

*Days up and down they come*

*Like rain on a conga drum*

*Forget most, remember some*

*But don't turn none away .... Townes Van Zandt*

The summer of 2014 will be remembered by some, forgotten by many. Lucky are those for whom forgetting is an option. We tend to remember misfortune, taking good times for granted, those of us lucky enough to live in a place where peace and rule-of-law obtain. The people of Gaza will remember cowering in terror under Israeli airstrikes this summer, as will the Yazidis fleeing ISIS jihadists in northern Iraq. The people in West Africa, where summer has come with the Ebola outbreak, will remember, along with thousands of others trying to reach the shores of Europe in leaky boats.

Time and a place to work in decent surroundings—a *clean, well-lighted place*, with a loving companion, and nothing more disturbing than occasional squalls to ruffle the flow of days—these are precious times, but none we're likely to recall.

It never rained in June. The temperature dropped in July, the rains came, and we rarely saw the sun. Now, with much of August behind us, mushroom pickers in the forests report Mother Nature is three weeks ahead, and we are already into fall. We had such a summer before, back when Edith and I were living in Schaffhausen, when parts of Stein am Rhein flooded. But I've forgotten the year. Running high now, and too cold for swimming, Old Man River—Father Rhine—just keeps rolling along. He doesn't care, doesn't forget or remember.

I suppose my purpose here is to forestall the forgetting; if only for a few people, and only for a short while. This summer has found me still researching late nineteenth-century America. A time when people were just getting used to indoor plumbing and electric lights, they suffered events that ring familiar: economic depression, race riots, strikes, foreign wars, corruption, and devastation from natural causes. The reason for my travels to these forgotten days: I'm writing a novel, and I need to understand the world my characters are living in, what they're thinking about.

I try not to dwell on the wisdom of adding another soon-to-be-forgotten book to the already overcrowded shelves of the world. There are over three-hundred-million people living in America, and most of them will tell you "I could write a book." Of this number, maybe a couple hundred-thousand will go through the arduous, time-consuming process of actually writing one. Of this number, perhaps nine-thousand will be published by a professional firm. Thousands more will go the route of self-publishing, as I have. Most of these books will never be read, much less remembered. The obvious question: Why bother?

If I may dig around in my answer kit, because I've been preparing myself my whole life for this. My ambitions to be a writer pre-date my involvement with songwriting and the music business. When I moved to Nashville in 1971, I thought I stood a better chance of making money there. All I needed was a hit song to propel me into the position where I would find time to write. In my naivety I figured this was going to take me a couple of years, along with giving me plenty of material. Little

did I imagine how those years would stretch into nearly thirty before *Gulf Coast Boys* came out in 1998. *Pleasures of the High Rhine* followed in 2011, and *The Years the Wind Blew Away, Don Ricardo's Life and Times* the following year. A whole different critter from a memoir, a novel has different requirements. But it's just another step. You may hope people will read it, just the same as you hope they're going to like your song. You write to do justice to the task, to give the story life.

Another reason is merely to keep my brain alive, making it do something we haven't tried before. I recall a piece of graffiti from Browns Diner, a Nashville watering hole that said: "If you're not composing, you're decomposing." Muscles atrophy from lack of use, and so do brains. Artists don't have to retire; they scoff at the notion.

As might be expected, my songwriting output has diminished lately, but songs and prose are not mutually exclusive. I'm hoping this is just temporary lapse until I achieve more momentum with the book. As I remarked elsewhere, if I get a good song idea I'm going to be on it like a blue crab on a chicken neck.

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Fall in real time will be bearing down on us soon enough. We will be heading back across to Texas for gigs in early November. I've just had a schedule update posted on the website. Best to all, hope to see you down the road.

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