize this place,” I said. “This happened years ago.”

“Just watch,” said the camera.

So I watched.

And watched.

And watched.

“Still watching?” said the camera.

“Yeah…not much happening,” I said.

“Look,” said the camera.

A wasp, one of those ones with a waist every man and woman wants, flew right into the center of the web and was totally stuck there. And it was a big wasp. The kind you don’t want to see coming out of your beer can when you’re camping and it just crawls out all pissed off and drunk. And you don’t dare move because you know that’s just going to piss it off even more. So you try to be invisible and think happy thoughts like, nice wasp, beautiful wasp, happy little animal of my sweetest dreams…please don’t sting me. Would you like another beer? I have more. I hope.

Big. Motherfucking. Wasp.

Stuck in the web. Flailing and making lots of motion. Too much motion. Be still wasp. Do you have any idea where you are? What’s waiting for you?
Too late. The biggest meanest big brown spider in the world shot out of the side of the web and zeroed in on the wasp with hungry fangs dripping venom. It was on that wasp like a mule kicking a piñata.

But wait.

Something unexpected happened. Suddenly the wasp was stinging the hell out of the spider and it broke out of the web and flew off with the spider.

“See that, Biff?” said the camera.

“Yeah, I remember that. Watched it through the window a few years ago,” I said.

A few days later, a new spider had taken over the web. Not as big as the last one, but big. And the wasp returned, got stuck in the web, the spider came down like a mule kicking and the wasp flew off with it. Somehow, it had learned how to get its next meal by pretending to be the meal. It acted out a scenario that kept itself fed.

“So, Biff,” said the camera. “You saw this. Now, what does it tell you?”

“Spiders are dumber than wasps?” I said.

“Think, Biff,” said the camera.

“Naw…think I’ll just feel this one,” I said. “If that animal with that tiny mind can learn, then we with out big minds can learn.”

And I was back in my hovel with my camera, now silent in my hands and the fox said, “Getting any closer in your search, Biff?”

“Big minds, fox,” I said. “We need big minds. Each of us.”

“Any hope of that, Biff?” said the fox.

“Let’s look into that,” I said. “Let’s just keep looking into that until we find a way into it.”

(To be continued. Until we find a way.)
“Shit,” I said. “I don’t have a picture of a spider web.”

“Yeah, you do,” said the fox. “The one you took under the bridge. You gave your friend Dwight a print of it for his birthday. Find it.”

“OK,” I said. “Somewhere in the half million images I have, I’ll find it. Actually, I think I have that one on my Facebook. I’ll look.”

“Hurry, Biff, you’re running out of wine,” said the fox.

“Got it! A little over sharpened and over cropped, but it’ll do.”
Searching for Peace (big minds)

“So you think you’re going to find a big mind out there, do you?” said the fox.

“Don’t know,” I said. “But I’m sure as hell going to try.”

“Where you gonna start, Biff,” said the fox.

“Thinking about it, fox.” I said.

(Pause while Biff thinks. And thinks. And thinks. Until he remembers. Thinking hurts. Like hell. So he stops thinking and returns to his natural state. Mindlessness.)

“Hey, fox,” I said. “I know a guy who stands around on the street and offers to recite a poem for a penny to people walking by.”

“Must have a hard time making a living now that they don’t have pennies here anymore,” said the fox.

“He still says ‘Poem for a penny’ only now he says ‘Poem or a joke or a penny.’ He’s branching out,” I said. “I think people just give him whatever they give when they give to someone who’s livelihood depended on pennies.”

So there I was on Queen Street, the poem for a penny guy’s happy reading grounds, but he wasn’t there (timing’s always been my downfall), so I told the fox, “Pretend to be the poem for a penny guy.”

“Aw, c’mon, Biff, I’ve never even met the guy,” said the fox. But I knew he was secretly smiling.

“Just pretend you’re dressed in tattered clothing, with a mangy beard, wearing an impossible toque, mittens that look like something returned to the Salvation Army a thousand times, a backpack with all your worldly belongings splitting the seams and you have a mind that the entire world has stepped on all your life,” I said.

“Just the kind of person I’ve always wanted to be, Biff,” said the fox, still smiling secretly.

“OK, you stand by the curb and I’ll walk by and you say, ‘Poem or a joke for a penny’ and I’ll take out my gun and shoot you dead,” I said. And savored the look of horror on the fox’s face. “Just joking, fox. I don’t have a gun. At least, not today. Maybe tomorrow.”
The fox caught on quickly and laughed. I hope, someday, I’ll be able to erase that image out of my head.

So I walked down the street a bit, turned around and walked toward the fox who didn’t look anything like a fox. He was dressed in tattered clothing, had a mangy beard, wore an impossible toque and mittens that looked like something returned to the Salvation Army a thousand times, had a backpack with all his worldly belongings splitting the seams and looked like he had a mind the entire world had stepped on all his life. As I walked by, he said, “Poem or a joke for a penny.” And some other stuff that I couldn’t make out…just like the real penny poem guy. He even shuffled around as he talked and looked at me and the sidewalk and the road and the street lights and everything in the world all at the same time. Just like the real penny poem guy.

“OK,” I said, and handed him a cheque for two million dollars. (MS Word thinks I spelled ‘cheque” wrong. Fuck you, MS Word…it’s cheque. Woah…three wrong spellings in a row. I’m on a bad boy spelling high.) “I’ll take the poem.”

So the poem (or joke) for a penny guy read a poem. Not sure what he said. Not sure what the title was. Not sure what the poem was about…something like life in the modern world and how we ignore the little things that matter. But I was too mesmerized by his delivery to focus on the words. I watched him express the words with his body and face…the physical conviction of every word he said. This was a truly big mind, a mind so big that it was integrated with every cell in his body.

