**[ACTIVITIES](#activities)**

To do:

* Compress several years of life into songs, a puppet show, video, song lyrics reviewing what we did different years.
* Type up the baby book text that betsy wrote and add my own memories into it as well, use photos from that time period to add
* Write poem/journal about all of Esme’s favorite books (book title, author, favorite part)
  + Esme supplies the favorite books and parts.
* Write a poem about Esme’s favorite foods (same method as above: brainstorm foods and what she likes about them and then write up the poem and print it out or cut up the words and us them as site word practice. Extension: use the children’s Thesaurus to look up synonyms and antonyms.
* Esme’s stack (of sight words she knows or is learning, use ROLEX cards.

**08/01/2022**

Helena wondering in and out of the study to tell me random dinosaur facts that she is making up from the pictures of a dinosaur book.

Yes, we can go see the dinosaur bones in the museum and then we can go to Dinosaur land and dig for their bones. We’ll go to where they lived and dig for their bones there. The dinosaurs died in this desert. There. In this place. That’s where we have to dig for them.

Dad, somebody like dinosuars, but all dinosaurs died, but at the side somewhere at a place they talking about dinosaurs.

**06/23/2022**

“Dad, I’m pulling you down.”

Losing patience quicker with wrangling Helena these days. At 40lbs her cooperative or dead weight approach makes all the difference.

Left salt on the floor. Didn’t shut up all the windows. Trying to be attentive. Trying to let myself get lost.

Trying to settle into thinking about coding and comedy. Personality. Persona. An act of artifice. Creating a character. Charisma. Attraction. What do they have to seem so joyful. Trying to practice that beatific Alphonso Joy

**06/25/2022**

Helena working on playdo at the kitchen table and talking to herself in silly voices. “Macaroni is yummy in my mouth, but not yummy in my toes.”

Betsy—“Who are you talking to?”

Helena – “I’m talking to myself.”

**06/02/2022**

Helena: “ Why did the human poop on your head?”

Me: “ I dunno.”

Helena: “Because he was lying.”

**06/01/2022**

Mom, I wish I could ride on a giraffe. And a hores. And a mammal.

Betsy—“You’re a mammal.”

Helena – “I not a mammal. I not a creature”

Betsy – “you are, you’re a creature.”

Helena – “No, I a people”

Helena -- “Mmmm, I like cucumunders.”

Helena – “I have too much neighbors”

Me-“ Do you want to live out in the wilderness like Hilda, surrounded by trees and mountains.”

Helena – “No… Hilda likes to get lost.”

Me – “That’s right, she always finds new things when she gets lost.”

Helena—“You want to hear a song?”

Me – “What? Okay”

Helena – she puts up one finger and announces, “I can sing you one song.”

“A farmer in a well, a farmer in a well, high harry cherry-oh, a farmer in a well.”

**5/31/2022**

Towards the end of the school year, on Princess and Pirate’s day Esme asks me if Canada has a queen. I attempt to thumbnail sketch Canada’s relationship with the UK. Esme asks if there was a war between the The British Empire and Canada for them to become independent. I say no, then try to clarify by describing how post the World Wars the British Empire was broken up. How the sun used to never set on the British Empire. Oh, I see they had bitten off more than they could chew. Then she expresses her hope that Russia goes the same way. How is she so clever? I felt like I was not explaining well. But she got it and summarized it into this pithy insightful truism…

**5/29/2022**

Helena wakes up and saunters into the room, blonde bobbed hair tosseled and soft, then her hands go up and she talons up her hands, witchy fingers, pink nails raised defensively in threat- “I’m a snake with claws” she says with her morning’s husky voiced greeting.

**5/27/2022**

Helena comes into the work room and says, “Here, Dad, put this on.” Then proceeds to put a plastic string of red beads around my neck.”

**5/25/2022**

**Helena** -- “I want to pick my unds. Ahhhuuu (here catchall frustration sound, such a defeated, annoyed bothered, exasperated sound, defeated and rebellious all at the same time-- “this sucks” kind of implication.

**5/16/2022**

Helena comes out of her room in the morning and climbs up into my lap and then flips up her pajama top to read me a poem from the surpisingly large and wordy tag that is dangling on the inside of her pajamas. “I want to read you a poem. Blah, blah, blah, nonsense, Badness is the funniness.” Turns out she is quoting Roal Dahl and goes off to fetch *Revolting Rhymes*. Opening up to the Quentin Blake illustration of the Prince hilariously chopping the head off of Cinderella. The badness is the funniness.

