

The Yesterday Project: One

BEN & SANDRA DOLLER



THE YESTERDAY PROJECT: ONE

BEN & SANDRA DOLLER

ESSAY PRESS EP SERIES



#31

ESSAY PRESS EP SERIES

In the Essay Press EP Series, we give extended space and time to some of our favorite authors currently developing new book-length projects.

CONTENTS

<i>Series Editors</i>	Maria Anderson Andy Fitch Ellen Fogelman Aimee Harrison Courtney Mandryk Victoria A. Sanz Ryan Spooner Randall Tyrone	INTRODUCTION	v
		ONE	1
		AUTHOR BIOS	42
<i>Series Assistants</i>	Cristiana Baik Ryan Ikeda Christopher Liek		
<i>Cover-image</i>	<i>Blessed Food</i> , Courtney Mandryk		
<i>Cover Design</i>	Courtney Mandryk		



INTRODUCTION

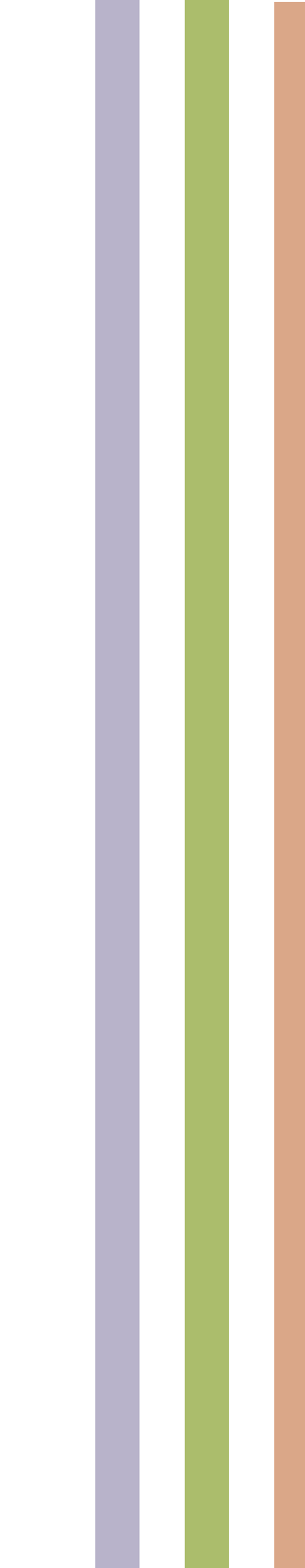
The Yesterday Project is a blind collaboration: each of us separately wrote a document recording the previous day, every day, for 32 days, without sharing our work. There were no other constraints except that each piece had to begin with the word “yesterday,” and no discussion of the writing, process or content was permitted before or after. (On two different days, a word-count constraint was agreed upon beforehand.)

The collaboration took place over the summer in the shadow of a diagnosis of life-threatening illness: Melanoma cancer, Stage 3. The resulting work reads as part reality show, quotidian performance, conceptual essay, documentary, love letter, health-food cookbook and living will. On the 31st day, we performed a live reading of three sections of the work, surprising each other with the intersections and differences between our experiences as art. This is our declaration of dependence—an investigation of shared identity, adulthood and the risks inherent in deep connection. An incessantly honest chronicle of the dailiness of struggle, creativity, relationship

and environment, *The Yesterday Project* projects the imagination of a future as a radical act.

The Yesterday Project is forthcoming from Sidebrow in fall 2015. This chapbook presents the first seven days of the project.

one



July 17, 2014

Yesterday we woke up to vegan food over Mendo. Over the fog coast and ran into Sid on the way in who said, I'm only the kitchen manager. But he is so much more. Bought his book on the way out *Approaching the Natural*. So it was like running into natural, running into an approach. The hostess sat us a skinny grump. You had the view of the redwoods, I had the view of the people. Which is natural. Lots of children with eyes and everybody is somebody's daughter. What a perfect daughter you have somebody said to someone else. The one table with two unbelonging, the woman much happier to see her woman than to see her child. The one little boy in a green hoodie carted off screaming, But I don't want to go. I say it's difficult when you get language and are able to say what you want and more importantly what you don't want even as it is happening to you. He walks out small behind his mother of his own free will hollering about how I don't want to go. That was breakfast with cashew sauce and polenta and kale which I thought was spinach but you told me was dino kale.

Yesterday you drove us up into Mendocino to the pipe shop over the hill and under the feather trees. I walked with my bum knee on the cobbles and we got a tour of the glass blown into bowls for the perfect smoke. The energetic hippie wouldn't stop. An old folks walked in, lured by the ceramic cups in the window that you told me are for keeping your stash. I just thought it was bait & switch, smart hippies. The old folk took one look and left. Later I saw them crossing another street holding hands, all beige and crochet and wooden buttons and not buying weed pipes for later or for their grandkids like I'd hoped.

There was another impromptu gathering of happy old women in the bookstore. This is the place to come for old women. If you die and leave me old alone, I'm moving here with my knitteds. But remind me not to put up a sign about my Russian-English speaking dog who needs a play date, someone will write how arrogant and that will be the end of that.

Yesterday we bought socks. For \$15.99, \$12.99, and \$9.00. There were no cheap slippers so we got some wool, some bamboo, some hemp wear for our tootsies. I drove us back after reading Mark's and Emily's and Chad's and Barb's and my mother's emails on the phone in the car in front of the cooperative in the old church.

