

crooked letter 4: A Few of My Favorite Things

It has been a while since my last crooked letter, because depression decided to gnaw on my head. The late fall eats away at my defenses, and last fall devoured me. When consumed, I forget that I love the world. I forget that I am thankful. Gratitude cannot withstand the acid bath of despair. I do not feel grateful when little gives me pleasure. I do not feel grateful when despair shakes me. I do not feel grateful when I want to die.

I was swallowed, but I am not easily digested. So it vomited me up. On the other side of December, I struggle and stumble and burn. I can't wash off all the stomach acid. Parts of me still are being feasted upon. I must reseal my cracked soul with joy and thankfulness.

I do feel better. The lengthening days help. Maybe the medicine is working this time, though having had two medicines fail me; I do not count on it to make a lasting difference. Depression is cyclic. Maybe like a traveling sideshow it decided to move on until next season. Whatever the cause, I feel better. When I feel better, I begin to remember what I love. I give thanks.

The other day, I wrote a Top Ten list for *The Satellite*, which most likely will be published sometime this spring. Unless written satirically, a Top Ten list is a list of what gives you joy, a list of what you are glad to encounter in this world of ours, a list of things you want others to experience. It is a list of blessings, a list of things you are appreciative of. I would not have been able to write such a list a month ago.

It took me a bit to get started. I have not felt kindly disposed to much of anything for a long while. My "praise-the-world" muscles are weak. Unlike the song in *The Sound of Music*, "When despair bites, when mis'ry stings, when I'm feeling sad. . . remember[ing] my favorite things" cannot save me from "feel[ing] so bad." The boulder rolling down the hill time and time again is a source of meaning in *myths*. I struggle with bitterness. But in the midst of the leftover remnants of that dragging ass feeling, my heart opens, and I love again.

When I feel good, remembering my favorite things *can* make me feel "so glad." And while it is not insurance against the next infestation, it might make the protective seals around my head and heart a little stronger.

My bouts with despair have taught me how precious joy is. When I feel better, I enjoy love for love's sake, joy for joy's sake. I have learned to savor it because I have no idea how long it will last.

So in that spirit and in no particular order, here are fifty things I love:

(WARNING! The management must caution our gentle readers that the list below is like the plate of food you get after going up to the all you can eat bar. There is way more here than any sane person should consume in one sitting.)

1. The **Alachua County Library District** has a damn fine collection and helpful librarians. It is one of my all time favorite recreational places. Because I'm a library geek, many of the things I love I found there, and so I've listed the call numbers (underlined) to aid you, if you are so moved, in your search for a few of my favorite things.

2. **Diamanda Galas' music** is gorgeous, profound, disturbing and awesome in the true sense of that word. Her most recent work, *Defixiones/Will and Testament*, is "dedicated to the forgotten of the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocides that occurred between 1914 and 1923." Amazing and worth paying money for. Better yet ask the library to order it and be the first one to get to check it out.

3. **Terry Pratchett's *Discworld*** series lampoons not only fantasy fiction, my favorite popcorn reading, but also all manor of modern life. The characters are intriguing and believable. It is laugh aloud funny and surprisingly moving. The series is for adults, but he has written three Discworld titles for young readers. *The Wee Free Men* and *Hatful of Sky* get special mention for having a wonderful, strong girl as the main character. FANTASY PRATCHET or YA FANTASY PRATCHET

4. **Jane Austen's novels** sparkle. Her comic characters still can be found walking among us. In a time when most novels portrayed women as stereotypes and props to the plot, Jane Austen gave us real women- often annoying but real. I have read *Pride and Prejudice* close to fifty times, more for the difficult family dynamics than the love story. And her last novel, *Persuasion* is lovely, sweet and sad. FICTION AUSTEN, J

5. **Friday Night Services** have a little prayer, a little singing, a little silence, a little *schpiel*, some sitting, some standing, some bowing, some *Shabbat Shalom's* and tunes that carry you through the week, all in about an hour. Who wouldn't want to taste a little *tikkun olam, nu?*

6. **Mac's Drive Thru** has crushed ice, real cherry cokes, good greasy burgers and well treated workers. They are located on NW 10th Ave just a little west of Main Street. But you better go during the week. They are not open on weekends.

7. **Gainesville's Oak trees** are, after my family and jumbo sweet iced tea, what I missed most when I lived on the West Coast. The trees are beautiful and soothing in a twisted, Southern gothic kind of way.

8. **Maya Deren** created lush visual feasts that demonstrate incredible technical proficiency and leave the viewer with a beautiful, gladly sad feeling. Video Rodeo doesn't have any of her work yet, so call them to encourage them to add her to their collection.