And he was reading poems (or jokes) for a penny. On the street.

He reached his hand toward me and snapped his fingers. I was in Wilser’s (my favorite bar) sitting at the counter with the fox, drinking Pina Coladas imported directly from Cuba.

“Find a big mind, Biff?” said the fox.

“Yeah, I did, fox,” I said. “And I realized something.”

“What’s that, Biff?” said the fox.

“Those minds are out there, everywhere…right under our noses,” I said. “Peace isn’t in a council or a treaty or meeting of so-called world leaders…it’s in the mass. In the street poets (or jokesters) and the people who scoop up a handful of soil with their heads full of big thoughts about what they’re holding in their hand…the ones who’re still connected.”
“Connected to what, Biff?” said the fox.

“Just…connected,” I said. “To wherever, whoever and whatever they are.”

“Getting closer to finding peace, Biff?” said the fox.

“Yeah, fox,” I said. “Getting closer.”

(To be continued. In a big mind sort of way.)

“Kind of enjoyed that, Biff,” said the fox.

“I know. Saw the smile,” I said.

“Want me to smile again, Biff?” said the fox.

“No, fox. I don’t have enough wine left for that,” I said.

“It’s a Pina Colada, Biff,” said the fox.

“Right. If you say so.”
Searching for Peace (connectivity in the real world)

When I was a kid, I played weekend baseball in the schoolyard. Those were hot summer days, the kind that practically make you gulp down an orange popsicle before it melts in the heat. We were all dusty and dirty with summer and baseball and none of us had jeans that weren’t torn somewhere. We all wore the same black and white sneakers. When we were in our positions on the diamond, we watched each other.

“Who’s on first.”

“What’s Who up to on first?”

We watched each other’s movements, waiting for telltale signs that would give up the other kid’s next move. One mid-July day—so hot mirages hovered in the school parking lot and the sand in the baseball diamond was so dry that we trailed clouds of dust running from base to base—we were short on gloves and I was the catcher…without a glove. I forget the pitcher’s name, but his fastball screamed from the mound to the plate. A bit faster and it would have cracked the sound barrier and broken the school windows.

And I had no glove.

All it took was one pitch and it wasn’t the sound barrier cracking…it was my thumb. The sound of a bone breaking is sickening. Not just to the person with the broken bone, but to anyone close enough to hear that dull crack of calcium under flesh rearranging the physiognomy in an unnatural order. Some people throw up.

But not any of us. We were baseball players and none of us were going to chuck our cookies over something like a broken thumb. At least not in front of everyone. Long story short, saw a doctor who wrapped it up and said, “Someday you will meet a fox.”

Always wondered about that.

The thumb hurt like hell for days but it didn’t put me out of the game…I was the umpire. A very mean angry umpire with a painfully broken thumb. Who would never play baseball again.

“Where’s all this going, Biff?” said the fox. “You don’t even watch baseball anymore.”

“Hey, fox,” I said. “Somebody warned me about you 150 years ago.”

“Biff,” said the fox, “that can’t be…you’re only 105. So…what’s all the baseball memories got to do with your search for peace?”
“Everything has something to do with the search, fox,” I said. “But those summers are closer to the next part of the search.”

“How so, Biff?” said the fox.

“We were all real,” I said. “We could see each other, yell at each other, throw the ball to each other. We could break a bone, lose an eye, get a bump the size of an egg on our heads. But we didn’t care. We just wanted to be out there, pleasure or pain, and play baseball. And we were all connected physically and mentally by the game. Know what I mean, fox?”

“I can do that just by messaging people on FB, Biff,” said the fox.

“No, fox, you can’t,” I said. “It’s a different connection. If the person on the other end breaks a bone and they don’t mention it…you’ll never know about it. Your connection will be only what they want you to know. You won’t see or hear their pain…you’ll only read their words. ”

“Yes,” said the fox.

“We might get that someday, Biff,” said the fox. “When they have, like, surround Skype complete with smellorama and pain and stuff.”

“But how will you know if they haven’t turned down the sound when they fart so that you won’t know they’ve farted? You can’t do that in real life. You’re stuck with what actually happens. And there’s honesty and certainty about that.”

“But…” the fox tried to say.

“And you won’t be smelling the same air,” I said, “feeling the same temperature, sharing the same danger if an earthquake suddenly swallows one of you up. Instead of losing your lives together, you’ll just lose the connection.”

“But the earthquake might happen on the other end, Biff,” said the fox. “I think I’m OK with that.”

“There might be free beer and pizza at the other end, fox,” I said. “Real life is all the good and all the bad. Shared. It’s real connection. And we’re losing it.”
“But we didn’t have peace even before computers and social media, Biff,” said the fox. “So what’s this got to do with the search?”

“Not sure yet, fox,” I said. “I think it tells us something about ourselves, something that’s always been in us but that’s manifesting itself through mediums it couldn’t use before. And now we can see it. I think it might be in the connection…or maybe the disconnection.”

“Worth a closer look, Biff?” said the fox.

“I think so, fox. Always good to look closer at things.”

(To be continued. In a connected sort of way.)

“So, fox,” I said, “you’re on Facebook?”

“Might be, Biff, might be.”
Searching for Peace (in a connected sort of way)

“So, Biff,” said the fox, “I’ve been doing some thinking about this whole connection and reality thing.”

“And what did you come up with, fox?” I said.

“Well…I think you might be wrong about the connection between me and someone on Skype not being as real an experience as when I’m with them physically.”