Then the sun came out and vitamin D3 was possible and we all lay in it on the deck over the river—we two and the two dogs—as if it had been months since seen. After lentil soup with carrots, kale, cabbage,

potatoes, yam and a flavor tray, we walked them up the hill with brush all around, curling around the lip of the river where the RVs park. One happy white dog in a boat below. One enormous malamute approaches. My bum knee. I try to convince you how unusual and chic I would be, a girl with a limp. I wear pleated high waist jeans you found for me, rolled up over my black boots with a black X tee shirt and a black & white polka dotted sweater.

Later we read and wrote and had a glass of wine with the quinoa and broccoli you made. There was no TV, no movies. I did Ashtanga primary series on the deck. I read Maria Damon on the margins and Sarah Bay-Cheng on Gertrude Stein. Poets are the only scholars. You read Ben & Feliz & Brett and Harry Mathews. I researched adoption and saw photos of unwanted children I didn't want to see.

I forgot about our morning bath together in the profound clawfoot and washing my hair with African black soaps and you rinsing it and trying to figure how to build me the same setup, the faucet I can control from within the bath, without standing. I forgot about the long night, how I woke up thinking about your cancer and how will we know if it's come back and when and what are the chances and why do they keep talking about three-year, five-year survival, and what is the mark. When will I know if you've survived.

07.17.14

Yesterday arrived, we didn't yet have this plan. We had another plan: go to the Raven restaurant and try the vegan biologique health breakfast here in Mendo. We are on vacation and the kitchen is tough to work in, and we are healing, and we are here. We went there. But first we woke up. I woke up first, two hours before I woke you up, and I read almost 70 pages of Harry Mathews's *My Life in CIA*, kind of a record for me—I am feeling this vacation—it's a page-turner, and I started to tell you about it when I woke up, but when you asked if we could read it together I didn't want to read it anymore.

So we drove to the Raven, it was farther than I thought, but I knew it was on the right and it was. Eco-lodge chic, not really chic at all, just wood everywhere, probably indigenous redwood paneling not in the reclaimed variety we see so often in San Diego, more the hunting club kind that betrays no gesture towards hipness. Which is what is cool about it up here, and I'm glad you had the idea to drive up. It's also always chilly, and we needed supplies from the town. You were underwhelmed by your polenta,

you're in the quest for never-ending vegetables because you want me to live.

I think we've been to the town before, but when we talk about it, we can't remember, though I think I convinced you then you convinced me, now I'm not really sure, but we've been to a few towns like this before, we keep comparing, Hudson NY, Canandaigua NY, Ithaca NY, most of coastal Oregon, hippie towns with water, Co-ops and fog. We did the walking tour. I loved the way you were happy. We went into a shop with beautiful pottery and glasswork for smoking marijuana. The owner was so nice! I didn't know there existed both a decorative glass industry and a functional glass industry. I didn't know that bongos and bowls could sell for five thousand. We bought the Panda. He cost \$40. We bought some notebooks elsewhere that cost almost \$20 each. We were really vacationing now. We went to a store just for socks. \$40! We walked by the music festival. Music escaped the tent. We went to the co-op in the church. \$70—much on my favorite nut butter famous for healing adopted nutrient-deficient children.

I hope I heal. You are doing everything you can. But there is an air of eulogy in the way you Google our prospective adoptive children. I saw you doing yoga on the deck, the ten minutes the sun was out, when my P90x3 was over. I can't believe what you are capable of. I tried to do the moves behind you, me your big lumbering shadow. My anklebone couldn't take the pressure.

We walked R & K and saw a man with a huge malamute. Luckily, I had both dogs because of your bum knee. The dogs freaked out, but not too bad.

I wanted to do it with you all day, but we hugged a lot instead. It was a busy day. We wrote for an hour in our separate rooms, some project I started about writing a book called Book. We'll see. We had soup and later quinoa with broccoli and beets and potatoes from the pressure cooker. When I thought I turned the pressure cooker off, I turned it up. When I thought I double-checked, I turned the other burner on high, without lighting it (it's an antique Wedgwood). Fumes set off the fire alarm, and I waved my iPad at it to turn it off. I could have killed us all.

July 18, 2014

Yesterday yesterday started. Movement in the bed, chronological. Fast morning and warm tea, getting colder in the carafe. A new project, a reality show. Each day a performance of living. Each record a matter. This is what it's like to be here.

In college there was a younger girl with attention problems who made a photography art project called "This is what it's like in here" showing how sad it was to be her, sad little negligee and fake blood and sorry eyes. I always hated that line, that direction, that girl. Pity the animal.

This is what. Westerns with Joseph Cotton and Gary Cooper and the Preston Sturges actor who survived. No popcorn. Raw goji berry chocolate pieces. Cauliflower steak and tofu steak and wild rice and spinach salad. Lentil soup. Egg frittata with red peppers. Flavor tray. Gertrude Stein and Maria Damon. Bob Kaufman. Fanny Howe at the end of it all, her wild childhood now in pieces.

I emailed the doctor who didn't get the slides of your original lesion, no word on the real diagnosis, no word on.

