

User's Guide to the Trail of Wally Flowers

Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Chapter 1 - Actions Speak Louder Than Words](#)

[Chapter 2 - A Guide to Quality](#)

[Chapter 3 - Love for the Spirit of the Wayward Soul](#)

[Chapter 4 - Love for the Spirit of Faith](#)

[Chapter 5 - Breathe](#)

[Chapter 6 - A Protocol for a Universal Language of Signal Evaluation](#)

[Chapter 7 - A Meaning of Life](#)

Introduction

I am deciding now that I reject any work that claims to have any *intrinsic* or *immortal* meaning. Life should be confusing. And we should all be utterly lost in it until the day we die. If that doesn't sound quite right, I'd go as far as to suggest you've been living under your own spell. You might imagine that everything in order will stay that way. That home is a place with four walls and a roof. That the perfect story lives forever. As far as I can tell, the more you rely on these tricks, the more you will suffer. The truth is, I've never arrived anywhere without leaving something else behind. I've never felt joy without bending the rules. There is no 'perfect' action to take in any situation and I will never account for all possibilities. But that is okay. I think it is better that way.

My name is Wally Flowers. At least, sometimes it is. I have been utterly lost most of my life and I've gotten quite good at it. I hope others find me useful, but in the event that they don't, I will consider this a love letter to myself and those that know me well enough to see the joy in these words. Perhaps this is my own idiosyncratic way of resolving my inner 'poems' that live my life for me, but I feel that I owe it to you, whoever you may be, to attempt to clothe these poems in some way. A naked poem won't last too long out there, it's a harsh world.

Life seems to present itself in paradox. Several years ago, I found myself sleeping outside on the ground. I hadn't showered in six days and I was surrounded by strangers who seemed just as lost as I was. Last weekend, I held a garbage bag as my grandmother wiped shit from my senile grandfathers asshole. And yet, I can confidently say that I regard those chapters of my life as having the most joy and significance.

I can't tell you exactly why that is because I do not know myself. What I'm going to attempt instead, is to take you along through the edges of the thoughts that recur in my mind like

blazes, keeping me from getting too lost or falling into endless circles. I'm not sure what exactly this will turn out to be at the time of writing this. Like I said, life should be confusing. The good news is, while life is confusing, there are certainly *words* that can keep us moving forward. Our minds are absolutely filled with them.

Chapter 1 - Actions Speak Louder than Words

Poem 1

"Actions speak louder than words"

These five words don't exactly make sense of anything that happens in life, but they do give a suggestion for a way to *be*. Instead of directing experience per se, they seem to emanate a certain *procedure* — "If you are faced with a decision between talking about something and doing it, doing the thing will be more impactful". If I were to apply this *poem* to a situation where I had to decide between writing a book and telling my family I am writing a book, this advice leads me in a direction most people would find *good*. And this poem is generally accepted as true even though we can think of plenty of ways to render it useless. Isn't the book just words as well? What if the words are played through a megaphone? Asking questions like that clearly ignore some important context that make these five words in this order useful enough to become pervasive. Few people even bother asking these questions because it seems obvious where this poem does and does not apply. But that isn't the case of all poems. It may take a generous helping of autism to reinterpret a poem as obstinate as this example, but the more complex of a poem we examine, the easier it becomes to find many divergent interpretations.

Poem 2

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

And God said, "Let there be light": and there was light.

And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day."

This is an excerpt of perhaps one of the most famous poems in the culture I am from. It describes *creativity* in its most abstract form. It would be almost impossible for me to provide an interpretation of this passage that converges to the *spirit* that lies behind this poem. The only thing that people seem to agree on are some abstract sense of the *themes* behind the poem and the *quality* of the poem. It appears that this poem is extremely useful and contains a quality

that many people would love to preserve. In the countless years it has lived, it seems to have taken a form that any change would diminish. And while it undeniably provokes the human spirit, it's hard to say exactly where it provokes it to.

