



BIRTHDAY CAUSERIE

THE HOSTED

I'm reading Stephenie Meyer's book, "The Host." It's been available in the Hamilton Bookseller catalogs for years; I just haven't had the financial prowess to splurg (or invest) for it. But now, someone finally donated a copy to the dorm's library. I'm only a few chapter in, and this is suppose to be her first attempt at a "novel for adults," as the book itself states; but it still, to me, has a Young Adult, YA, feel to it. At least so far.

I am a little concerned about the book's blurb from "USA Today," by Carol Memmott: "'The Host' is the 'X-Files' meets 'Days of Our Lives'...." Not an enticing combo for me. Though, I do love "X-Files"--and fortunately, My 63.1 (CW), here in the Columbia area now plays "The X-Files" every Thursday at 10 PM, and again at 11 PM, beginning last week when they aired episodes 1 and 2. I was a kid--about 13 or so--crushing on Gillian Anderson when that first pilot episode originally played back in the '90s. She was first depicted for me on our family's 25-inch floor-model Magnavox TV.

Not sure this Wanderer can live up to that.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

I regularly send out short stories (and poems) to various literary journals. Who knows? Maybe I'll land another publication, or three, and suddenly find myself able to buy real food.

The dramas of prison compound upon times of depression that come and go--making the process of productivity slow going at times. Kinda like the interims that space out these blog posts.

DHEC

We've been seeing a large quantity of maggots and flies in the kitchen lately, who seem to be having a turf war with the roaches; and this zoo has an "A" from DHEC! A 96, says a reliable source. 2 points were taken off for food temperature (it was too cold), 2 points off because the cooler was 55 degrees instead of 45, and no points were taken for the critters who'd gotten a heads up that DHEC was coming (it's kind of hard, in fact, for DHEC to surprise a place with three sets of fences and searches to go through before even getting close to the kitchen—but of course, it could help to try).

When I worked in pizzerias, DHEC would call us before they came, and if we got a low score—they'd put off posting it until they returned the next day (or days later) to give us a redo. The only time I ever seen them do anything was once when an alcoholic I worked with, for some reason, thought he could keep the store open with a broken prep-table. The prep-table is what the toppings are kept in, so it's refrigerated; but this mendacious inebriate just filled the top of it with ice from a gas station next door—thinking that would be acceptable. Putting customers' health at risk, as his percent-of-a-percent profit sharing check took precedence for him. (Same reason he'd scrape day-old cheese and topping-muck out from under catch-pans to top pizzas towards the end of a rush.) Within a few months the store—with him there—ended up losing over five-grand a week in sales, and never really recovered until his demotion.

I have little respect for any DHEC officer that calls ahead, or looks the other way around maggot infested meat. "Meat" that is not of an acceptable grade for human consumption. A doctor should run random nutrition tests on prisoners! Many of the guys here are developing cancers due to the carcinogenic agents being surreptitiously served.

We did just get a new warden—the third this year—that arrived this week, and he strikes me as a descent person, so, maybe things will improve....

PRISON WRITERS

The Education Department is finally up and running, but not exactly up to par—it's kind of a muddle of academic dilemmas and egocentricity.

Narcissism, like conceit, can provide vocational ascendancy if justifiable—but when feigned in place of actual skillsets relevant to the position: we get ... muddlement. Like my previous coworker, the inebriate, with his half-melted bags of 0.99 ¢ ice—he may have meant well, but he'd obviously found himself in a line of work that he was irrefutably ill-suited. Misplaced self-worth can backfire horribly in the workplace: creating a situation in which the managerial prima donna remains in place so long as there is no viable replacement.

The same is true for some students: many have signed up for classes merely to ... be signed up for them. Members of the Character Based Unit, CBU, are required to sign up for at least two (I'm the Educational Coordinator of the CBU, and it's part of my job to keep up with attendance), but some just want on the roster to show a court. Fortunately, those who do it for ulterior motives get weeded out; and those in search of personal growth stand out even brighter.

While I may not expect a scholarly commitment from students, an inclination to participate and take instruction without bias is helpful. The problem—here—is that many have strong racial embitterments ingrained within their hearts, compounded by a blatant disregard for the value of an education, and the unwillingness to put in the work needed to achieve one.

As I write this: one student is on the other side of the table (we're in the dorm's dayroom/classroom) diligently at work on his homework. Many guys do this; but a handful don't. Those are the weeds that get pulled—or just die off themselves, as they grow tired of the masquerading. This guy is really working.

An ex-student sits behind me at another table: a Mr. Nobot, I'll call him that to protect the nuances of his nonentity from defamation. He's scribbling an urban novel. The genre has a respectable share of profitability; and fits a niche. Pluck up any random person and you'll find a web of self-contradictions, inconsistencies, confusions, and all things oxymoronic. Nowhere will you find true paragons; no quintessence without conflict. And it's this psychological complexity that gives us such mental diversity. Urban novels record a societal niche; and that's what good literature is suppose to do—record us. Not the stereotypical and conformed, but more interestingly: the paradoxical?

The problem with Mr. Nobot's style of urban tale, to me (and many would agree, I'm sure), is that he glorifies the abuse of women and children, crime, murder, and all out anarchy. He has a deeply ingrained nihilism, I believe in response to his own societal maladjustments and failures. Insipid points of view riddle his characters' biased opinions. The narratives are dressed up with elementary school-level grammar and vocabulary; but he'll take no steps to learn any better. Truth is, he doesn't seem capable of any higher level of comprehension.

Perhaps he is some anomalous paragon of all things gone wrong? His very incarceration serving testament to the fact that the criminal justice system does—at times—get things right.

I've learned now what red flags indicate a fledgling terrorist in the making; Revamped my curriculum to help educate against such immorality.

On a more positive note, students here have potential. In creative writing, I focus a lot on the short story—but one group is at work on novel projects: gearing up for NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month) that takes place each November.