The meditation walk over the cliff over the sea which we couldn't see for the crying out fog. A roost of buzzards behind the Ledford Inn. Silent walking and pointing. When we walk the dogs in silent, the world makes the walk. Many men in trucks pulled over eating sandwiches and burritos, not looking at us, not looking at anything. Thanks for the break. Each man in his own truck alone.

Except for one truck with seven dogs and a living woman. She comes chasing after us asking if her dogs can play with our dogs. I don't care if they bite mine, she says, I don't care. I wouldn't have gotten another dog, but he's her son you see. He's part pit bull and lab. Look how much they want to play, she says as they rip at their lines and snarl and lash and teeth and super fun. She is like me but wearing crocs. I'm wearing pebble print skinny jeans, my bone print black sweatshirt, the new GBV "cool earth tour" pink tee, the Parisian wooly scarf with the holes, a red hoodie, black ankle moto boots. New socks. I think about this.

Two hot baths yesterday and oil. Some painful writing. Painful is the name of the Western town Gary Cooper and his half wit ride into with the wrong initials, MJ, Melody Jones. Why does Gary Cooper take himself so unseriously. Why does he look so much like Tom Beller.

Yesterday my sisters and their sisters and brothers scattered the ashes of their original mother into the lake in upper Washington. I think this happened, but I have no proof.

Yesterday you transcribed and I inscribed some more, for what. The sound of your typing was maddening and I wrapped up my little pink dog in a wooly blanket. You had Ronald Johnson and I had Kiki Smith and that was a reversal.

I saw the mugs of my dream in the store, small and bright with no handles, matte not shiny, monochrome. We didn't buy them. We ate our soup from Lucite green mugs on the back deck over the river where the people still stay in their RVs, never come out. Larger and larger birds with red beaks flew by us on their way down, some white birds circled the river bank and the RVs. You call them all eagles though they are hawks or falcons or buzzards or swoops.

In the end I was nauseous and wished I had slept through another Western. I made new water and washed our glasses and cut new pieces of lemon and lime, lemon for you and lime for me. I wished it was over in my stomach. I slept through. Dreamt that one of Matt and Scarlett's sons had died and it was awful. Fell asleep reading Fanny and her record of everything. She continues to get smaller and more entire. Lullaby for adulthood.

07.18.2014

Yesterday was here. We started this. Write a page in the morning, side by side, you're always faster. You lap me right away.

Then I walked around this rented house, made tea. Yesterday I made eggs scrambled with a million vegetables: mushrooms, kale, tomatoes, pepper, shallot, garlic. I cleaned up after the dogs. Yesterday I read a collaborative book written by Ben and Brett and Feliz.

I loved their book, and not—I think—because of our scholarly association, our friendship, or the way it feeds my ego. It doesn't feed my ego. It makes me feel incompetent, their quick brains, their humor, their dramas. I can barely remember what happened yesterday. I can see how their project, writing letters to Wes Anderson, overlaps with this one, maybe is even what got us doing this (although this was your idea), also how entirely different it is.

Later we were walking the dogs on an unknown trail, nearby across the highway. You said we should try

walking meditation. I think that is what walking is, if there's no talking involved. But you have to commit to meditation.

We were on some bluffs, hard to see the water with all the mist. The dogs could feel our commitment. They are always meditating. You nodded towards two vultures (kinda breaking the code of meditation ethics) but I appreciated it. Vultures are as big as eagles, but get no respect because of their carrion tendencies. They're just freegans. They should be America's official bird, America's or California's.

It was peaceful, but every ten feet the seclusion broken by a worker in a truck eating a sandwich. It was getting harder to meditate. Perhaps the vultures get their crusts. After three of those trucks, there was another kind of truck, a homeless truck, a truck that was more for sleeping and storage. An explosion of angry dog voices, R & K broke their meditation and joined in. Kiki was wearing her pink hoodie with her collar attached through a slit in the back. She was mine. She was straining at her collar, choking herself, almost losing it, but she wasn't the worst dog in this kennel.

There was a dog under the truck, fierce, teeth everywhere. I didn't know how you could be handling Ronald with your bum knee. But I think our meditative states kept the dogs more level than usual, not plugged in to our usual anxiety. We made it past the feral truck and dogs.

Past more workers, some doing some work.

To a winding path that went down a hill, with warning signs promising doom if we kept going.

There was a crazy lady's voice behind us, but we had to go back. She was at the crest of the hill in her crocs and nightgown, she was a crazy lady.

She wanted to have a doggy playdate. She didn't care if our dogs bit her dogs, she said. We dragged our dogs by her dogs, politely declined over and over.

Later I cooked cheddar cauliflower steaks and tofu steaks. The cheddar is the color of this crazy crucifer. It was a real success. We tried out the Panda and watched a Western with Gary Cooper, a kind of comedic one where he has no skills and a sidekick but is mistaken for a quick gun badass. Gary Cooper, Cary Grant, Clark Gable. My friends.

July 19, 2014

Yesterday was not one thing. Walks in twos and threes and silence. A naked worker with an orange cap clearing vines on the hillside. Or a shirtless squatter with an orange helmet gathering berries and bed stuff. I saw a smashed dead snake worm-sized that you did or did not see. I stopped writing so fast. I concentrated on the non-project. Doing yoga on the deck teaches you to ignore people.