A little while later I get the call of the day -- from the Andology lab to make a appointment for Thursday. I initially say ASAP and she invites me to come in today, but then I back track and ask if we could do Thursday at 10:30. I say I can and that that is great. She reminds me to bring the $60 in cash and I assure her I will. Thursday at 10:30 on S. Wood, just west of downtown in the Medical district. At last, at last we’ll put my generative skills to the test… at last, at last we’ll put my infertility to the test.

Later in the day Helena comes up from the yard with soaking wet pants. She then takes them off, as well as her underwear, hangs them in the bathroom (as per my suggestion) and then goes and finds a new pair of underwear and a dry pair of pants. She then puts both of these on herself! A bit later I realize that her underwear are inside out, not that big of a deal and her legs are through the same leg hole, basically wearing her shorts as a skirt.

5/12/2022

Helena wake up chipper and bright, then darkens when her bottom rash flash up. We have a skirmish about lotion that she requested. I am holding the lotion tube and have lotion on my hand that I am ready to apply to her aggravated skin, she protests—” Not that lotion!” This is the lotion, but she has it in her mind that it is not the lotion, so I sink into the couch trying to gather up all the nen that’s building up. I woke positive about the day ready to push further with my Rails projecs. My digital dislocation is lessenting—I am closing in on being settled in the digital sphere.

Helena – “I like the Beatles! (when she hears the Beatles come on). One of the Beatles—I want to hold your hand, hand, hand. I like the Beatles—they have a great haircut!”

5/9/2022

Helena – “I still hungry!” After absolutely not wanting her dinner. She whines. She moans. Our collective patience is in tatters.

Helena: “Marcel, would you like your Vitamin? Helena (doing a high pitch, squeaky cat voice: “No, hank you!”

I pick out a pair of underwear for Helena. She rejects them. She picks out a pair. Then When I am putting them on her and notice that they are Peppa Pig underwear and I have the audacity to comment that they are Peppa Pig underwear she suddenly wants another pair immediately-- “I only like watching Peppa Pig. I don’t want to wear the underwear.”

**4/24/2022**

Helena -- “Hey Dad, this Jelly Cancer is good!” ( Jolly Rancher)

* “Hey Dad, can I have some more Giddyweed?” (Gatorade)
* “Hey, Dad, you banana juice!”

**4/17/2022**

Helena at three and 2 months is growing up at an ever-increasing rate. Annoucein

“What’s rooting,” she asks when I tell her I should tell her about rooting sometime. We root down together. The lack of judgement, the curiosity. The unselfconscious engagement in the subject. The idea. The act. That yes and mentality that gets beaten out of people because it has to be a two-way street. It takes two to tango and so forth.

“Dad, we was carrots!”

**3/28/2022**

Helena’s hilarious and incredulous and elongated “Whhhaaaat??”

**3/24/2022**

We monster car, Helena says in a husky, kind of aggressive and threatening (for a three-year-old) voice. Now we Angel car. This said in a much sweeter, higher, more innocent sounding voice. Then just as sudden she’s back to the huskier voice saying Now we monster car again. Pointing out the window at a car passing in the opposite direction-- They angel car.

**3/23/2022**

Helena: Maybe a cat could share he’s toys?

3/22/2022

The candy wall is on my nose.

3/18/2022

Helena after barging into the office where I am trying to concentrate and me telling her she has to leave.

She protests – “This is my den. I not Helena. I a bear.” She starts wailing when I tell her she has to leave.

Later she comes back in again with two little toy dogs – California and Egglet (real name Margot). California was from Stella’s birthday party, a little pound puppy looking mutt. She also has a little rabbit in a ballerina costume from the very kind and funny Polish janitor butler guy at Graff, Jesse, who gave Esme and Stella identical dolls for Christmas one year. Esme named the doll Dollhouse. Helena tells me the names of the toys with her little husky voice, she is warm and cuddly, fitting less and less easily into my arms these days, on my la. She’s my lanky lovely. All arms and legs like Dollhouse.

Both girls are good sleepers and generally good eaters. Full of opinions and plans catch phrases. Daily tragedies and festivities. In the late afternoon Helena asks Esme what time it is. “What time is it Esme? Esme? What time? Me, from the other room calmly as Esme is not responding—“Helena, it’s 5:45”. Helena bursts into tears and in her most melodramatic voice howls – “No, dad! Don’t tell me the time. I was asking Esme!!!”

**3/14/2022**

H- (talking about the shark tooth fossil esme received from Kim’s neighbor Charlie) “A long time a go there was a shark and he died and his tooth came out and the rest of him stayed behind.”