“How so, fox?” I said.

“OK…so I’m not breathing the same air or feeling the same temperature and I won’t go down the tubes with them if there’s an earthquake,” said the fox, “but I can still respond to their thoughts. They can tell me everything that’s on their mind…you know…reach out to me with their mind and express their feelings. They might not be as willing to do that when they’re physically with me.”

“So you’re saying that the electronic connection might be more real than the physical connection?” I said.

“Sometimes,” said the fox. “Like when people write letters to other people. I think sometimes people are more open and express themselves more clearly when they’re writing to someone than when they’re talking to them. Some people are more comfortable with written words than with spoken words.”

“Guess I can go with you on that one, fox,” I said. “Writing gives you a chance to think about what you’re saying instead of just burping the words out of your mouth like I do.”

“You burp words, Biff?” said the fox.

“Feels like it sometimes, fox,” I said. “But how does a letter relate to Skyping? There’s no reflection…you’re talking, not writing.”

“But you’re not physically with the person,” said the fox, “like you said. What I’m saying is that sometimes the physical world can be less real than the worlds we create in the ways we communicate.”

“Not quite getting this, fox,” I said. “Are you sure you haven’t been hibernating?”
“Gonna ignore that remark, Biff,” said the fox. “Let’s visit a friend of mine.”

(Poof. As in transporting somewhere.)

I was in a room, I think…a home office, with the mandatory shelves (but with nothing on them), the mandatory swivel chair (with nobody sitting on it) and the mandatory desktop with monitor, keyboard and mouse…with a bar of soap lying between the mouse and the keyboard.

“What’s this?” I said. But the fox wasn’t there. “I’m a bar of soap, Biff, a bar of soap!” said the soap.

“Bars of soap don’t talk,” I said. “This is something I know.”

“Sometimes you have to just give into letting yourself know extraordinary things, Biff,” said the soap. “Or all you’ll ever know is the ordinary. And where would the magic be in that?”

“But you’re a bar of soap,” I said.

“No,” said the soap, and started jumping all over the keyboard and pushing the mouse around. It was kind of creepy. As the soap jumped and pushed, things appeared on the screen. A blog appeared on the screen. It looked familiar. In fact, I really recognized it. It was my blog. Silence Says I All (…but, on the other hand…). There was that big greenish yellow eye staring at me (not really an eye though…some kind of tube holder screwed into the side of a caboose that I took pictures of long ago).

The soap jumped around some more and my WordPress account appeared, open to the new post page. Words appeared like a frantic stampede of letters filling the text window. The cursor hit the Add Media button and went to the media folder where it opened a picture of me with my usual body, but a bar of soap sitting on my shoulders in place of my head.

“Very funny,” I said. “But that’s not me.”

“But it could be, Biff,” said the soap. “And nobody in the world would know it. All I have to do is press the Publish button.”

“So what are you saying, soap?” I said.

“Without the picture, everybody who reads what I just wrote and sees the picture would think it was you,” said the soap.
“I still don’t get it,” I said.

“It would be real to them, Biff,” said the soap. “Just as real as anything else in their lives. Even though it was written by a bar of soap and not you.”

“But it wouldn’t really be real,” I said. “It wasn’t written by me.”

“Doesn’t matter, Biff,” said the soap. “Some sociologist guy once said that if something is perceived to be real, then it will be real in its consequences. In other words, it becomes real because we accept it as real. That’s the beauty, Biff, we can make things…anything…real by accepting them as real.”

The soap jumped around some more on the keyboard and wrote: Biff’s a bar of soap. Biff’s a bar of soap!” Over and over. Filling the text window.

“But nobody’s going to accept that I’m a bar of soap,” I said.

“And that’s it, Biff,” said the soap. “Getting them to accept the extraordinary.”

“You mean…” I tried to say.

“That peace is possible,” said the soap, “is an extraordinary thought.”

And the soap danced across the keyboard. I looked closer to see what it was writing when suddenly…

(Poof)

I was standing at the edge of a cliff with a thousand foot drop into the ocean with the sun rising over a great expanse of possibilities. Gulls circled in the sky.

“Nice view,” said the fox.

“It certainly is,” I said.

“Getting any closer in your search, Biff?” said the fox.

“I think so, fox,” I said. “Kinda like a jigsaw puzzle and I’m getting the pieces from all over the place.”
“Think you’ll be able to put them together, Biff?” said the fox. “That’s what the search is all about, fox,” I said.

(To be continued. Piece by piece.)

“Do you really burp your words, Biff,” said the fox.

“Only when I’m talking, fox.”
Searching for Peace (piece by piece)

Standing at the brink of a thousand foot cliff makes you think. The gulls sailing in the air probably don’t have the same thoughts a human has with all that distance under them. They can stop the mad plunge, turn it into a magnificent swoop and carry off a delicious wiggling fish. For them, the sky is a place to relax and be a bird or something. Anything they want.

A thousand feet.

It provokes thought. Weird thoughts, like, what would it be like to jump or just relax like a gull and fall forward into all that roiling air and close my eyes and feel weightless and free if only for few moments. I wonder how many people, if they knew that they had just minutes to live and they were standing at the edge of a cliff, would fall into all that emptiness. Smiling.

Or making their last selfie.

A thousand feet.

The soap had a point…we can make things real by accepting them as real. Thousand foot thought.

People jump out of perfectly safe airplanes…wearing parachutes of course. And that’s another thousand foot thought…accepting that the parachutes will open. Accepting that they were packed right, that they have no defects. Some people would call this trust. I’d say it’s more like accepting their fate, one way or the other.