Yesterday I had an insecurity. Our waitress at the Italian grotto was an Anna Joy look-alike or sound-alike or spirit-alike and she shepherded us just the same. Lulled into dolce vita. That's what relationships are for, she said, sharing spaghetti. Or something.

Yesterday there was more no news about the Malaysian plane shot down. Yesterday I got more Melanoma alerts that may or may not apply to you. Yesterday we both received one minute voicemails from Dr. Brouha. Neither message came through because we are in the sticks by the river. We will forget to call him back on Monday. You will forget to stay alive. I will have to remember to keep you alive.

No sun.

We walked by the Skunk Train to see if it was something we would do. Ride into the redwoods by old growth and understory, all poetic sorts of names for plants and flowers I'll forget. Ride like it was 1892.

We walked by the North Coast Brewery. The art deco poster of Thelonious's brew made us both want one. Why a Belgian, Duchess, that's a lot of rubies. We peered in the bar windows at places we used to go. The fast-moving bar maid grabbed another 6 pack from the cooler. A teenage girl with long brown legs tried to cross the street to her laughing car of friends. Their laughter seemed incommensurate with the task.

Yesterday I was too serious. On the way home I lunked inside my womanish lot. Care is an oppressive word. I tried to look at the lights behind the Victorian windows on the crests or the bluffs or whatever they call them. I looked into the trees.

It rained on me on the yoga deck. A working neighbor played Phil Collins's one good song. I only took one bath. I wanted to get inside my Turkish robe so quick I forgot to dry off my hair. It hung in brown wet strings around my face. You took my picture with my hood on, a boxer. You started taking pictures. You read actual things while I read about things. You read David Byrne and told me about it. We wrote in our separate rooms.

It wasn't yesterday we bought pots and pans and strainers and popcorn from the store. Yesterday we bought cans of dog food and dry dog food and raw hides. Wild boar food. Yesterday I made tea. I am aware this sounds depressing. This is all part of it.

You are typing faster than I am. You are probably writing about one or two important incidents. I am trying to capture some movement. I just coughed and the sound was interruptive. The truth is I don't remember yesterday at all, don't even want to. Something about an antique refrigerator, trying to keep the tea warm all day, making water, making a vegetable smoothie, throwing out the rice from the day before, making plans to see a movie then not seeing a movie, watching Joanne Woodward and Henry Fonda con a poker game. You are probably writing about that. It's official, I am colonized. This is the worst idea.

07.19.2014

Yesterday we woke up, we typed the last day up. I don't know how it will go, if I will reveal anything at all. I don't know what the audience is, not that that ever mattered, but now thinking about this form of address, the wonky pronoun stuff that happens. There was tea. If everything follows form, your half will keep mine afloat, just like this life we call ours.

We both had messages on our iPhones from my dermatologist, Brouha. But we're out of range, and there was just the message that there was a message, each 50 seconds long, neither of which we could access. Maybe they have my scans? By the time we were in range to call, later yesterday, it was the weekend.

You made breakfast: leftover polenta and lots of vegetables. It tasted fantastic. We are finally learning to feed ourselves in this new era. Anno Cancero. I thought so much, yesterday, about our luck, our bounty, the fact that we can be somewhere, mostly typing, mostly eating, walking our dogs in this weird

northern California land where the sun never comes out, how lucky we are to complain about it.

Every day we take our supplements, my 2 Reishi, 6 Spirulina, Multivitamin, 5000 mg Vitamin D, CoQ10, Flax Oil, Curcumin. You take smaller bits of the same.

It is so generous of you to swallow all the pills too—I can dry swallow anything, golfballs, but you take them one at a time, a few less than I do. You have no sugar, no caffeine, no animals, no booze, no gluten. Your solidarity is astonishing. I filled your water glass halfway through your pills.

It takes a while to get going when you're in the Creative Class, you made smoothies at some point, and I read accessible books while you read difficult ones. I read a bunch of How Music Works, kind of shuttling backwards through it. Byrne's brain is so historical, something about the Bo Diddley beat osmosified into rock and roll via Mexico via Mississippi. I thought along with David Byrne about the economy of Pop, of Pop as an art form whose most aesthetic elements are located in its calculations. We finished my soup.

I think I took two baths yesterday. I did my agility training. I sweat like a giant wound. You were doing headstands on the deck. My scar hurt when I was jumping, I wondered if I was dying.

We walked the dogs. I saw a worker working in the bushes. You saw a naked vagrant in the bushes. The

dogs pooped at a Corgi crossing. Scottie? You'll remember.

Yesterday, body parts were scattered everywhere. We drove up the coast a bit in the evening; there was even some sun. We went to Fort Bragg. We couldn't walk on the coast there: there were toxicity warnings. It reminded me of home.

We had a lovely, expensive dinner. Everything is organic here, we've decided. We contemplated the Skunk Train while we waited for our movie. Two middle-aged (my aged?) men played acoustic guitars. One of them butchered his lead. You said this is nice. I made an exaggerated "really?" face. It was supposed to be a mock judgment of his bad note but it seemed to condemn our whole situation. We were both a little shocked at my ability to be just between us in public. I apologized to you, to the air. No one else saw me.

We skipped the movie. Drove back and had a little fight. Fights are so much sadder now. You thought I would hit a man walking beside the road. I thought I wouldn't. Neither of us can bring ourselves to bring it. You said I called you crazy. I said you were imagining things. The kind of gendered response that ruins the world.

