

[Back to Article](#) [Click to Print](#)**TIME**

Monday, Dec. 01, 1997

THANKSGIVING INVENTORY

By Roger Rosenblatt

Driving on the highway, I am stuck behind a black delivery truck from East Coast Custom Car. On the back of the truck in bright yellow lettering is a list of things sold at East Coast Custom Car: stereos, alarm systems, bed liners, 4X4 accessories, trailer hitches, fog lights, wheels "and so much more." I make a note to include these items in my accounts, then turn off toward the bay, which is winter blue already. The powerboats have disappeared. The cormorants swarm in a black mass near the mouth of a creek, their snake heads craning for invisible fish. I watch for a while, slip in a tape of k.d. lang and add these things to my list as well.

Then I drive home, where I make more entries still. In the mail are new pictures of the children; I share a cup of hot chocolate with the dog; the wind kicks up; the fat pine on the front lawn trembles its skirts in the late afternoon; shadows smudge the hedges; day hook-slides into night. I think of high school baseball, then basketball. The orange moon hangs so low it looks as if it is about to fall to earth and bounce.

This inventory is getting out of hand. Last week alone I made more than a thousand new entries, and I never erase the old ones. If this keeps up, I will require a dozen ledgers, and even then my accounts will be woefully incomplete. Every year it is the same. I prepare my inventory for Thanksgiving, to say grace, and always come up short.

In a different season, W.D. Snodgrass wrote a poem called "April Inventory," an ambling elegiac list consisting mostly of the things he had gladly failed at. His poem ends on the lines "There is a loveliness exists,/Preserves us, not for specialists." Specialists were the target of his complaint. The successful people around him had zeroed in on particular and limited interests and had been rewarded for the categories they had made of their lives, while he, in unsuccessful contrast, had flopped about and picked up a few scattered items of value, like loveliness.

My inventory is sort of like that. It is a record of haphazard events, the serendipity that Jane Jacobs used

to say made for a pleasant city. So I jot down the stuff I bump into, or that bumps into me--nature's bewildering accidents, good and bad, ridiculous, astonishing. The task is overwhelming.

Did you know that there is a species of turtles called Kemp's ridley, which are born on a nesting beach in Mexico (only a few survive) and then swim madly out to sea, where they are carried by the Gulf Stream all the way up to Long Island, N.Y. (it takes three to five years), where they feed for a year on the defenseless spider crab as a training exercise before they take off again and swim down to the Chesapeake Bay area in Maryland, where they eat the much tougher blue claw crab for which the Long Island boot camp has prepared them? Needless to say, they made my inventory.

As did the deer, the full-size antlered stag I saw the other day at dusk, as I was walking down the main street of our village. Suddenly he stepped out of a driveway, looked about to panic, saw it was only me and trotted, head high, down the center of the street.

I put him on the page with Charlie, a homeless man with sleek black hair who hung around my former neighborhood in New York City. One day Charlie put together an entire living room on the sidewalk in front of a church. He had scavenged bits of furniture from the local garbage--a couch, a couple of chairs, an area rug, a coffee table, a standing lamp (plugged into nothing)--and had set up a pretty attractive place. I sat with him, and we talked as more purposeful people navigated around the furniture and us, and seemed not to mind. Clearly I was boring Charlie, because he soon dismissed me. "I've enjoyed our little chat," he said, "but you'll have to excuse me. I'm expecting guests."

Lives this month: two sweet young friends have babies, their firsts. Two brave old friends fight cancer. Another attempts to resist a deteriorating muscle disorder.

Deaths this month: the philosopher Isaiah Berlin; Victor Mills, the father of the disposable diaper; and Francine Katzenbogen, a lottery winner who lavished her millions on her many beloved cats. Miss Katzenbogen died of an asthma condition severely aggravated by her cats. Cross reference: Katzenbogen/cats.

The moon is sky-high now, a small pale eye at the top of the dark. A light plane blinks by overhead. I get a phone call from a close friend whose child is gravely ill. Too many loved ones in distress this Thanksgiving, too many entries of that sort. In adversity they conduct themselves like soldiers. A sleepless night. A new day full of migrating ducks and edible smells from the kitchen. I am ill-prepared again, but I give it a try:

Thank you for this sublime mess. For human courage and for turtle courage. For cormorants, philosophers, Miss Katzenbogen, k.d. lang, disposable diapers, moons, dogs, deer, Charlie, trailer hitches, fog lights, wheels and so much more.

Find this article at:

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,987465,00.html>

Copyright © 2012 Time Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited.

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Add TIME Headlines to your Site](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Customer Service](#)