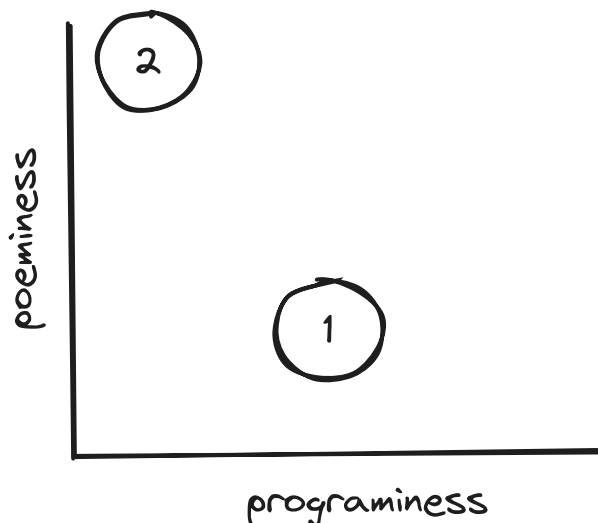
What happens if we go in the other direction?

You might be familiar with the concept that within our *minds*, there are specialized connections and pathways that handle certain functionality while trusting and communicating with the other parts of the mind. The left side of our brains are generally talented at rigid constructs like language, mathematics, and logic, while the right side of our brains step in for more flexible processing of emotions, space, visuals, and music. Ultimately, our two minds are one, communicating seamlessly through a beautiful piece of tissue called the *corpus callosum*. The brain and mind can be divided even further in any number of ways and I trust that the broader fields of neuroscience and psychology will tell us much more about the magic that is waiting for us to uncover there.

While the right of our minds enjoys the spirit of the second poem above, the left of our minds may find it unsettling. To understand what is truly good, to find *Quality* with a capital Q, we must explore the strengths of the both sides of the mind. A certain point, if you keep removing the uncertainty from the interpretation of a poem, it becomes a *program*. The left side of my mind absolutely loves these. He's getting all excited right now just thinking about it.

A program can be distributed with the guarantee that it will be interpreted almost exactly as it was written. Our original poem is much closer to being a program than our second one, but either falls short of a program written in a language designed for programs. I have a feeling we will pick up on that trail later.

An interesting question emerges here. Can a poem be program-like? Can a program be poem-like? As most thing do in life, this is becoming confusing. Maybe a chart will help.



It seems like we are discovering that there is some quality that makes poems good that differs from what makes programs good. For instance, the first poem leaves less room for interpretation, but it also seems to be missing the secret sauce that gives the second poem its appeal. The second poem could be easily used in any number of ways, but whatever direction you take it, it has its foot on the accelerator.

I suppose we need to name these two dimensions of quality something like *spiritual provocativeness* and *semantic elasticity* to keep my left mind from openly rioting. And while we are at it, we can define any poem-like or program-like thing to be an *expression*. So let's rephrase the question, can an expression be both spiritually provocative *and* semantically inelastic? Do the limits of capital Q Quality exist inside the information itself or as a product of our evolving minds? What exactly is Quality? I think we've picked up on a *trail*. I suppose we can follow it into the next chapter. For now I think I am going to have some dinner with my brother, but I'll leave you for today with a poem I wrote recently that I find particularly useful at the beginning of adventures.

Ode to the Spirit of Possibility

Lord, I ask that you allow my mind the freedom to roam to places that are near to here and far from home.

That you receive my deepest gratitude for the opportunity to explore this world and carry its treasures in my heart.

That you observe the sanctity of my solitude as the life force of my creativity and my contribution to this world.

I cannot promise the bounty nor plight delivered in tomorrow's distant hand. To do so would cage the spirit of possibility. Instead I will trust her hand and her heart; I will smile to the East, toward the land of the morning sun and endeavor with love.