We all got on a twin bed, you, me, R & K, and escaped into two escapist Westerns: *Stagecoach* and *Big Hand for the Little Lady*. Highly recommended.

July 20, 2014

Yesterday Wes Anderson was Fred MacMurray with Barbara Stanwyck, Stanny, in a pushed back cowgirl cap and floating trousers over high heel boots tracking the wild cat. Stanny just had to have her houndstooth coat on a stick and then back on her shoulders. The crime killed her horse so she took another one with longer hair, not a moment missed. Stanny in blond curls and a negligee turns up Stanny full makeup in the barn in an overcoat. Old films is understanding old women. Why sure.

Also in LA, Feliz and Ben and Brett read last night at the Poetic Research Bureau from *The Wes Letters*. To Wes Anderson. You read the book this week and read it to me or read it for me. I turn to odd pages where Feliz is finishing an imaginary letter and forgetting to sign it from Wes, and Ben is burying himself in Wes Anderson's front yard, but not dead, just buried. Brett is proliferating. They play a drinking game called Wes Anderson and win.

Yesterday Wes Anderson died and Fred MacMurray narrated it himself, attended his own funeral so to

speaking. They hanged a fastidious hobo moonlighting as Wes Anderson. Wes Anderson was bad. Stanny holds the torch for Wes for five years—David Bowie—but then takes up with his brother, the dully named Tom. Tom wants in on the job at the bank, and then Tom dies. Tom gets shot with the tiniest pistol by his boss who has just fired him the day before. You rarely see people get fired in old films, it seems contemporary.

Five years is the time they give for recurrence. As if in five years everyone falls dumb dead from the disease.

At first, Stanny is mad at Wes for leaving, for moonlighting, for criming it up. Then she's mad at him for getting Tom killed. Then she gets deputized, gets her own little star, which she sashes to her hip in those chic crepe pants. She rides off to bring Wes Anderson in. Wes Anderson is hiding out cooking steaks in a cabin past the waterfall in the woods. His pardner holds him up and takes the cash, oversized packets of dollars. I've got enough dollars to buy a steak, so cook me a steak.

We walk the dogs by the river. As if I've never seen mosquitoes before. An old truck route and many versions of birds with naturalist names I won't say. A neighbor with a white truck had an old avocado farm in Fallbrook, he has to say "ex" wife.

Stanny and the crook have a shootout behind some rocks. This is where her houndstooth coat comes in.

She makes it through the waterfall once and finds her man to take him in. Then gender remembers itself and restablizes, can you read it. The waterfall falls her after his warning, Wes Anderson is always right. Stanny falls terribly down the fall. Wes lassoes her in and they make it back to the cabin, where Stanny admits everything was all her fault and if she had only loved him better, less strongly, less aggressively, Wes Anderson never would have left.

I have a natural resistance to writing the word aggressive. We have a fight I won't write about, you say some things not fit for print or film. I try to knock you off the waterfall.

If I have another bite of venison I'll grow horns.

07.20.14

Yesterday the project settled in, not the writing, not the quality, but the rhythm, the waking and the typing, the tea. I used to drink two pots of coffee before I could speak a sentence.

We did the project, detailing yesterday's yesterday. Paul McCartney is everywhere in this, Ham and Eggs on the scratch track, substitution.

Meditation is my medication. We tried the Qi Gong your colleague Dropboxed us. We were on Mars, the red energy was flowing into my heart from the tip of my tongue. K barked loudly and I couldn't get the word I was supposed to say. I asked you, it was "Coo." We cracked up, I had to stop the flight.

I discovered how to make a decent smoothie: all the superfoods all lined up: the maca, the cacao, the hemp hearts, the berries, the grass powder, the chia seeds, the flax seeds—that's the base, you save the vegetables for salads, because vegetables taste good the way they are.

Here's a good recipe for a smoothie: 1–2 cups of a combination of coconut milk and coconut water, 1 peach, 1/8 avocado, one Medjool date, all the superfoods. Blend 'til smooth. Add 2 cups of ice.

We drank our smoothies in the only sun of the day. Something about yesterday's project had made you sad. The world had become about me, and I've been encouraging it. We had an adult conversation. I listened and I understood.

I think I forgot to take my supplements yesterday!

We went on a hike! Drove the dogs to a park, which was a beach, and we walked the estuary. It was very beautiful. There are so many kinds of Westerns, the dustbowls, the goldpanners, the different landscapes that the films were really about. Here's the kind where gold and logs are the currency, where water is everywhere.

It's in the air, in the constant haze that hangs here. We drove back in and saw that one mile down the road, it breaks.

We saw that before though, on our hike—we saw the paddlers and canoers skimming the estuary. We didn't see much wildlife but for mosquitoes. They swarmed R, not really K. They attacked the black dog with the long hair. We forgot to bring water, we forgot to bring the dogs' vests with their water packs—back at home. We forgot to bring the dogs' life vests for aquatic fun—back at home. We

forgot to bring our paddleboards—back at back at. We didn't even know where we were going and yesterday we finally got there.

I know why. Everything is your responsibility, and I've done nothing. It doesn't always work this way. Yesterday I loaded the page for Facebook, instinctively, then I closed the computer.

