

A list of writer's self-help slogans stares out at me from the cork board on the wall facing my desk. Culled from various sources, the first one reads: "Never open with the weather." I wonder why, considering that's the first thing people always seem to talk about.

Swinging around to the end of August, I'm happy to announce the completion of the first draft of the novel, *All of This Was Mine*. I can say that now: the basic story is done. In the last letter, I was just getting to know Rosina, the woman who saves Tom's life a second time, and whom he marries. Years have passed by now, and Tom and Sarah both have new families. A chance encounter with the best man from his first wedding, and a dream that comes to Rosina, convinces her that Sarah is still alive. Tom takes a train to New Orleans. There he finds her sister Betty, and as in the song, a clandestine meeting is arranged.

A number of revelations have occurred this past year, and especially this summer: writing a novel is not at all like a memoir; it's more like voodoo, puppetry, or magic. First you invent characters, then they come to life. You find yourself dreaming about them. The mind works in mysterious ways, telling us what is real, and what is not. The same mind that teaches us to be skeptical can be induced to take a leap of faith. People can be convinced of the most outlandish and preposterous notions. The trick is in the delivery. I can't really explain the joy this brings to me, a lifelong habit and ongoing quest.

Starting July 1st of 2014, the writing has taken a year, less time out for gigs and travel to the States. It's made me a borderline obsessive, causing me to abandon or postpone other cherished activities: reading for pleasure, naïve painting and poetry excursions, and even songwriting. Aside from a couple of gigs—and a short road trip up to Germany—all I did this summer was ride my bike in the mornings, work on the book, go swimming, and tend the garden.

It makes me feel good to think of myself as a responsible person, a working artist with goals and an agenda. Other times I feel like an old crank building a boat in his back yard. A guy who dreams of sailing away on a boat that will never make it to—let alone leave—the dock. There's remains some backstory to add, and editing and rewriting to do, but I'm going to let the book rest until we get back from the Tønder Festival in September. Edith has been a model of patience through all this writing, and we're due for a vacation. I've never been to Denmark.

When the invitation to Festival came up, I thought it would be fun to make a road trip out of it. I probably should have looked at a map of Europe first. It will take us two nights, plus a short drive to get there on Thursday the 27th, when I'm playing a show at one of the smaller stages. The Townes Van Zandt tribute show will be at the main stage Saturday night. I understand this will be a kind of in-the-round. The players are Hans Theessink, Butch Hancock, and Townes' son, J.T. Van Zandt, Mary Gauthier, and Chris Smithers. I've played a few of these tributes over the years, a couple here in Europe. This will surely be the largest one. I'm always amazed by how far and wide Townes' music and legend has spread.

In other news Bear Family Records in Germany has put out a record with Susie Monick and Mark Sergio Webb recorded live back in 1993 at Pedernales Studio outside Austin. Titled *Mankind*, it's actually a reissue of a record that never saw the light of day. Offering a good snapshot of what we were doing back then, it features a cover photo by Edith, with lots more in the booklet. The CD is nicely packaged. There are two bonus tracks from a concert with Susanne Loacker and Sergio in Switzerland. I'd like to thank my old friend, Harold Eggers for putting this deal together.

*

*

*

*

It would not seem to have much to do with the gentle, pastoral gliding of the Rhine by here—the chaotic flood of migrants fleeing Africa and the Middle East, and trying to get into Europe. Numbering in the hundreds-of-thousands, nobody seems to know what to do with them. Historically, European invasions came from the east. This is not an army of invaders; it's more like a locust swarm of desperate people fleeing war and environmental catastrophe. People in dire situations are going to move; they always have. World-wide, an estimated sixty-million refugees are on the move. Watching this history unfold, I cannot help but reflect that I am a stranger here myself, allowed to live in Switzerland because I'm married to Edith. "*Alle Menschen sind Ausländer—fast überall*," reads a note at the bottom of the new Bear Family CD. "All people are foreigners, almost everywhere."

Best Wishes to all. Support Independent Art and Music! Hope to see you down the trail.

Richard J. Dobson

Diessenhofen am Rhine, 22 August 2015

Mankind, the new CD on Bear Family is available through www.bear-family.com ... For more information and schedule, please see www.richard-j-dobson.ch ... Books and records are available through www.MyTexasMusic.com and www.amazon.com ... European distribution through Brambus Records, www.brambus.com ... For information on the Tønder Festival see: <http://tf.dk/en/>