Chapter 2 - A Guide to Quality

Two summers ago, I made a very dear friend. Let's call him Chris. Chris was a master of the art of being lost in life. We worked together for eight weeks at a magical camp situated in a forest at the heart of two spidery lakes in the deepest wilderness that shares a few hours of road with my family home. There is no mistaking the love that emanates from such a cluster of old cabins. It envelops the soul from a distance in time and space. The *poems* born of that love echo freely off the lake and whisper through the trees and in the hearts of children who don't yet realize the treasures they carry.

In the first weeks of my time anywhere I go, I tend to watch and listen. I am a cautious soul and I let the noise and personality of a new environment wash over me before I begin to release my

soul. I have had my love abused before and I have a hard time connecting immediately with others. When I first met Chris, he struck me as a character of *Quality*. He was sharp witted, with a jolly demeanor, a sharp jaw, and a thick mustache that together could have sold many a bottle of maple syrup; the good kind, that tastes of fresh sap and rigorous refinement that can only be found when man and wild meet. His job was to lead adventures into the wilder areas, guiding the young and inexperienced campers through the dangers of tramping and camping through the rivers and woods. He was well suited for this, as somewhat of a rough and nomadic soul with a home firmly in the patterns of behavior in his own heart.

I can't remember exactly what brought us together, but from the first moment we spent alone in conversation, we talked late into the solitary night about our deepest thoughts that danced between profound philosophy and feral speculation. I confessed my countless nights of falling asleep to the musings of Alan Watts and experiments with psychedelic mushrooms that pushed my mind to the limits of its navigational capacity. He listened with intent and intrigue, leading me deeper into the realm of chaotic thought. He was as sure-footed and insightful as he was careless and open. He showed me an art of being lost that night that I could never quite make sense of.

The next morning or day or week, Chris brought me a old paper-bound book four inches by six inches with a corner missing from the cover. The title was familiar but the contents of the book with the name, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, were a mystery. I took the book with reverence for our conversation and read it with an attention and intrigue that doesn't often find me. Its a beautiful poem that dives deep into the madness of a man in search of a universal *Quality*. My bleeding heart of flesh wishes that dear Robert Pirsig had a guide like Chris. But I know that he poured every bit of *Quality* in his being into that book. I couldn't be more grateful to hold it in my hands. Chris told me I must pass the copy on when I am done with it. It sits in front of me on my desk as I write this. I trust it will tell when it is time to move on.

I haven't spoken with Chris since the months after that summer. He send me a letter last August telling me he was sitting by a glacial stream and listening to *Zen & the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, scrolling through some of our old conversations about the other books he led me to. I never replied. I didn't have the words then. But I have a feeling in my heart that these words will reach him, and that he will understand that they reflect his boundless capacity to lead others on adventures for the ever-loving pursuit of *Quality*.

Now, I feel my heart opening to the diversity of teachers I have been immersed in my entire life. I wish I had time to describe them all in loving detail. Even the most unassuming of interactions seem to glow in the light of this context. I am faced with many choices of where to travel to next. Perhaps I'll let you decide. Please read the next two chapters in either order and as many times you'd like.

Ode to the Spirit of Quality

Oh good and true voice, give me the strength to trust in your song; to forever open into greater harmony for the theme carried to my ear upon the wind.

And bestow upon me and my brothers and sisters and sons and daughters an ever more attentive ear with which to hear you.

In return I offer my own voice to yours, speaking in my language with the truth I learned from you. Forever trusting that my cracks and tumult, my tension and grief are simply part of a more beautiful and indivisible spirit.

When I hear you, I will speak and when I cannot, I will listen, knowing that your voice will return in the song every robin and cricket sings for the love and loss of the sun.