Yesterday I made tempeh sandwiches, pesto later. I am cooking up a tidal wave in this borrowed kitchen, in bloody rivalry with the healing restaurants nearby.

Yesterday I wondered if this project will reveal my shallowness, my shame, our fundamental imbalance, your great goodness, your good greatness.

We saw one good Western (Barbara Stanwyck and Fred MacMurray reprising their *Double Indemnity* roles—Fred's character was named Wes Anderson), 1/5 of the worst one ever made (from the '90s/Jeff Bridges/*Wild Bill*), and a truly great John Ford one whose name I forget. I kept falling asleep, but I read the synopsis earlier.

July 21, 2014

Yesterday is becoming a kind of trauma.

I was hostess to a Helen I'll never meet. Here's where to find the ironing board, the hammer, the hairdryer. Did I leave enough champagne. When you think of KG is it Kevin Garnett or Kendall Grady. This tells you where you are.

We started with forbidden breakfast. Apricot scone and everything bagel and lox platter, green twiggy tea and cappuccino. The small chubby boy in the striped tank top chased away the birds on the bench. He chased away the birds until he was in the street. The women behind us, one gray, one brass, talked about their older sex lives. Give Phil a try, you never know, maybe he has sex in his dreams. At first the elder was talking about being a revolutionary in Chicago in '68, getting arrested, Cambodia, and then Israel. Every woman they mentioned, they mentioned her age. Rose, who's 82. My Aunt Mary Alice, who's in her 80s. Paradise for old women is no paradise at all.

Walked the headlands and saw an Alpaca. You said, I'm so glad we came here. I'm so glad you said that, happy summer camp for we. We didn't even know where we were going. I just picked a spot on the map and we came here. Who knew we would be surrounded. Alpacas and organic markets and books and river and sea both. I didn't even know there would be water.

Should all people be artists if it means peppering the world with more and more dog art and gold wire representation. People like to sell their art in booths at fairs. I wanted that one ceramic mug but how to get it home and was it really that different from the other ceramic mugs elsewhere. It was there.

An older couple, he walks behind her with his hand in her back pocket holding on like a child. She smiles. Is there something wrong or is this just their situation.

Lots of Joe Brainard and his masculine notations. Lots of male in Joe. Joe at 19, Joe at 26. At 26 Joe worries about being old. How many Joes live here now, actual old. Joe writes about smoking four packs a day. That's it. He makes a good point about how cancer doesn't get you tomorrow, it takes years and who cares. I guess it's tomorrow.

Yesterday woodwork and the massage and the bath and I figured out how to sleep in a braid so my hair doesn't strangle me in the night. You went out to get mushrooms but came back with a paper bag of sprouts, pea sprouts, and sprouted adzukis. Then

you made roasted beets and yams dribbled with pesto and wild rice with mushrooms and sprouted adzukis.

Then John Wayne was in the Union and took a Southern woman hostage. Of course they fall in love but it's slow going and she keeps trying to get him killed. Maybe we think if we adopt a baby you won't die. Maybe we think we're too lucky or too decadent sitting over the highlands bluffs just us looking at seals who are logs. Coming, going, walking, writing, doing our little things, reading our big fat art books.

Music is everything. You put on Otis when I was in the bath and you were cooking, and that turned into something else. We stopped and listened to that Bright Eyes song. I said I'm glad I didn't die before I met you. You said Swear I was born right in the doorway.

07.21.2014

Yesterday the sun came in through the shutters, big Ronald was crying on the floor. He likes to be invited into the bed. I invited him up, he leapt his 100 lb body up the four feet. In Japan making a pot of tea is an art: I took yesterday's grounds and yesterday's bag and boiled water and poured it in.

We sat at the table, yesterday, to do this typing. It was a weekend; we debated not doing it. What is the difference between our weekends and our weeks? We did it, typing at the table—Battleship style—instead of the bed.

The project was already making me sad. There's so much to cover, and no time for reflection, or explanation. And because we are going to wait to show each other, it's like a secret, though it's just about what we've done. You won't talk about it much. And the constraint grows. I follow your lead (always) and don't talk about it much. It's bubbling along, like we're learning to play a new two-person instrument, or like we're the four legs in an animal costume, learning to walk.

We drove (I drove) to the town to cheat on our diet. I can still be bad, but with rules, and not every day. This will help relax me, and stop the spread of bad cells. Organic bagel with lox. You had the gluten free scone. All were delicious. I had to promise not to regret it—that could cause inflammation. I didn't regret it, I don't. I had tea; you had decaf cappuccino. Your gluten-free scone was fantastic, but I knew there was too much sugar. Your cappuccino smelled like god, but how do they get the caffeine out? The Water Method. But how much water does that waste?

Behind us, two older women talking freely about male sexuality. One was the mentor, active in revolution. You told me I missed it when I was getting the drinks, the countries she's been to. I only remember Israel. But they were talking about one husband, his resentment at his wife for limiting his sex life to only her. Something else about intimacy vs. fun. Wild assumptions: all men are this way; can't imagine Donnie caring about sex but he must at least dream about it.

Yesterday we walked from there and saw one lady walking a little dog and one lady walking an Alpaca. I told you I'm so glad I'm here. I said yesterday I saw an Alpaca. Yesterday I saw an Alpaca, I wanted to crawl inside its furry shell, to ride it into the ocean, to drink a toddy with its owner, who wore alpaca and looked like an Alpaca and walked the monster on a leash. Its Alpaca lips curled and it didn't seem to notice me, yesterday.