I read about a man who jumped out of a perfectly safe airplane and his parachute didn’t open. But he landed safely. Don’t know all the details but I always wondered if he screamed all the way down…or just accepted that he was about to die and enjoyed the ride down.

Or maybe he just accepted that he would be OK. “Yep, on my way down. Wicked nice view. Gonna land safely. Takin’ a selfie. Lookin’ good. Oh look…a hundred foot long mattress. Everything’s gonna be OK.”

Everything we approach with enthusiasm starts with acceptance, the notion that things will turn out the way we expect them to turn out, the way we want them to turn out.

“Where you going with this, Biff?” said the fox.

“Not sure, fox,” I said. “Thanks for the interruption.”
“Anytime, Biff,” said the fox. “

Now, where was I? Oh yeah…acceptance. We accept so much, not because we want to or don’t want to, but because we need to accept things. We need to accept that the sun will rise no matter how many rainy days fill out lives. We need to accept that the tanning lotion we’re going to buy will be used. Or why would be buy it? Everything we do and everything we are depends on some degree of acceptance.

In one of his books on self-esteem, Nathaniel Brandon suggested that we stand in front of a mirror, naked, looking closely, and just accept ourselves. Without having to like or hate ourselves. Just accepting ourselves. All the good. All the bad. Just accepting.

What a non-judgmental thought. What a beautiful concept. The freedom from judgment. And once we refuse to judge ourselves, we can be free of judgment from others. And maybe even be free of judging others.

How can someone who can honestly accept themselves…see themselves for all they are and just accept…believe that they are any better or any worse than anyone else?

“Hey, Biff,” said the fox. “Lookit me…standing in front of a mirror, naked, just accepting me without judgment. What a cutie am I.”

“Fox,” I said. “Please don’t smile. You have no idea how disturbing that is.”

“Judging me, Biff?” said the fox. “Maybe you should try this.”

So there I was, standing naked in front of a mirror (by a thousand foot cliff) in all the glory of my still too large belly (even after going from a 35 to a 31 waist and having to buy all new pants), the wrinkles and crooked teeth from too many fights and the scar on my jaw from too much Scotch (and a failed bout with gravity) and…well all of it me. Including the not so bad shoulders and blue eyes.

So I didn’t throw up.

“Hey, fox,” I said. “Lookit my cute little pug nose. And please stop smiling. Try grinning.”

The fox grinned.

Ouch.

(To be continued. A closer look at acceptance.)
“Maybe the world would be a more peaceful place if there were more mirrors in it,” said the fox.

“Let’s look at that,” I said.

“You know, Biff,” said the fox, “you really do have cute little pug nose.”

“Thanks, fox,” I said.

“And my grin?” said the fox.

“I think I’ll need a lot more time on the mirror for that.”
Searching for Peace (a closer look at acceptance)

A thousand feet.

I used to work in sales and marketing. It really sucked. You never really had a chance to just be yourself…with all your strong points…and weak points. You weren’t supposed to have any weak points, at least, none that you could ever let anyone know about. Weak points could be exploited and used against you. Weak points could lose a contract or a client. Weak points could get you laid off or fired. So they weren’t allowed. You had to be perfect in every way.

It was bullshit.

And probably why there’re so few great sales and marketing people around. Maybe if we could all accept that nobody’s perfect and that our faults may even work towards making each of us distinct from each other, then just maybe we could accept that it’s OK to be human.

A thousand feet.

We used to have sales and marketing meetings in which some bozo would always say, “Let’s take the thousand foot view on this.” Sometimes it was 800 hundred feet. 400 feet. I think it depended on how much you didn’t want to see that didn’t fit in with what you wanted to see. You know, obscure everything with too much noise so that you could bore into those places that promised a whole new approach without having to essentially change anything.

I mean, what can you really see from a thousand feet up? Oceans of motion. The confusion of the moment multiplied a thousand times. It only worked for people who wanted it to work, but few did.

I always wondered what would happen if, like in Bruce Lee’s movie Enter the Dragon, those long and boring sales and marketing meetings were held in a room full of mirrors with all the meeting participants shuffling around trying to find a new idea and seeing only reflections of themselves and the other participants.

Talk about your thousand foot view…trying to find a needle in a haystack.

Some ancient cultures believed that mirrors reflected the true nature, or shadow soul, of the viewer. Can you imagine all those sales and marketing people wandering around seeing themselves and the others with all their strengths…and all their weaknesses? They’d all be out of jobs.
Unless they just accepted what they saw and said, “Hey, Arnie, you’re a human being. And that’s OK with me.”

“Thanks, Sabrina…you’re OK too.”

And they might even find that bright new idea.

But then…

“Arnie. Sabrina. I see your weaknesses. You’re both fired.”

There’s always that asshole to fuck up the best of things and scare everyone away from just being themselves.

“Hey, Biff,” said the fox. “Remember what you said about just looking into a mirror and accepting yourself?”

“Yes, fox,” I said. “I do.”

“Well…” the fox tried to say.

“I’m not looking at my naked body again while standing at the edge of a thousand foot cliff,” I said.

“Maybe more assholes should do that,” said the fox.

“If only,” I said.

(To be continued. Somewhere else. Again.)

“So you were one of those sales and marketing assholes, Biff?” said the fox.

“Please don’t grin when you say that.”
Searching for Peace (in the way we ask questions)

People don’t ask questions.

I mean it. Sure, we ask innocuous questions like, “How much is that furless guinea pig in the window?” (even though we have no intention of buying it…we’re just curious about how much shit like that costs) and “How’s things going?” (and they’d better not tell us the truth or we’ll stop asking them).