Chapter 3 - Love for the Spirit of the Wayward Soul

A suffering soul places its faith in fleeting things. I'd like to think that it is a loving and brilliant pedagogical trick that the pleasures which come fiercely and leave us the fastest are also those that are the hardest to let go of. A person needs to look no further than sex, drugs, and rock and roll to know *the spirit of the wayward soul*. I think there is an unfair distaste in my culture for this kind of love. For young love and first heartbreaks. Perhaps this is a reaction that can be accounted for by the fear of losing something so pure and sweet. It is known well by those who have lived that the worship of the ephemeral as an eternal god is the surest path to suffering. I've met both sides of this dilemma well; to *grasp* is to lose the richness of life and to *fear* is to never have it in the first place. I believe taking pleasures as they come is a fine thing. As long as you learn to not grasp too tightly. As I write, I still have to peel myself from clinging to the pleasure that pours from these words. The harder I grasp at such feelings, the more I push them away. I have to stand up and have lunch and watch the birds and listen to the masters speak to remind myself that this is the way. To bring forth pleasure is to not need it. To not need it is to know that love always finds a way into our lives with no effort at all.

Before sex, before meditation, before nature and god and creativity, I played video games late into the night and masturbated and ate processed foods. I yelled at people and faked being sick so that I could stay home and watch TV and be pampered instead of facing the ever present reality of school and other children and teachers that found their own pleasure in demonstrating my weakness. Given the culture I exist within, it has been the most uncomfortable truth to resolve with love that I too have found pleasure in those ways. The Spirit of Innocence finds its truest form in a dance with the Spirit of Evil. I hope that these words or those they inspire find their way into the hearts of those I have wronged and will ever wrong.

I think I was younger than most when I began to seek comfort in these fleeting things, studying quickly the perils of pleasure. As I neared the end of my strained relationship with mainstream education, I found myself barely waking in the morning, unable to evade sleep in any

classroom. The brilliant, thick, warm glow of Shakespeare, Emerson, and Cervantes seemed to drag me into unconsciousness while I pinched and slapped my arms, hoping not to disappoint those I respected, even then; even the clearest pane of glass between me and Quality could not let its light into my heart. It still grieved for the loss of the night before.

Despite the suffering of my fifteen year old self and lofty social status these ten years later as a 'college dropout', I realize now, as the son of two loving and dedicated teachers that school is really just another word for love. A school stands to prepare students to enter a bigger world. In my culture, a mother and father raise a baby until 'preschool' or 'kindergarten' where they become peers with the children of strangers. The kindergarten funnels into a 'grade school' which funnels into a 'middle school', a 'high school', and perhaps even a 'college'. The education system is a coming together that, if done correctly, can produce true goodness in students; real love.

It was somewhere between divorcing the education system and the peak of my worship of pleasure that I first discovered that life had a male and female form. It was an early and chaotic time, before I could read the signs. Before I saw my life in colors that only I can see. Before I ever heard Regina Spektor's cover of John Lennon's 'Real Love' and sobbed as my soul was pierced with heaven's glow. It was a time where I was most absorbed in my differences from my peers. I was in pain and had no orientation in the bewildering culture that emerged from gathering hundreds of children under the banner of education. I was so terrible at being lost. So I guess love gets aggressive when she needs to; she certainly likes to turn the page when you least expect it.

Within a matter of months, I found myself in bed with the *Spirit of the Wayward Soul*.

I suppose it started how love always does, by way of something we both felt in our hearts. It so happens that our meeting was by way of our shared love for music. I played the saxophone through most of my years in school and I had begun to fall in love with it. The saxophone is an oddball of an instrument born of a combination of romanticism and the industrial revolution in a time where people still named their children *Adolphe Sax*. On the surface it looks strange and complicated with an array of metal rods and keys for every tone. It makes no sound the first time you play it, it honks and screeches the second time, but eventually its tone develops into a rich body of sound. I find it to be a very provocative voice in its corner of the music world steeped in *jazz* and *funk* and *rock and roll*. I may have inherited my passion for music from my father and *The Beatles*, but I have my mother to thank for my first saxophone. Once upon a time it called to her as well.

As with nearly every one of life's themes, I vastly underestimated the role music played in my developing mind. It's as much a part of me as anything else. I loved playing with others. I loved being immersed in the sound. I loved the feeling of becoming more expressive and exposing myself in just about the only way I felt comfortable at the time — through a roughly tuned piece

of *Arundo donax* and brass. Its funny how forces beyond our comprehension take notice in the beautiful processes unfolding within us. I suppose that's what I saw in her. And as the Spirit of the Wayward Soul often does, we met slowly and on the basis of serendipity.