“Helena peed in the potty, Helena peed in the potty,” Helena chats. “I’m calling myself, Helena!” she says in a silly voice while pointing at herself. “Helena.” She says again in such a sweet almost maternalistic voice.

Helena you are setting up *Candyland* chanting “Candy, candy, candyland, woo do do, woo do do do do, (lounge singing turns into *Theme from Totoro* as you unfold the game board and begin tracing the color squares along the winding path with your finger making racing car acceleration sounds with your mouth until your finger reaches the end of the board, the castle at the top of the board with ice cream cones for turrets and you exclaim-- I win!!!

You are struggling with potty training. We are struggling with potty training. We are tired of changing poopy diapers and you having a sore bottom and keep having bowl movements that turn into bath times and so on. We love celebrating with you with “Belle, Belle pooped in the potty, Belle, Belle pooped in the potty!”.

Helena and Esme got shots this week in uptown. One on each arm for Helena. “Don’t take my bandaids off okay.”

Esme will go to school today for the first time without wearing a mask.

She is loving school. Received all “A”s on her report card. Loves reading (need to get that list from betsy).

Building a second brain for your kid

Helena playing toy store-- “a drum!... a baby!.. some underwear!!!”

**03/13/2022**

Helena playing a game where she imagines she’s in a toy store. She runs around the kitchen, crouching down to pick up the items she imagines to be there, calling out in delight as she snatches them up-- “A drum!... A baby! … some underwear!!” Do they have any puzzles I ask and she immediately says, yes, right here-- and stoops down to gather up a few imaginary puzzles off the floor.

Helena and Esme loving the Davey Crocket song. Betsy’s story from being a kid and spinning around and around dancing to the song playing it on the faster speed.

**03/03/2022**

**Helena:** “ I’m pooing!”

Mommy: “ No -- you’re not!”

Helena: “ Yes, I are!!”

The dream child’s becoming love rainbow.

The dream child’s evanescent young rainbow.

**03/01/2022**

Grapenut and Nutsawoo – two squirrels that linger around on our back porch and pillage our bird feeder

**02/08/2021**

“Dat not frash.”

Frash trash

Fristmas tree

Frick trick

Frip trip

Esme reading at a TRC reading level “P”

To demonstrate proficiency in TRC, students should read at Level D by the end of kindergarten, Level J by the end of Grade 1, Level N by the end of Grade 2, Level P by the end of Grade 3, Level T by the end of Grade 4, and Level V by the end of Grade 5.

Esme is moody, game, winning, obstinate, focused, capricious, sentimental, poignant, insightful, literary, growing, tall, strong, excited, curious, interested, kind, concerned, patient.

**12/29/2021**

Helena’s screeching cry of protest-- she want so be held-- at 30lbs now this is becoming a bigger and bigger ask.

**12/24/2021**

Stretching and having Helena crawl all over me while I was in a yoga pose.

For I've grown a little leaner, grown a little colder  
Grown a little sadder, grown a little older  
And I need a little angel sitting on my shoulder  
Need a little Christmas now

The pull and push, this pressure test and balancing act.

12/10/2021

Helena making up lyrics to the *12 Days of Christmas*

“And three little black birds!!!”

12/03/2021

Helena --- Let for yet ie. “ No milk let”

Moo for more … “Ahhh… no moo milk.”

**12/02/2021**

“Hank you, Mommy,” Helena

Helena slaps me across the face, I ask her-- “What are you doing?”

I’m doing this she says and begins to cheerily slap her own cheeks.

“Ya’s at ‘cool” (Esme’s at school)

“I ga” (I’m finished)

**12/22/2021**

“I fat and hungry. Dad, I fat and hungry again.”

“You’re not fat. You’re skinny.”

“Dad, I skinny and hungry.”

“Would you like an apple?”

“No hank you. No hank you.”

“Bavey Frocket”

Baby Daddy-- Helena wearing my glasses and hat.

Esme spins the lime green translucent dreidel that Micah had given here, “Whoa! Its going around!” she squeals in delight.

She’s shattering my concentration with the ebullient pitter-pat filibuster of youth.

Nun, gimel, hey of chai, shin

**11/24/2021**

Two year old singing the kinks from the kitchen about a big fat mamma and the summer time.

**11/19/2021**

Helena: Anna Bay Grables == Ann of Green Gables.

Fig (Twig- a cute little “Deef-fox” who is gcharacter from a storybook)

Fruck (truck)

tick (stick)

Boon (spoon)

Bring (Spring)

Fwimming (swimming)

Grew (screw)

Ratch (scratch) “The cat *ratched* me”

Ear whack (ear wax)

Candylier or Candiler (Advent Calender with chocolate)

Brexit (Breakfast)

Frismas Free (Christmas Tree)

**11/04/2021**

Esme to Helena-- “Hugo died, honey. You want to be where Hugo is? You want to go where Hugo is, honey?

