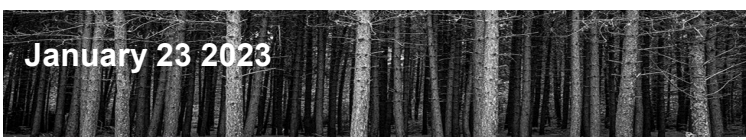


January 23 2023



# ART IN THE TIME OF COVID

## My Story

The Existential Adventures of Crazy Man and the Dog, Sidestepper

### How It Started

On May 14, 2020 at 5:41 PM Atlantic Time, after maddening weeks in COVID-19 isolation, I posted the first episode of The Existential Adventures of Crazy Man and the Dog, Sidestepper.



Three years ago, we were in lockdown. The streets were deserted, outdoor patios closed, stores had somber lineups of masked shoppers...and I missed my trip to Cuba with my daughter by one week.

2020 really sucked.

I had a severe back injury that started almost exactly when the lockdown started and I spent the first few weeks sleeping on the livingroom floor and crawling to the washroom. On one of those days (May 14, 2020) I lay on the floor, propped up against pillows and the wall with my laptop in my lap. I wasn't writing anything...just staring at the screen, thinking about nothing, going crazy.

Suddenly, a thought raced through my head hard enough to make my eyes spin in their sockets (though, that might have been the pain killers). I swear...steam blew out my ears and nose (though, that might have been the pain killers) and I played bounce your head off the wall (though, that might have been the pain killers) for a few hours while I considered my thought.

When my fingers stopped dancing across my thumbs, I put my hands on the keyboard and wrote:

*One day Crazy Man stepped outside to see what it was all about.*

I think we all had that thought around that time. I stared at these words for days, months, eons until they sank in and I realized that I was on to something. The next sentence attached itself to the first one like a block on a blockchain:

*He'd been under his bed crying and drinking wine for so long that he couldn't remember what he was crying about and he'd run out of wine.*

I was out of wine and I was out of pain killers. It was time to test this outside thing. But first, I stayed inside long enough to write the first episode of The Existential Adventures of Crazy Man and the Dog, Sidestepper. You can read it here:

<https://biffmitchell.com/crazy-man>





## Without the pictures, there would be nothing.

Mixing photography with writing can drive you crazy. I know. I've done it. ([A Picture a Day for a Month](#)) By the end of the month, I was nuts. And now I'm doing it again with the Existential Adventures of Crazy Man and the Dog, Sidestepper. The adventures are molded in images so tight that loosening them would be playing with fate. We don't want to play with fate. The only time this didn't happen was the first episode. When it ended, I wondered what kind of image would be appropriate...something that would point the story in the right direction.



I came across an image of the road to Saint Andrews by the Sea and knew right off that was the image to set the tone of their journey.

*And so...Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, stepped and sidestepped onto the path looking for adventure and new meanings but, nothing they really had to think about.*



Beside that image, I found the second one and that's when the images began to inspire the stories...over a hundred and sixty of them. Whenever I saw something that might have a story for the traveling duo, be it a used condom on a sidewalk, a spider in the window or a flock of mean birds by a lake, they all had stories to tell the strange duo.

The images are mostly stark and dark as are the stories they tell of lives unfolding in a world spinning out of control and losing contact with itself. Every animal and object appears to be in conflict in a world of fast-changing rules and only along the path of adventure and new meanings are these conflicts at least seen if not understood.

Some images are disturbing., like the one of the dead squirrel in the street (Episode 61). It was taken off two social media platforms even though that dead squirrel had a story to tell.

*Continued on next page...*





## Without the pictures...

The series has had a deep influence on my photography. Gone are the days of events, macro, portrait and nature. Now, I look for stories, pretty or not. If I don't see a story to click on, I don't click. I suppose all photography should do this but no portrait, bowl of apples, park stature or rolling hills can tell a dead squirrel's tale better than a dead squirrel.



Seeing the world this way—a mammoth jar of stories—feeds my writing, my photography and my ink drawings.



In fact...there is one drawing in the series. Episode 61 shows a demon from my ink series [105 Personal Demons](#). It had to be done.

## Over 150 Bizarre Characters!

Lot's of characters...

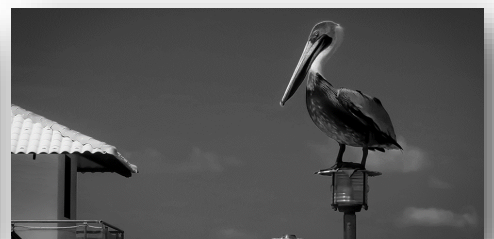
Who says a piece of driftwood has no story of a previous life or a lady bug can't be something else in disguise? A few years ago, it was believed that neutrinos had no mass and now we know they do, creating a huge lie in my second novel (Team Player). So what the hell...let the flower people tell their stories and let the waterfall that want's to be a dog, be a dog. Or at least hear its story.



Matt the Rat and The Dolphin of Diamonds would spew myths and legends given the right ear...one that sees each story as a bubble of stories in a giant bathtub of tales.