9. ***The Long Road to Freedom: An anthology of black music*** will make you weep. It is a stunning collection of African American music and an important reminder of just how indebted our culture is to Black Americans. You will find it in Books on CD section, not the music section. CD 781.6 LON 2001.

10. When I was just a wee lass of twenty-one, **RE/Search #13: Angry Women** introduced me to the work of amazing women artists, performers and theorists. The example of the women interviewed gave me courage to become the all around freak I am today.

11. One of the funniest performance pieces I have ever seen was Van Choojitarom's **American Santa II**. This Santa workout had the audience howling and garnered a standing ovation for Mr. Choojitarom.

12. If you like passion, politics and poetry, you must check out the next show put on by **The Apartment Poets**. They have craved out a niche of spoken word on UF campus. Folks consistently give them high marks for their shows. They do regular gigs at The Orange and Brew in the Reitz Union. And if you really like spoken word and poetry, check out the weekly Poetry Jam at the Civic Media Center.

13. One of the most stunning piece of theater I ever saw was **Anne Bogart's Going, Going, Gone**. Imagine the emotional subtext of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf* slammed into dialogue about physics, art and the meaning of life delivered by phenomenal performers, and you have a tiny taste of what it was like.

14. It is not surprising that I love **Shakespeare's plays**. The emotions are big. You don't need much in the way of set or costumes. It doesn't matter what the gender or sex is of the performer; if people complain, you can tell them that there is precedence. The story lines are over-the-top yet the characters feel so real. My two favorite plays are *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Check out the film version of *The Tempest* by Derek Jaram (DVD DRAMA TEM). 822.33 is dedicated to Mr. Shakey's plays.

16. I'll admit there are parts of **Sally Potter's films** are a bit pretentious and some times even goofy. But her movies spend the night and then linger over brunch with you. *Orlando* (VIDEO DRAMA ORL), based on the book by Virginia Wolf, moves a sex changing, ageless character through a number of significant historical epochs in British history. And *The Tango Lesson* (VIDEO FOREIGN TAN), combines gorgeous dance numbers with a strong female character.

17. **8 Women** is divalicious. It's French musical with to-die for costuming and a luscious cast that includes Catherine Deneuve, Isabelle Huppert and Fanny Ardant. DVD FOREIGN EIG

18. In my mid-twenties, when I got trapped in an endless desert of writer's block, **Natalie Goldberg's Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within** was an oasis. 808.02 GOL

19. When the shitty self-hate voices drown out everything else, **Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness by Sharon Salzberg** gives me some comfort. Check-out-able books: *Faith* (294.3092 SAL 2002) and *A Heart As Wide As the World* (294.3444 SAL 1997).

20. Reading **books by Sylvia Boorstein** is like getting a cup of hot soup, some buttered toast and a huge hug your Jewish-Buddhist Nana. A nice example of this mix is *That's Funny, You Don't Look Buddhist: On Being a Faithful Jew and a Passionate Buddhist*. Check-out-able books: *Pay Attention, For Goodness' Sake* (294.35 BOO 2002) and *It's Easier Than You Think* (294.34 BOO 1995).

21. If you like fantasy *and* the teen “problem” novel (I grew up with both), the **Harry Potter** books are a great mix of the two. jFANTASY ROWLING

22. As a child I was a voracious reader, and while I loved learning things, I also longed to escape. I read fantasy books featuring girls, like Robin McKinley's *The Hero and the Crown* and *The Blue Sword*, again and again. In retrospect, the writing in books like these is not world class, but girls kicking ass with swords and/or magic more than makes up for somewhat lackluster prose. YA FANTASY MCKINLEY

23. Nick Cave takes on mythic qualities with his new album, *The Lyre of Orpheus*. You can find this one at Hyde and Zekes.

24. *The Cellos Suites inspired by Bach* is soothing and achingly lovely. The cello is one of my favorite instruments, and Yo Yo Ma's work on this album is so good. CD CLASS BAC

25. Songs like *Bei Mir Bist Du Schoen* and commercials in Yiddish along with gems like *Samson and Delilah* make *Music from the Yiddish Radio Project* a must listen for the lover of yiddishkeit (things Yiddish/Jewish). Books on CD CD 791.447 MUS.

26. In high school one of the few records I actually spent my pittance of an allowance on was *Ella in Rome: The Birthday Concert*. Scat is not dirty; it is divine.

27. I love folk and fairy tales. I engulfed collection after collection when I was in high school. One of my favorite collections is *The Maid of the North: Feminist Folk Tales from Around the World* (j398.2 PHE). *The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales* (j398.2 HAM) is another great book.