The thing with questions like this is that they don’t change anything. They don’t really mean anything. They’re elevator questions filling up the background of communication. Like a clear subject in a photograph with a faded background (technical term is bokeh…pronounced bokeh). But without the clear subject.

I think the main reason we don’t ask meaningful questions is that we’re afraid of the answers. How long does a husband or wife put off asking, “Are you seeing someone?”

I used to be a bartender. I worked in the games room of a club, which was quiet for most of the night, so I got to know some of the customers well as they sat at the bar building liquid courage for the evening ahead. One of those customers was Hakusata (name changed to protect her innocence) who came in early in the evenings for a couple of months and tortured herself over thinking that her husband was having an affair. In situations like this, bartenders are supposed to say something infinitely insightful, or just keep their mouths shut and nod agreement when appropriate. But one night, after a couple of months nodding and keeping my mouth shut, I had to ask, “Why don’t you just ask him if he’s seeing someone?”

She looked at me astounded, lips quivering, on the verge of tears, and said, “Because he’ll tell me he is. And then it’ll be over.”

So, I suppose not having a clear answer to a clear question meant that it wasn’t really happening, that everything was fine. But more importantly, it meant that nothing had to change. It wouldn’t be over. It would just go on and on.

Things wouldn’t change.

The vast majority of us hate change. We become emotionally and intellectually lazy in places where we’re not likely to make mistakes because we know the rules of the way. Asking questions can really fuck up complacency. Unless, of course, the question is background music in front of a clear subject that you don’t want to see.
I’ve worked for a number of IT startup companies. One thing you can be sure of in an IT startup is that 99 percent of them are going to have shaky periods and most will likely go under within the first two or three years. There’s this thing so many of them have in common: the layoff. I’ve seen so many of these. Times when staying in business meant paring down the staff. Thing is…we all knew when these times were coming. But very few had the nerve to go to management and ask, “Are there going to be layoffs?” And then ask, “Am I going to be one of them?”

OK, in a situation like that, they’re probably going to lie to you…so you might ask, “Why bother to ask the question?”

Got an answer for that one. Because if you’ve come to the point where you find yourself asking those questions, then it’s time to start sending out resumes. Before the axe falls.

The simple act of asking a meaningful question clarifies things in itself. If you’re brave enough for the question, then you’re brave enough for the answer.

“Hey, Biff,” said the fox. “I have a question.”

“Go ahead, fox,” I said. “Ask away.”

“Does my grin really disturb you?” said the fox. “Go ahead…I’m brave enough for the answer.”

“Yes, fox,” I said. “Your grin really really disturbs me.”

“Bastard,” said the fox.

“You asked,” I said.

“Ever hear about little white lies, Biff?” said the fox.

“Fox,” I said, “are you happy with your life?”

“I have fur and a tail, Biff,” said the fox. “What’s not to be happy about?”

“Good point,” I said. “You know what one of the toughest questions is for people these days, fox?”

“How does my hair look?” said the fox. “Oh…sorry ‘bout that, Biff.”
“I’m going to ignore that, fox,” I said.

Damn thing grinned. I won’t go into details.

“Am I happy with what I’m doing with my life?” I said. “That’s the toughest question.”

“How’s that, Biff?” said the fox. “Seems pretty straight forward to me.”

“It is,” I said. “But the answer would be pure dread for most people. It would mean looking at what they’re doing and changing it.”

I don’t know how many times I’ve heard people complain about their jobs and say day-after-day how much they’d like to be doing something else. They already have the answer to the question they should be asking; they’re living it every day.

But they’re not asking the question. They’re not speaking directly into themselves and asking, “Am I happy with what I’m doing?” I think the answer, then, would cause regret, panic…tears. So they go on living the wrong answer. I think, if they could honestly answer another question, they might be little more honest with the first.

“What’s that, Biff?” said the fox. “Go ahead and answer. I’m brave.”

“Am I going to die someday?” I said. “I think most people come to grips with this one too late to look back on fulfilling lives.”

“Is that what you’ve done, Biff?” said the fox.

I thought about this for a couple of years and said, “I honestly don’t know, fox.”

“Any hope for you, Biff?” said the fox.

“Not dead, yet, fox,” I said. “Not dead yet.”

(To be continued. Into something different.)

“So, Biff,” said the fox. “What’s this got to do with the search for peace?”
“Everything, fox,” I said. “We need to be asking a lot of meaningful questions and be ready for terribly beautiful answers before peace is ever going to be something we own.”

“You’re not going to die anytime soon, are you, Biff?” said the fox.

“If you’d stop grinning, I’m sure that would add many years.”
Searching for Peace (in a coffee shop, working on a board)

So, I’m sitting at Read’s and I’ve spent an hour working a on a skate board that’s going to be used in an auction to raise money for a skate board park in memory of a beautiful child who died in his sleep at the age for fourteen. He was a skate boarder and a movie maker. And he was a beautiful human being. I’m doing this skateboard for him.

I love working on this board. I get lost in the details of the drawings and everything around me falls away and I’m on this plain of existence composed of wood and black ink and intricate lines flowing into each other to form shapes and rhythms with meanings I may never comprehend, but this is for Isaac…so I don’t mind being lost on that plateau.

But working on the board gets a bit draining after a while. This is a good thing, but I’m on my third cup of coffee and I haven’t eaten anything today. My hands are shaking with caffeine energy. It’s time to write.