Over a hundred characters, including: The Lost Rag Doo, The One Who Waits, The Flower that Never Was, The Lizard Who Wants it All, A Place Called Egglend, the Queen of Every Sandcastle, the Tears of the Planet, the gulls from the Single's Only Seagull Social Club and the Deep Dark Scary Woods. And aliens..





## The Story Behind the Couch by the Deep Dark Scary Woods

It started with a break-in at a gun dealers store while my friend Tanya and I were driving to Saint Andrews by the Sea. The RCMP were cordoning off and closing roads for miles around the area in an effort to capture the thieves, and warnings were issued to the public.



The direct route to Saint Andrews was closed and trucks and cars were lined up on the roadside waiting for the “it’s -OK-to-go-without-being-shot-by-gun-thieves” clearance..

We didn’t feel like waiting. We wanted to fill our lungs with fresh ocean air breezing in from the Bay of Fundy. So we backtracked and found a back road pointing in the direction of the ocean. There was nothing along this road. It was in the center of the deep dark scary woods where bears and rabbits roamed.

Five or ten minutes into the wild woods detour, we spotted a road veering off to the right and a few feet past the turn we saw a couch on the side of the road. Nothing else. No doorway, porch or back yard with a trampoline and couch. Just the couch.

We wondered who might have been sitting there and why they didn’t just bring along a camping chair.

We found a dead moose, but that didn’t shine any light on WHY? WHY? WHY? Was there a couch by the side of the road in the middle of nowhere?

I guess we’ll never know.





Some people wonder what these stories are all about. I do. This is from my website:

## What Is This?

Some say life's a path winding through a forest of endless possibilities. Well... we'll see. In the meantime, Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, will be following that path through the deep dark scary woods on a journey like no other.

And who are Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper?

I'm not sure. I'm still learning.

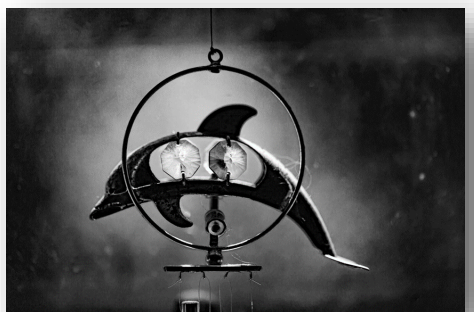
Crazy Man was under his bed with an empty bottle of wine for a long time before he decided to look into "this outside thing." His body exists in one dimension and his mind in another and he's never been sure which is which. Once on the path, the past begins to slip away and he can't remember if he has a kitchen or not. Or a garage.

The dog, Sidestepper, is looking for the mother who abandoned him when he was a puppy, causing his body to stay the same size and his legs to grow into long skinny stilts that make him look strangely like an egret nest perched on top of power lines. But don't think about that...you'll dream. It won't be nice.

And he walks sideways. Always.

After a short confrontational greeting during which Crazy Man assures the dog, Sidestepper, that he's not his mother, the two decide to travel together down the path of adventure and new meanings through the deep dark scary woods.

What awaits them will change their already weird lives into...well... something weirder. You're welcome to join them on their journey but, be warned, nothing good can come of this.



## Being in the Time of COVID

COVID must have been cyanide for extroverts. It was a time of loneliness for many and time of madness for some. It seemed cruel and unforgiving and maybe was.

I'm thinking it was a time of great reflection on where we are and what we're doing and such thoughts change lives.

I took a break from the series after posting a hundred episodes but I posted other things like [CRUEL](#) with my feelings about the COVID thing.

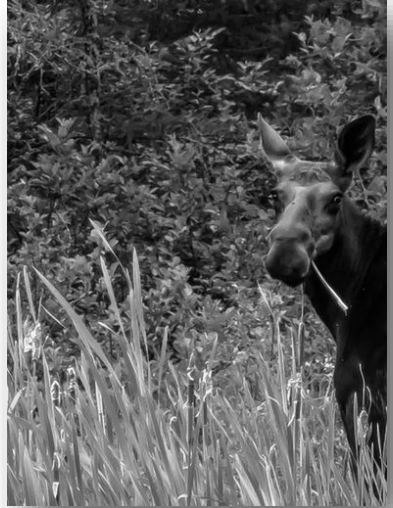




## That's pretty much it...

I'm thankful that this series came out of COVID and at the same time, regretful for the things lost., like possibly my sanity, but that was on the way out anyway.

I know a few other artists whose work was influenced by COVID and I'm guessing just about everyone in the art world, like the rest of the world, was influenced in some way .



For some, it might a have been a single piece of work: a drawing or poem. For others , maybe a series of works. Or maybe just a change in perspective. It would be interesting to hear some of these stories.



So I invite you to write, draw, paint, sculpt, perform, make music, photograph, video tape or just quietly express a moment about how COVID affected you as an artist or affected your art in a meaningful way.



Post it on your blog, website or social media. Show it in galleries or streets, send it to someone as a postcard and then send a picture or statement for the work and I'll post it on my website at:

<https://biffmitchell.com/art-in-the-time-of-covid>

But let's get those stories out before they're forgotten.