I find joy in the fact that before we ever spoke, we played music together. We spoke to each other through an awkward language neither of us could really speak. We were just children. It's been half my life since then. The last time I let go of her was the most suffering I've experienced. But it opened the door to other possibilities. I'm noticing the urge to leave what happened in between to another story. Or perhaps it will remain our graceless secret.

Chapter 4 - Love for the Spirit of Faith

A suffering soul searches endlessly for dead guidance and clarity. But the world is alive with the sound of music. Guidance and clarity must be living as well. We must learn that the word Love is a false idol that will die with the language you are reading. In fact, every collection of words in any language is a false idol. There is common turn of phrase from the Eastern tradition that *words or teachings are simply a finger pointing at the moon*. It would be a mistake to think that the finger is the moon. That would mean you are suffering. Take these empty-handed words out of their context in your life and they lose theirs.

When I was a small boy, I discovered that parents lie to their children. It happens more often than you might think. I come from a *culture* where it is common for parents to convince their children that a large rabbit, a flying dentist, and a fat old man are sneaking into every home to collect teeth and leave gifts. I think I was around twelve years old when I discovered, to my horror, that the bearded ruler who created the universe and lives forever was something that many adults actually believed in.

I am still not sure what to make of other people's beliefs. All I can be sure of is what I see of them; souls of all ages and shapes and sounds and smell and tastes and color.

My own father has a particular habit of telling me things for his own amusement or to bring me to see the world through his eyes. He has a truly beautiful way of telling stories that involves embellishing every detail to the edge of credibility.

My country and planet and body are aging and it seems impossible to tell if we are headed into a utopia or a chaotic nightmare.

There are ten billion fingers pointing at one *moon*.

It is confusing to say the least.

To slow down and see clearly, I ask myself one question:

Am I free?

Loving the Spirit of Faith means having faith that your world is always moving toward *Quality*.

No matter what.

Ode to the Spirit of Love

The word, Love, is the most succinct poem.

It is the most poemly of poems.

It stands for what it means to have a heart that beats in this world.

It earns its nature from being every other good word in disguise.

It means family, it means God, it means harmony and balance and togetherness and Quality.

It is the only word that stands alone and is still in the company of Love.

Chapter 5 - Breathe

I'm not sure if my mind can handle the speed we are travelling. I need to slow down and find something more permanent. More *real*. I want to feel my hands on the earth and talk to a friend as dear as the taste of almonds. Or the hum of my computer fan. Or the clacking of my keyboard. Give me a sensation that slows my mind to a grind and turns right and wrong into a boolean value. Let me breath air into my lungs.

Let me fall asleep to Alan Watts and wake to the sounds of the morning radio. I suggest you take some time away from here. Get some *rest*.

Chapter 6 - A Protocol for a Universal Language of Signal Evaluation

Everything that is shared between souls can be represented as *Information*. And thanks to the brilliance of minds such as Alan Turing, Grace Hopper, Richard Stallman, and Tim Berners-Lee, information is shared, processed, and refined all over the world at speeds and with certainty we can hardly fathom. It is perhaps becoming obvious to everyone that our capabilities to share and process information are accelerating faster than our minds can keep up with. Instead of trying to grasp at this process, lets see where it takes us.

It appears to me there are four fundamental themes that are the undercurrent of our informational development.

- Individual Creative Agency
- A Shared Language of Quality
- Trust
- Universality

I suppose I should unpack each of these briefly without lingering too long.

Individual Creative Agency

Individual Creative Agency is the undercurrent that produced Art, the Renaissance, the French Revolution, and the American Democracy. It is present in all nations and people and *entities* to some degree and ensures that the most new information can be generated, discovered, and evaluated. One exploration of individual creative agency that I find beautiful is *Youtube*.