28. In *Negrophobia* blonde Bubbles Brazil confronts the Flaming Tar Babies, Flapjack Ninja Queens, Uncle H. Rap Remus, the Zombie Master, evil Buppets, Talking Dreads, and Fred Farrakhan MacMurray, the Flubberized Nubian and her Negrophobia. This novel by Darius James, writer and performance artist, is gorgeous and grotesque. It will push your buttons. It will make you think about race, racism and white “fear of a black planet.”

29. I like reading personal narratives, because I enjoy seeing how people untangle the events of their lives and weave them into meaning. *Lovesong: Becoming a Jew* by **Julius Lester** is masterful tapestry. BIO LESTER, J

30. **Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue*** eases me into writing. CD JAZZ DAV

31. Ah, how I love the sulky, smoky, slinky rendition of ***Sugar in My Bowl*** by **Nina Simone**.

32. Marjane Satrapi's graphic novels ***Persepolis*** and ***Persepolis 2: The story of a return*** will give you an understanding of the Iranian Revolution that you could only get through the eyes of a intelligent, sometimes clueless and oh so painfully real young woman.

33. **Kim Klein's *Fundraising for Social Change*** is the bible for those who want to raise money for scrappy organizations that know that "the impossible will take a little while." You can check out a copy, if you become a member of the Civic Media Center.

34. Open 24 hours serving filling and cheap food, **diners** are a life saver when the desire to get in a late night writing fix collides with a desperate need to get the hell out of the house. If I hit a writer's block, I can spend time ease dropping on the other freaks that come out at 2 a.m. on a weeknight.

35. Calling **Carolee Schneemann's *Fuses*** art-house porn might be a disservice, but it is sort of true. I like it because it is beautiful, weird, moving and hot. You won't find this at the library.

36. All perverts should read ***Public Sex: The Culture of Radical Sex*** by **Patrick Califia**. The book will be difficult for those scared of or offended by "extreme" sexual practices, but his ("her" at the time of writing) examination of sexual politics and culture in America is a must read for anyone who thinks seriously about sex.

37. **Late night bike rides in the summer** are cool and quiet.

38. **Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*** throws a whiny, weak girl into an *Alice in Wonderland* world filled with ghosts and spirits, where she grows into some of her strength. DVD JDRAMA WAL

39. If you love the physical act of writing, as I do, and you have a huge writer's bump from pressing too hard, which I do, then **fountain pens** are a joy to write with. Even the ink all over your fingers is lovely. Of course, I find hands covered in ink sexy.

40. "**Summertime** and the living is easy." I've got renditions by Ella Fitzgerald, Doc Watson and Janis Joplin. I even have a bizarre early Ska version.

41. **Fresh flowers and candles** make a dinner table into an altar of graciousness.

42. What I like to call the Dead Days- **Halloween, Dias de Muertos and Samhain**- are a powerful time for reflection. Ritually honoring the dead and remembering our own mortality may help us savor our what ever life we have left.

43. I am a sucker for a **good dance number**, especially if it is in a film about dance. Some of my all time favorites: *Shall We Dance?* (The Japanese film not the crappy American knock-off for those too lazy to read subtitles) *Strictly Ballroom* and any thing choreographed by Bob Fosse: *Cabaret*, *All That Jazz*, etc.

44. Tonight, as I was biking home, another damn man reminded me that I am a woman, that I am prey. Drag King shows give me a chance to drop that burden and watch women fuck with what it means to be male. So I give major props and thanks to Gainesville's **House of Ma** for creating, with their crowd pleasing performances, such a riotous sanctuary from the sexist shit.

45. The pro-woman, sassy, sexy rapping of **Salt N' Pepa** takes me back to when I was cutting my teeth on feminism and learning just how much I like shaking my ass.

46. I love the trees. I love Southern accents. I love the weather, even the humidity (though late August is a beast). I love jumbo iced beverages. I love the laziness. I love **North Central Florida**

47. San Francisco is a wonderful city, but I don't miss living there. But when I see the pathetic excuses that "decorate" our town, it makes me long for the incredibly vivid, luscious **murals in the Mission District of San Francisco**. Hell, even the McDonald's in my neighborhood had a better mural than anything I've seen here. One of the best is on The Women's Building.

48. I didn't believe it was true, but **New York pizza by the slice** bought and eaten in New York City is better than "New York style" pizza by the slice anywhere else. For that matter, so are New York bagels.

49. I love **learning**. One of my favorite things is to diving into a new area of study and read everything I can find.

50. One of the best decisions I ever made was to go to **New College of Florida**, the funky little college down in Sarasota, FL. I got to feed my head lots of thick theory. The professors at New College genuinely enjoyed teaching. The students were voracious, passionate learners. And I got academic credit for writing, directing and performing. What more could an artsy, geeky girl have asked for?