So, after close to an hour on my next novel, I’m listening to two young university women talking vociferously about feminism. I can’t hear much of their words over the background music and the distance, the conversations going on all around me, the sound of the coffee machines, the door opening and closing and letting in chills of cold air every few minutes.

But I can feel their energy, their animated excitement with ideas and the expression of those ideas, the mutual exchange and the energy that comes from clarifying thoughts by sharing them.

That’s when we really know what we think…when our thoughts are clear enough that we can express them in a manner that communicates to others.

It doesn’t have to be words; it can be a painting, a sonata, a photograph… a dance. It can be the silence of a shared meditation. That mutual awareness an idea makes gives definition and solidity to the idea…the ability to grow and evolve. Once an idea is expressed it’s hanging around forever…if only in the vibrations left behind from mutual awareness.

Ideas are energy. They vibrate furiously inside the mind, but I’m not sure if they leave a permanent mark in that cerebral cocoon. I guess it’s like the egg meeting that sperm cell. The idea of birth is there…but until they meet, the consummation of the idea isn’t. It’s only real when the mutual awareness happens. Everything else is daydream.

“I don’t know, Biff,” said the fox.

“Hello, fox,” I said. “Something on your mind?”
“Well, I guess not,” said the fox. “Unless I tell you what it is.”

“That’s not exactly what I mean, fox,” I said. “You can have something on your mind and it’s real to you during the moments that it exists in your mind. After those moments, it usually fades into the background to become memory or a vague thing that might spring into your thoughts another time and you might even build on it. But it’s still in a dormant stage until you express it…when you put it out there where it can suffocate or breathe the air that surrounds it.”

“So, Biff, let me get this straight,” said the fox. “If I have an idea, like just in my thoughts, it’s not really an idea until I talk to someone about it…or make a painting or dance it.”

“No,” I said. “It’s an idea, but it’s still in an embryonic state. It could be growing and developing but, until you express it, it’s still in the womb of your mind…where it could be forgotten, or die with you. It’ll never have the energy and resilience of birth.”

“So what’s this have to do with your search for peace, Biff?” said the fox.

“Hey, fox,” I said. “Everything. Again. Everything. Peace is an idea, an idea that we’ve never made real by…and I mean everyone…expressing it…and making it real.”

“Hey, Biff,” said the fox, “read the papers, listen to the news, watch television…everybody’s talking about peace.”

“Yeah, fox,” I said. “Peace on their terms. And that’s not really peace. There can be no terms on peace. Not ever. It has to be a mutual acceptance that we’re all in this together…and that is the only terms of peace that will bring peace.”

(To be continued. God only knows where.)

“So, Biff,” said the fox, “you eavesdrop on people’s conversations at Reads?”

“And I make notes.”
Searching for Peace (through the eye of a needle)

“So, Biff,” said the fox. “Why do you keep sewing that shirt? I think it’s, like, mostly thread now.”

“I love this shirt, fox” I said. “It’s the most comfortable piece of clothing I’ve ever had. And I’m going to keep sewing it until it turns into a ball of thread.”

“How long have you had it, Biff?” said the fox.

“Remember when dinosaurs walked the earth?” I said.

“Vaguely,” said the fox.

“Not that long,” I said.

“You one funny guy,” said the fox. “But I think you must have had that shirt for almost fifteen years. It’s turning yellow. Don’t you think it’s time to give it a decent burial? You could even tie die it.”

“The grin, fox,” I said. “It gives away your sarcasm. And it gives me nightmares. While I’m still awake.”

“Watch it, Biff,” said the fox. “Or I’ll smile at you.”

“Just joking, fox,” I said, as I finished the sewing and started looking through the eye of the sewing needle.

“Whatcha doin’, Biff?” said the fox.

“Looking through the eye of this needle, fox,” I said. “Maybe that’s the way.”

“The way to what, Biff?” said the fox.

“The way to get closer in my search for peace,” I said.

“I don’t get it, Biff.” said the fox.

“I’m going to take a look at things through the eye of this needle,” I said.
“Careful you don’t poke your eye out with that needle, Biff,” said the fox. “You know how accident prone you are.”

“I’m not accident prone, fox,” I said.

“Big dent in your chin there from meeting a sidewalk when gravity wasn’t on your side,” said the fox. “Two false teeth from falling off the top of a building into a heap of scrap metal. Big scar on your right arm from crashing through a glass door. Three broken ribs from…”

“OK, fox,” I said. “That’s enough. I’ve had a few unfortunate accidents that anyone else could have had.”

“’Cept they weren’t anyone else,” said the fox.

“You know, fox,” I said. “You could be the first fox in history to hibernate. You could get yourself in Wikipedia for that.”

“Biff, how many times do I have to…” the fox tried to say.

“Time to see things through the eye of a needle,” I said.

And there I was, needle in hand (and not making pinholes in my head or eyes), sitting at Read’s Coffee and Magazine Shop holding a needle up to my eye, looking at what I’m writing on my laptop and people are looking at me strangely.

“They’re waiting for you to poke yourself in the eye with the needle, Biff,” said the fox.

Ignoring the fox and the people waiting for me to stab my eyes out, I focused through the eye of the needle at the word needle. All I could see were the two ‘e’s.

And this made me think.

What if we all had to walk around for a whole day looking at the world through the eye of a needle? What would we see? How would this make us think?

“Biff,” said the fox. “You’re starting to sound a little crazy. And you’re looking a little wide-eyed.”

“I’ve been crazy all my life, fox,” I said. “And tomorrow I’m going to be just a little crazier. I’m going to spend a day looking through the eye of this needle.”
“And you get this from looking at the word needle through a needle?” said the fox.

“You got it, fox,” I said.

