



Have I mentioned that I like birds?

Yes, that was *sarcasm*. And unlike Donald Trump, I understand the meaning of the word. I'm well aware I've written about birds here. Ad nauseam.

(Your nauseam, not mine. I could go on forever.)

I would say I'm sorry... but as Ali McGraw told Ryan O'Neal, love means never having to say you're sorry, and I love you guys. So, I can't apologize for this particular obsession. I can only try to woo you into my headspace in hopes that you, too, become obsessed. Trust me, you won't be sorry.

My friend and fellow *Lowcountry Weekly* columnist Laura Packard – isn't she great?! – sent me an article the other day, saying "made me think of you." The article was called ["Why Do Writers Love Birding So Much?"](#)

Whoa, hold on!? Writers love birding? This was news to me! I knew that *this* writer – yours truly – loved birding, but I didn't know it was a *thing*.
What a happy revelation.

Like me, the writer of the article, Katherine Towler, discovered birding in her middle

years. And like me, when she did, it was a flat-out, slap-yourself-upside-the-noggin epiphany.

“The bittern, and the many birds that followed, were like messengers telling me to wake up,” she writes. “How had I reached my forties without knowing these extraordinary creatures? How could I have been so blind, so self-absorbed, so just plain witless?”

Girl, I feel you.

Towler goes on to say, “Writing demands a strange double vision, with a gaze focused simultaneously outward and inward. In order to write works of substance that speak to our times, we must be connected to human society and culture, but the act of writing requires separating from the din of people and news and striving. In the years I have spent writing ... I have shut out a great deal. I have stayed sequestered in my house for days on end and maintained an almost maniacal focus on myself.”

Yes! Yes! All of the above!

“With birds I have found another way of being in the world,” she continues. “I am released from myself instead of sent deeper within... Until I went out looking for birds, I did not understand how much I hungered to leave the self-consciousness of the writer behind.”

By the time I read that paragraph, I was weepy with the merciful relief that comes from knowing somebody sees and understands you. This is what good writing – the best writing – does. This is the gift readers long to receive and writers long to give and I am both.

Most writers are, by nature, fiercely independent. No, not in a “Leave me alone, I can take care of myself!” kind of way – in fact, many of us need considerable help with that – but in an ornery, “Don’t tell me what to think or feel!” kind of way. We’re constantly cleaning the lens through which we view the world . . . evaluating our own biases, peering beneath the layers of our personal and cultural predilections, trying to keep our perceptions untainted by popular opinion. At the same time, we’re also passionate universalists – always hoping to tap in to something essential and true about the human condition. Something that binds us all together.

A prickly, particular universalist. That's me, and I think it probably describes a lot of my writerly brethren and sistren. It's a beast of a paradox to wrangle while also trying to get the laundry done and the carpool driven.

For me, that paradox manifests in a deep aversion to joining clubs, organizations, and even social cliques. I'm sure it's true that membership has its privileges... but I'll just have to do without, because I make a terrible member. I can never get with the program – can't sign off on all the beliefs and goals and requirements. So I end up being the resident contrarian, which is not as fun as it sounds. (I *do* belong to a book club, and bless their hearts, they put up with me . . . but I'm sure they will vouch for what I'm saying here.) Also, I dislike the fact that joining one group often means pointedly *not* joining another. For instance, I could never join a political party, not only because I can't agree with either party's entire platform – which I can't – but because joining one party means actively *opposing* the other party. And I have *friends* in that party! And they have some good ideas! (The other one, too.) Sorry, can't go there. Not in this political climate, anyway.

But Writers Who Love Birding? Now there's a club I could join. I think I could sign on for the whole shebang. Of course, seeing as how we're talking about *writers* – who love *birding* – I seriously doubt such a club exists.

And that's okay, because I prefer to watch birds alone. Big surprise.

Here's something great about birding that Katherine Towler doesn't mention – and I think it applies to most everybody, not just those of us who toil in the field of language. Today, more than ever before, we live in a media-soaked world of spin and propaganda, fabrication and artifice, optics and imagery. I don't know about you, but increasingly, I find myself thrashing around for a reliable source . . . an honest broker . . . an unbiased report. They're damn near impossible to come by. For somebody like me – a bloodhound for truth and balance – this state of affairs causes great frustration and anxiety.

But then I look out my kitchen window and . . . ahhhh . . . there they are. My favorite cardinal couple, dancing around the bird feeder like they do whenever I remember to fill it. He, a burst of ruby red against the sun-dappled grey-green Spanish moss; she, all mauves and pinky-browns and bright beak. My gaze is riveted by their unexpected beauty, my heart rate slows, I hold my breath, willing them to stay. Just stay there, doing their thing. Just stay there, being birds.

They're not putting on a show. They're not preening for a photo op or warbling out both sides of their mouths. They don't give a dang what I think of them. They're not out to impress. They're not trying to look younger than they are (there's no bird Botox) or richer than they are (no tax returns to hide) or thinner than they are (no Spanx) or in any way *better* than they are. Birds keep it real.

And for this, they are perfectly perfect.

Margaret Atwood and Jonathan Franzen and all the other big-time writers in Towler's article have their own reasons for birding. I'm sure my friend Jeff Kidd, editor of the *Beaufort Gazette*, has his reasons, too. (By the way, Jeff takes the most astounding bird photos. Check them out if you haven't!) Some of those reasons we all share, but I can only speak for myself when I say that birding gives me something I desperately need in this increasingly virtual world of screens – where everybody's more interested in how things look than how things *are*, and it's harder and harder to tell the difference.

Watching birds reminds me that there is still such a thing as truth. And it's not just "out there" – it's all around me.

It may be hard to find through the many screens that fracture my view into bits and shards and kaleidoscopic distractions. But truth exists, and I can see it every day through my kitchen window, in my own backyard.

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