

New Year's, 2019

Dear Family,

So sorry for this loony manner of letter writing. I'm obviously, you could say, running late this year. So pooped from the semester, and I guess a pretty long year. Some good, some bad; some up, some down; a lot of things sideways, inside-out, upside down... haha.

Ok, this is all about me, right? So. I traveled a fair amount. Went to Cancun last winter, but only after having TWO DAYS of flight delays out of Fargo due to utterly berserk weather! Wanted much more time to eat local food, listen to humongous guitarróns in cafes, and stare at the ocean, but nice nonetheless. Also made it to Colorado to see Brandi Carlile at the Gorge Amphitheater in WA, as well as in Seattle on the same trip. But after than my bad knee was truly shot. For WA I had to be pushed in wheel chairs through airports and carted around the show grounds! Did. Not. Enjoy. And that was why I missed Susan's wedding later in the year; by that point I was barely walking at all. (Had tickets to see Brandi perform Joni Mitchell's entire *Blue* album in LA as well; was all set to make that into a big trip for seeing family, but of course it plonked.)

My Buddhist practice, which has sort of merged with some alt- and very Buddhist-like Christian trends of the last few decades, has even suffered, because I was not able to drive to retreats or to one of my main places in Minneapolis as much, and couldn't even get up the stairs where my local sangha meets. Actually, it's kinda amazing how much the knee has held me up, now that I think about it!!

Anyway, I had a total knee replacement in August. These joint replacements are so common, I can only imagine someone else in the family has had one (or more!) by now. I have friends in their 40s, 50s, and 60s whose bodies are full of mechanical knees and hips! It's practically like going to the dentist. Was still surprised by the pain and long recovery, though.

It's so much better now and feels fantastic. I can't exactly run or hop like a kangaroo, but am happy regardless.

John was in the hospital for two weeks last winter; long story and very difficult, but he's really in great shape now. (Everyone in his family lives into their 90s...Pisses me off haha.) I count my blessings every day to have him in my life.

Have been writing tons, in part because I was on my back with knee recovery and also because I'm managing to keep some of my hobbies under control and thus have more time. (I play ukulele now. I'm really into ukuleles and I have lots of ukuleles. Don't laugh. It's a blast.)

Here's a link to my latest manuscript:

www.ndsu.edu/pubweb/~cinichol/creativeonline/SINGER%20New%20Years%202020.pdf

Most of it, I'm sure, is too weird for you guys, and too much trashy language no doubt, but maybe you'll like something here or there. (Everyone in my world swears constantly. Students. Every single teacher I know. Every one of my friends since college. Most of my Facebook and Brandi-fanatic pals. If certain dumpster words appear in the poems, it's because I'm relaxed, enjoying myself, and being utterly honest LOL.)

The ones you might like best are "The Contest," "Empathy for Fat Elvis..." maybe "Guest Appearances by Neil Young and The Thing With Feathers," and maybe the second "Lyrical Village" near the end. And some of "Resort," parts 1, 3, 5, and 6.

"The Contest," I know, is intense, and probably more than you really want to read or know. But it's about Dad, so maybe of interest. Keep in mind that it's a long confessional poem (a kind of poem that pushes the boundaries of what is permissible to say aloud), and if I scream "I hate your guts", it's only a step on the way to saying that I love him.)

They are mostly very long, immersive meditations. Anyway, no obligation to read to any of it!!!!

Well, that's most of what comes to mind from this year, though I have to say I'm dying to retire. Work just gets more nuts every day. Universities are being run like corporations with obscenely rich administrators, while more and more PhD instructors and scholars are hired as temps. In some places around the country, university teachers are actually homeless. It's insane. John and I were lucky to start teaching just before a lot of the ugliness got too entrenched, but it hurts to see my students struggling. Many of them both attend school full-time *and* work full-time, and will still be hopelessly in debt for the rest of their lives.

And on top of that of course a burning planet and our democracy hanging by a thread, but I won't go there. You're welcome. Farmers up here are suffering horribly from tariffs and freak

climate events, I read about white nationalists every day in the news, and we see confederate flags and swastikas around town. In FARGO. Pretty flipped out, to say the least.

But that's a seriously lousy note to end on! What's happening that's *good*? It's snowing like crazy right now outside my window and is SO pretty! GIGANTIC snowflakes. Winter wonderland. Our foo-foo rescue terrier Gracie cracks us up every day. I have more and more grand, great-grand, and GREAT-GREAT-grandnieces and nephews! (How many greats can be added to the word "aunt" or "grandmother" before someone stops counting?) Brandi Carlile won multiple Grammys (no pun) and a whole slew of awards this year. Susan re-married! I finally ate a raw oyster. (They are low-fat, very good for you, and sustainable.) There are now very burger-like burgers out there that are entirely plant-based. (Whenever you're feeling down, besides singing "These Are A Few of My Favorite Things," just remember that there are now fewer dead cows in the world.) And know too that the ukulele is making a come-back and may now be the world's greatest, most versatile, most profound and magnificently silly instrument in the world.

Wish I could see everyone. I luuuuue getting photos, letters, emails, Tweets, messages by passenger pigeon, messages in a bottle...

Love you all and hope your Christmas season has been happy, safe, and peaceful. Most of all, Happy New Year.

Love,
Cindy

P.S. Sorry again for the typed letter. My handwriting is down the drain without a paddle. Or up the creek without Draino. Never mind.