



Walter Mitty and I

The series of woodblock prints that I am currently making is a bit different from my previous work in that each of the prints has a long story attached to it - in fact, the 12 prints and their accompanying stories actually make up a full length book.

The stories describe the environment around the location depicted in each of the prints, but in an attempt to make them a bit more interesting, I also write about my own activities: my camping adventures, and the animals I meet while exploring the area. Sometimes though, nothing much actually happens, so on one occasion, to fill out the story, I 'imagined' a number of things that could have happened during my trip. This was easy to do; I just sat back in a sunny place, closed my eyes, and a moment later was deep in a dramatic episode - saving a freighter from being shipwrecked in a storm, or surviving a massive earthquake and tsunami ... heroic adventures!

Many years ago I read a short story called "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty," in which the author introduced us to a mild-mannered character who was constantly daydreaming in a similar fashion. It was very clear what was happening - these dramatic and romantic mental fantasies were a way for him to escape his very humdrum life. He was a 'nobody', but in his daydreams, he became a hero!

Every since reading that story, I have been a bit bothered by it. You see, I myself can easily do exactly the same thing that meek Mr. Mitty did in that story - at a moment's notice, I too can 'escape' into a world of fantasy and imagination. It's not something I do all day every day, as he did in the story, but because I spend so much time alone, it is all too easy to do! When I am carving a woodblock, for example, I may spend around eight hours in the day sitting at my workbench. There is no conversation to distract me, and the work itself does not use any particular mental capacity - it is manual labour - so my mind is quite free to roam away ...

The reason that I am bothered by this, is that in no way do I see myself as a 'nobody' - as a person whose own life is so unfulfilling that he has to escape into a better place of his own creation. I have actually had, in real life, many of the kind of episodes that Mitty might dream about! Just for one example, a while back I was a guest on a major NHK television program. I had to wait backstage until the right moment, the host then announced my name in dramatic fashion - "Welcome, will you please ... woodblock printmaker DAVID BULL!" - a curtain rose, and I strode forward into the bright lights and applause of the studio audience. Millions of people watched! A heroic adventure indeed!

But a few hours later, sitting on the train on the way home from the studio, surrounded by people who had no idea 'who' I was, my head nodded drowsily forward, and ... some other exciting adventure got under way ...

I am very lucky in one thing - I sleep very deeply, and never have any memory of dreams. We are told by the scientists that everybody does dream, and I suppose my brain is indeed busy all night, dreaming dramatic episodes, but when I wake up each morning, everything seems to have been erased cleanly, and I have no memories at all of whatever may have taken place during those night-time hours. I get a fresh start every day!

But Mr. Mitty soon comes along to join me!

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