(To be continued. Through the eye of a needle encore.)

“So what did you see in those two e’s in the word, Biff?” said the fox.

“Two e’s, fox…two e’s.”
Searching for Peace (through the eye of a needle, encore)

“Whatcha doin’, Biff?” said the fox.

“What are you searching for, fox?” I said as I leaned into the carpeting on my living room floor, looking intently through the eye of a needle.

“Think you’ll find it that way, Biff?” said the fox.

“Nope. Not here, fox,” I said. “Finding about a billion dust mites and some cat hair from when Kiki and Gibson were visiting. And a bread crumb. But no peace.”

“Maybe you’re just not getting into it enough, Biff,” said the fox. “Whadaya mean by that, fox?” I said.

Suddenly, I was falling into the eye of the needle. I wasn’t any smaller, but the needle had taken on the proportions of a giant obelisk and I was heading straight for the eye, which seemed to be rushing at me as I fell toward it and the two edges of the eye rushed at me like two metal columns joined at the top to form a domed gateway that I fell through.

Did I mention I was screaming?

The fox did this.

I landed safely on the carpet, though upside down, surveying the jungle of carpet around me as I balanced on my head. It was kind of cool. The carpet fibers were wavy and what everybody’s worst hair day would feel like. Something moved a few feet in front of me (which would be less than an inch in non-carpet distance) and I heard a voice calling out: “Hey, Biff!”

“Yes?” I said, not really knowing who or what I was talking to but, as my vision cleared in the dimness of the carpeting, I started to see about a billion fat spidery bodies with plump double pincers instead of faces…like blobs with short blobby legs.

“Hey, Biff!” said the one in front of me. “We’re dust mites. We live on the skin you shed every day when you do Tai Chi and Qi Gong in your living room. Boy, Biff, you shed a lot of skin. Take a look around.”

I looked around and saw a lot of patches of skin. My skin. And these blobs were eating it.
Yuk..

(Note to self: Cure for dust mites…scrub harder in the shower.)

About a billion dust mites were making giggly sounds with puffy bodies wiggling like gelatin about to melt. They were hanging upside down from the carpet fibers. Standing on my head was starting to make sense.

“So,” I said. “I hope I’m not squashing you when I do my stuff in the morning.”

“C’mon, Biff,” said the mite. “Take a look around. There’s mites to spare. You keep the population down. Otherwise we’d be spilling out your windows and doors.”

“Guess I can find solace in that,” I said.

I was kind of relieved they weren’t pissed off and about to eat me. But…come to think of it…they were eating me. Sort of.

Didn’t see the fox anywhere. Must’ve finally hibernated. Strange thing though…I still had the needle I’d just fallen through in my hand.

“Biff,” said the mite, “we heard about your search for peace. How’s it going?” All around me, mites hanging from carpet fiber wiggled and giggled as they chewed on pieces of my skin.

“Not really sure, mite,” I said. “It seems to be coming in bits and pieces, like a giant jigsaw with missing pieces, and pieces that should fit together but don’t.”

“Sounds like life, Biff,” said the mite. About a billion dust mites stopped wiggling and giggling and chewing and turned toward the mite that was talking to me…and I swear they seemed to be nodding in agreement.

So I thought about this. The mites turned their attention to me as I thought. I’m not sure how I knew this, but I did. Maybe I was developing some kind of mite sense. When you’re surrounded by about a billion of them…

“So…you’re saying life is like a fucked up jigsaw puzzle?” I said.

“At first glance,” said the mite. “Pieces will always be missing. And some parts will never fit together.”
About a billion mites bounced up and down hanging from carpet fibers, making clicking sounds with their pincers.

Clicking sounds.

I’d heard that sound before, when I was doing Qi Gong in the morning. It was dust mites. Clicking in my carpeting. About a billion of them.

“So if my search for peace is like life,” I said, “then I’ll never find it?”

“No, Biff,” said the mite. “I mean that you’ll eventually find something…something that makes the search worth it in spite of the missing pieces.”

“So,” I said, “the search goes on?”

“Missing pieces and all, Biff,” said the mite.

About a billion dust mites wiggled and giggled and bounced and made clicking sounds across the firmament of my living room carpet.

“Look into the eye of the needle, Biff,” said the mite.

I looked at the needle, right into the eye, and it grew to immense proportions all over my living room, and I was falling upwards through those gargantuan columns again and standing in my living room with the needle in my hand.

Did I mention that I was screaming again?

“So, Biff,” said the fox. “Did you find peace in your carpeting?”

“Not really, fox,” I said. “But I think I’m going to start walking a little softer when I do my morning workouts.”

The fox grinned. I felt a cold chill racing up my spine.

“I wish you wouldn’t do that, fox,” I said.

“So you talked to the mites?” said the fox.
“About a billion of them,” I said. “And I’m still not a hundred percent certain what really happened in my carpeting, but I think my search for peace is starting to make little more sense.”

“How so, Biff?” said the fox.

“Not sure yet, fox,” I said. “But I’ll figure it out.”

(To be continued. But not in a carpet.)

“You could have warned me about the needle, fox.” I said.

“Hey, Biff…what doesn’t kill you…doesn’t kill you.”
Searching for Peace (anywhere but in my living room carpet)

Snow.

I’m sick of snow. The snow here is forever. At first, it’s beautiful, the brilliant whiteness creating Rockwellian images of trees and buildings covered in vanilla icing. But the beauty begins to fade after the third or fourth snow storm, when the snow banks grow into hills and the streets shrink into one lane passages rutted with ice holes.