We walked the circumference of the city, overlooking the ocean. The headlands. Now that we live on the coast the ocean's an ambience. I remember how it used to make me cry to see it, but this postcard still feels portable, small, somehow. I tricked you into walking to this little trail where we could watch what I thought were otters but were seaweeds. Your poor knee condition. My poor cancer condition. You're not allowed to even have a malady anymore.

Yesterday we shopped for groceries, we went to a woodworking show, we saw a smithy shop. I love your poem "he works for a smithy." We saw the art market, craftspeople with their wares. I heard someone say, "everyone speaks seven languages." I got defensive.

It's funny to organize a day this way, not weighing the things but just letting them go, chronologically. I looked at my iPad a lot. Day 1 Buffalo Bills training camp. My favorite player didn't pass his conditioning test. We ate. I gave you a massage. We did it. I made dinner. We watched a movie. You made popcorn. You fed the dogs. We watched another movie. We swore to stop watching movies on the vacation. We went to bed.

July 22, 2014

Yesterday was a long time ago.

You made an omelette with all we had.

I did one-legged jump backs into Chataranga.

You did pull-ups in the kitchen door.

I took a deep bath.

And read the black soap bottle from Olympia Washington with fair trade in West Africa. Of course Olympia.

What is this a record of hippie haven.

We went to *Snowpiercer*.

Pale imitation of Terry Gilliam or the more bright brutal apocalypses. All film is the train metaphor. How did that kid get a fur suit tailored exactly to his size for cuteness. What happened to her clairvoyance. How come they never get truly fucked up. Captain

America's bottom lip is too big for the part. I didn't see his arm get churned off. Movie moves from back to front of the train, a movie in reverse. All the little cabins. Nice job.

Not raving about The Ravens I said. View over the high treetops. Two different people on separate balconies off their rooms under the chimneys. One on her phone, one just looking. She is on her phone because one arm wrapped around her waist and the other holding her face. Someone else just looks out over the trees.

Piles of cedar firewood for the people in their rooms. We wait for a table and I stand in front of the fire with my back to it. Is it obvious I'm just trying to warm my ass. Is it that obvious.

Families unpacking from cars into the lodge. Trauma camping. One boy in athletic wear runs across the parking lot with a large clear plastic bag containing clothes. Did someone tell him to run or is this just his pleasure. Light a fire under it son, where is your sense of urgency. No one will say that to this child.

I try to remember to tell about the birds—hawks, ravens, whatever—over the yoga deck. One comes so close I hear his wings clap over my head. What color was he you ask. Black. From underneath.

But I don't want to be about the birds.

07.22.2014

Yesterday was nothing but gloom, the day never started, there was tea, many vegetables in an omelet from the tiny kitchen, the pan was too big, but I got the eggs to fold over. I guess we're ovo-vegan-something. I did my workout, had to cheat on the pull-ups a bit, but it burned and I felt strong.

There was so much gloom. It was fog and spray and shade on shade. Immediately you suggested a movie. I'm always up for that. But first we read. De Certeau. I revised a bio for *The Volta*.

We took the dogs to the beach, walked them in the gloom. K started screaming as soon as we got there, she was once one traumatized pooch. She screamed and we listened to her. It's an incredible sound. Poor thing.

I walked the dogs, as your knee was hurting and these wild animals can pull you apart. They sniffed like they were on the trail of something, 150 pounds of muscle and teeth. Ronald took a shit as soon as he walked 10 ft. I put the shit in a bag. There were a few

people around. I carried the shit about 100 yards to a garbage can, kept getting twisted in their lines. I could see you contemplating eternity on the beach. I plopped the bag of shit into the garbage can. The dogs pulled me every which way. I didn't want to snap them too hard, too many people watching. We started walking towards you. K shat in some cover of sea plants. She walks around a bit when she does it. I had one more bag. You were walking closer, I thought if I gave you the two dogs for the moment, I could bag K's shit better. I walked towards you, 20 ft or so, R took a second huge shit. I handed you R's reins. I only had one bag. I bagged R's shit. Carried its weight back to the can. Left K's shit to the rain.

Later, *Snowpiercer*. 95% fresh critically, 90% fresh audience. I have many thoughts about it. I felt the energy there, class & violence. The train as filmstrip, Tilda Swinton as the surreal visitor from the rich front. Captain America was poor and Jackson Pollack made him eat babies, they tasted the best, and the only way to destroy capitalism is to blow through the side with a stolen collection of drugs and roll down the mountain off the rails and look at a polar bear. I cannot disagree.

We had the most expensive vegan dinner of our lives. You were not that into it. We like my cooking better, but it's so hard to cook so well. We saved half of it for tomorrow, better known as today.

July 23, 2014

Yesterday we made a rash decision.

Ended up in a hotel room in Goleta watching sports in a king-sized bed by a pool. Slept with the lights on until four then watched some more *Sports Center* and you walked to the Valero for water. Both dogs at the foot of the bed.

Before that I drove us into town, into the college part of town. College kids yelling and eating. All of a sudden running out of their dorms at 9:30 at night. That makes sense to me in a way I remember, although isolated. Two or three friends walk together. Blond girls in yoga pants with golden retrievers. Boys walk down alleys alone. No one is more alone than the males which explains a lot of the problems everyone else has.