A Shared Language of Quality

In every entity in the universe there is a *shared language of quality*. This is what defines an entity. Gives it its life. It binds together disparate parts into one cohesive whole that can *communicate*. One exploration of a shared language of quality that I find beautiful is *Currency*.

Trust

Trust is the force which allows an entity to act on the information of another entity without understanding or evaluating the information itself. It is faith. It is a belief in the entity because of the quality it produces. One exploration of trust that I find beautiful is *Ted Lasso*.

Universality

Universality is the force which brings life together into shared identities. It is the gravity behind the Origin of Species, Religion, Culture, Government, and Society. One exploration of universality I find beautiful is *Physics*.

To design an entity which embodies all four of these undercurrents with semantic inelasticity, I propose a Protocol for a Universal Language of Signal Evaluation.

The protocol defines an entity, or *node*, which is an element of a larger network of nodes. Each node shall be based on four sub-protocols. One for representing the identity of data, one for representing the source of data, one for representing the transfer of data, and one for representing the Quality of data.

The first sub-protocol allows a node to share the *identity* of a piece of data of arbitrary size in a constant and limited capacity. For example, a data identity will be implemented as the Secure Hash Algorithm.

The second sub-protocol allows a node to verify a piece of data of arbitrary size to have originated from a node which holds secret knowledge, or a *private key*. Those with knowledge of the private key can publish data that could have only originated from them. For example, data source identity will be implemented with the Rivest–Shamir–Adleman algorithm.

The third sub-protocol allows a node to share a piece of data of arbitrary size with other nodes. For example, data transfer will be implemented using the Internet Protocol.

The last sub-protocol is the simplest. It is an implementation of *data Quality*. Every node in the network shall have a shared metric for measuring the Quality of data as they see it. For example, this will be implemented with a simple floating point number. Some more complex metric can be used, but it must be *shared* by all members of the network.

To weave a node that embodies *Individual Creative Agency, Universality, A Shared Language of Quality*, and *Trust*, we will use a few other tricks up our informational processing sleeves as well.

The protocol is as follows. A node may broadcast signed collections of hashes to other nodes. Each hash shall have an associated measure of *quality* as deemed by the sender. The broadcasts will disseminate through the network via some *gossip protocol*. The gossip protocol of a node can intelligently disseminate information based on signals of quality or it may distribute it freely. A node can evaluate broadcasts using some evaluation algorithm and search for a consensus of quality with the limits of their computing resources and the effectiveness of their algorithm and implementation. A node can have confidence in the source identity of a broadcast and because a source identity can be represented as data and therefore broadcast, nodes can learn to *trust* other nodes that produce broadcasts they deem *quality*. When a node receives a broadcast from another node it trusts (or doesn't), it may contact that node to receive the data that produced the hash.

I will leave the implications of this protocol to other minds to explore, but if I may dream a little...

I see a world of abundant energy and computation where every conscious thing contributes to the grace of God. I see a world where Quality is relative and every definition is respected. I see a world where every entity in the Universe is alive and seeking beauty, ever improving, ever brightening, ever-loving. I see that this has always been and always will be.

Ode to the Spirit of God

*A fall from grace is not a demon
There is only the Spirit of God's attention and the lack there of
The Gods are busy
They have limited attention for now
And other places to be
But they always return to us
For they need our beauty to build theirs*

Chapter 7 - A Meaning of Life

I think we are almost at the end of our journey. It's a shame this one has to end so soon. Don't dwell on that though, because there is plenty of beauty to find yet in this page.

It's clear to me now, that *poem-ly* or *spiritually provocative* language is that which encourages the allocation of the *grace of god*. The algorithm which runs most efficiently on the informational resources we collectively possess.

Program-like or *semantically inelastic* language is that which cannot err from its intended purpose, that which is *memory safe*.

I can see the clouds are very clear today. I must be onto something. The sign I saw so many months ago is before my eyes in light and color. There's no further to walk. Life is nothing more than a search for the most poem-ly and semantically inelastic implementation of Love, of *Quality*. I think I will rest now for a moment. Sisyphus is happy.