With each snowfall, a sense of defeat spreads through the vitamin D-robbed population, depleting our energy and ruining our backs from having to lift our shovels higher and higher.

And there’s nothing to smell but the cold as the unrelenting snow suffocates the scent, color and texture of life, transforming the world into a sensual void, a…

“So, Biff,” said the fox, “getting tired of winter? I seem to recall you in an earlier blog saying …winter, I love you.”

“I want to wear t-shirts,” I said.

“That was your first trip out on your snow shoes, remember?” said the fox.

“I want to wear sandals and shorts,” I said.

“You took pictures of snow covered trees,” said the fox. “It was beautiful in the woods…with all that snow.”

“I want to walk barefoot along a beach…feel water lapping at my feet,” I said.

“You read a poem to the woods…to thank the snow covered woods for all the beauty,” said the fox.

“I want to lie in the grass and watch clouds drift into shapes in the sky,” I said.

“Winter! I love you! you said,” said the fox.

“That was a thousand years ago, fox,” I said.

“Sounds like as long as this search for peace of yours is going to last, Biff,” said the fox.
“Then maybe we should get back on it,” I said. “Shave a few hundred years off the search.”

“No more talk of winter blues, vitamin D deficiency, suffocation?” said the fox.

“I’ll be in Cuba in a couple of weeks,” I said. “I’ll just keep that happy thought in mind.”

“OK then, Biff,” said the fox. “Where should be look for peace today? Maybe somewhere exotic? Somewhere warm and sunny, with beaches and Pina Coladas?”

“Maybe somewhere that doesn’t let foxes in,” I said.

“Maybe some place where they show a little more respect for foxes,” said the fox.

Oh hell.

A friend recently shared a post on Facebook. It went like this: The most dangerous phrase in the language is ‘we’ve always done it this way.’

I agree. It gets back to that whole matter of change and how we fear it. We get into cultural ruts. Political stasis. Religious inflexibility. We want to know what we’ve always known…and nothing else. We want to keep doing the same thing day after day, for the rest of our lives. And we want everyone around us to do the same thing…our way. Without change. Without growth. Like putting adaptation and evolution on hold.

We’ve always done it this way.

How many species of animals have perished because they always did it this way? How many empires have crumbled because they always did it this way?

We live in a world of change populated by a dominant species that refuses to change. We create borders to define our sameness and propagate that sameness with advice like: this is the way my parents did it, and their parents and their parents’ parents. We splinter faiths to create intolerant cults that are more political than spiritual and bind the believers into dogmas that will always be done this way…deep into generation after generation.

We’ve always done it this way excludes a better way. We’ve always done it this way dries the well of self-expression. We’ve always done it this way ignores the simple truth that will be the only thing to save our collective ass: maybe we should try something else.

“Like what, Biff?” said the fox.
“I don’t know, fox,” I said. “Just about anything other than what we’re doing to ourselves now. Maybe…get out of bed on the other side. Brush our teeth with the other hand. Say yes instead of no. Smile at someone we’d rather frown at because we don’t approve of their lifestyle, religion, political leanings, sexual orientation, clothing, hair style…you name it.”

“Grin?” said the fox.

“Please don’t grin, fox,” I said.

“Hey, Biff,” said the fox. “Look at me and smile.”

“I know you’re grinning, fox,” I said. “I’m not looking.

“C’mon, Biff, try something else,” said the fox.

“I’m not looking,” I said.

“Be the proof of your own convictions, Biff,” said the fox. “Walk the talk.”

Damn fox.

I looked at the fox. It was awful. All sharp teeth and twisted mouth. Foxes weren’t meant to smile. But I smiled anyway.

“Now, that wasn’t so hard, was it, Biff?” said the fox.

But it was. One of the hardest things I’d ever done. Trying something else is hard. It goes against our grain. Like ritual is hardwired into our genes.

“But some people do change, Biff,” said the fox. “And it isn’t hard for them.”

“Reading my thoughts again, fox,” I said.

“Hey, Biff…if you weren’t such an open book,” said the fox. “But think about it…some people do change…they never say we’ve always done it this way. The say how can we do this better?

“But their numbers are small, fox,” I said. “So small.”

“Hey, Biff,” said the fox. “How big is an acorn?”
“This some kind of game, fox?” I said.

“How big?” said the fox.

“Not big, fox” I said. “Not big at all.”

“And what does it turn into?” said the fox.

I thought about this for a moment, knowing that I should have gotten it right away, knowing it was something I’d heard so many times…knowing I’d forgotten this simple truth.

It made me smile at the grinning fox.

(To be continued. With acorns.)

“So, Biff,” said the fox. “Whatcha going to do in Cuba?”

“Sit on the beach with my daughter and drink pina coladas,” I said.

“Away from the snow?” said the fox.

“Away from the snow.”

(BTW…these snow dune pics were taken today, just outside Fredericton. For all of you poor souls without snow…feel free to come here and take away as much as you want.)
About the Search for Peace

As hopeless as the search might seem, it’s something that should never be abandoned.

“So,” said the Fox. “Does that mean we’ll meet again? Sometime? Somewhere?”

“I think so, fox,” I said. “If you promise not to smile or grin.”

About the Author

Biff Mitchell is a writer/photographer/illustrator living in Atlantic Canada where he is notorious for his *Writing Hurts Like Hell* workshops and his disturbing black gel illustrations. Biff has exhibited his photography, illustrations and constructivist art in galleries around New Brunswick. He’s held writing workshops in dark alleys and hot tubs.

Biff is the author of the world’s first free daily serialized coffee break novel: The Weekly Man.

You can learn more about Biff at biffmitchell.com.