To get there I drove us in night through the hills and over the cliffs and couldn't see but I didn't want to tell you, wanted to do my half. You did the traffic and the highway and the forest. I opened the roof so we could all see the whole thing, all of us, the

dogs. We ate a bit of leftovers from Ravens in the car, a mushroom crepe, some potato salad. I fed you mouths of black rice.

Before that we packed. I did my gathering routine and you did the carrying. How many times have we moved house. At the end, the dishes. I gathered all our empty jars, every bag, all the produce we just bought. Packed it all with cold packs. These are the things I can do. A bottle bag with vitamins and supplements.

I get a Melanoma alert on my phone about a professor-astronaut who had Stage 3 and now has Stage 4 and is on a trial of the MK-3475. The same as going into space, he says, there is an individual component and a collective one. He says you'll do anything to stay alive. He and his wife are both astronauts, it says, they went up to space together in the '80s. Twice. They have two children. What are the odds.

On our way out of town in the morning, after packing up the rented house that's become claustrophobic and grey, we drive by a neighbor in his yard. He is standing over some part of garden with no expression. I wave and smile and hate myself, what is my mood, what message. He looks our age and possibly dreadlocked.

He waves back somewhat glad or surprised or neither.

We forget to pull up directions on our phone and so drive around in a circle back to the house to poach the internet one last time. We drive by the neighbor's house again, I'm ready to be embarrassed or not wave a second time, but he's gone.

07.23.2014

Yesterday more gloom, we pay for this in California? We were both sad to have five more days. We have other places we could be. The privilege is astounding, but we could just roll. We are trying to vacate, and so we decided to vacate.

It went like this: we tried to make a breakfast of some sort, it was fine. We had tea. Supplements. We were looking at each other. I don't know who said we could go today or tomorrow. We had a new renter in our house and she couldn't work the coffee grinder, it said on your phone. You had an amazing solution—the Magic Bullet! We began to dislike the tactics our temporary landlord employed, basically no tactic at all but cellphone silence.

I called the hotel we would stay at near Santa Barbara, to see if we could switch our reservation for on the way home. We could, but it would cost more, it would be for today. We hated the house we were in. We came here to see if we could write, and had proven that who knows, but maybe. We said let's go. I was on the phone. They had a room. All the reviews

were terrible. You said you wanted to, were tired of being cold. Tired of staying in someone's home. I was tired of it too, of having cable, of the routine we'd grown, tired of the choices. Typing these things made me even more aware of it, how much time was downtime, which is what you do when you vacate, but I wanted to move. I thought of how many times the one radio station had played Counting Crows, how I always thought they were ridiculous, but how I kind of liked what they were up to in Mendocino. I accepted the reservation. It was noon or so and we had an eight hour drive ahead. You gave me the nod.

You packed the stuff, I packed the car. I made an ingenious structure out of bungees that held the backseat dog hammock up while providing support for our various baggage. You packed so fast, I packed so fast, we were out of there in an hour.

Yesterday we drove from Albion, CA to San Bernardino, CA. I drove five hours, you drove almost four. We ate leftovers and talked and listened to the radio and looked at our phones. I drove through redwoods and mountains and we marveled at the shade. We were free. We drove and drove. The news was about shot-down planes getting sawed in half by diesel saws and Tony Dungy being a bigot. I thought about *Snowpiercer*, about the rebels winning and owning the same system. Like I was supposed to.

Yesterday we ordered, obtained and metabolized pizza, which we are not supposed to do. The website

mentioned organic ingredients. We found our hotel.
It was still under construction.



AUTHOR BIOS



Ben Doller is the author of four books of poetry, most recently *Fauxhawk*, forthcoming from Wesleyan University Press in 2015. His previous books include *Radio, Radio*, which won the 2000 Walt Whitman Award from the Academy of American Poets selected by Susan Howe (published under his former name, Doyle), *FAQ*, *Dead Ahead* and, with Sandra Doller, *Sonneteers*. Doller is currently Associate Professor of Creative Writing in the MFA program at University of California-San Diego.



Sandra Doller has published five books: *Oriflamme* (published under her former name, Miller), *Chora*, *Man Years*, *Leave Your Body Behind* and, with Ben Doller, *Sonneteers*. She has also published two chapbooks, including a translation of Éric Suchère's *Mystérieuse*, which won the 2012 Anomalous Press translation prize selected by Christian Hawkey. The founder and editrice of 1913 Press and *1913 a journal of forms*, Doller is currently Associate Professor of Literature & Writing Studies at California State University-San Marcos.



Essay Press is dedicated to publishing artful, innovative and culturally relevant prose. We are interested in publishing single essays that are too long to be easily published in journals or magazines, but too short to be considered book-length by most publishers. We are looking for essays that have something to say, essays that both demand and deserve to stand alone. We particularly welcome work that extends or challenges the formal protocols of the essay, including, but not limited to: lyric essays or prose poems; experimental biography and autobiography; innovative approaches to journalism, experimental historiography, criticism, scholarship and philosophy.

Essay Press, like other small independent presses, needs support from its committed readers! Please consider [donating to Essay Press](#), so we can continue to publish writing that we and our readers admire.