**10/31/2021**

Helena: “Marcel-- I a kitty!! Look it!!”

10/20/2021

And then Helena is screaming at me and I am trying to settle in. Complaining about your commute psychic or otherwise gets laborious after awhile. After awhile you lose interest in the commute’scenery-- the novel becomes monotony-- repeated mise-en-scene. Modest beginning. Modest end.

10/16/2021

betsy-- “so doesn’t want to be around those two.”

10/01/2021

Dr. Minkus passed away this fall. We were all very sad. He was such a sound, understanding, patient, confidence instilling doctor who reflected the preciousness of your child and their health and your incredibly important and beautiful role or administering to those health needs, cultivating this child as they grow and blossom and have the absolute best chance to learn positive, satisfactory, nourishing patterns of engagement with this life.

09/19/2021

Guarding the bathroom door-- barring the two-year-old from exciting. How did we get here? 6-year-old on couch with puke bucket beside her.

Helena: “A body say no!”

Me: “You just have to try. Just try.”

Helena scolds me and bites my bottom fro moving the kitchen trash can so I can use the kitchen counter as part of my standing desk set up. I am trying to write, but am not at all in the mind set to be able to write well or productively or whatever. Betsy is a little hung over and napping, I have been up since 4 or something-- Esme is sick throwing up. Helena is naked from her little waist down, a perpetual threat of potty accident waiting to happen-- betsy’s back is bad- her psyche has been bad-- I have abandoned her attempting to seek a career-- seeking to structure a wall-- I’ll go in here and do this and come back changed, with more wherewithal for this existence.

Learning may sometimes seem spontaneous, but it is really a discrete collection of habits and insights acquired over an incredibly long period of time.

Have not been coming to the table. Have not bee taking my time. Esme vomiting over the side of her loft. Helena irritable and oppositional-- “ I not.” (I won’t, I don’t want to, etc.), betsy hungover after an ill-advised cigarette and an extra drink and daddy’s home head high on cannabis nursing a flaring up back and an incendiary existential crisis as he tries to self-teach himself into the tech world while pilfering time to waste on his embarrassing stabs at self-expression.

Chasing the inchoate -- the just over there --

The humble becoming, the crumbling into being, the coarse course of all substantial change.

Tooth and nail

Bottle and screen

Floating feathers

Down a public stream

Water lilies, Ophelia’s lips

Grassy lawns and barefoot children

A mason jar of fireflies brightening as the day dims.

9/20/2022

Helena calling Sour Patch kids “Gummy Boys!”

Helana : I’m gonna use the big potty and I’m gonna pinch your finger.

**08/27/2021**

Trust and practice… practice of running… not about performance. About a feeling. Changing up stride. Running in sandals. Then barefoot. Then in “barefoot” sandals. Hiking to the top of Sugarloaf mountain. Iron rich rocky top on the Lake Superior coast line just west of Marquette where the landscape begins to get rugged like Alaska or somewheres. And Helena at two and a half insisted on walking the whole way up hereself… well until we got to the more exposed stairs higher up and the metal handrails we super hot, then she wanted to be carried a little bit, which I was happy to oblige, especially since we were on the home stretch-- a fine place to set a precedent of carrying the 30 lbs. wiggly-worm.

Helena is very into her potty training sticker chart ( she gets a sticker if she tries and a sticker and a gummy if she tries and makes some potty in the proper place. ) She has been a little resistant to our heretofore pretty meager attempts to introduce it, but now seems to be on board. She’s been wearing panties for the first time today (purple ones) and they suit her and look comfortable and she seems like such a big girl. She’s had two accidents today. Thankfully she has not swallowed anything. Just this week she has swallowed the same marble and passed it out… twice… She seems very sensible sometimes… but other times. I suppose that’s all other though really. Really need to work on that swallowing of inedible things (things asserted by the guy whose swallowed like a handful of change and his mother’s wedding band over the years. Thankfully Helena has apparently inherited my robust digestive tract)

**08/25/2021**

Hey, dad, what does fatal mean? Oh, so the Basquelus in Harry Potter is very powerful, but there are some things that can kill it, including the crow of a rooster. The crow of the rooster is fatal to the Basquelous. “I smell blood” a favorite quote of the Basquelous which Esme has oft quoted and then Helena began to pick up.

8/21/2021

Helena whining. My body whining. The bickering of disgruntled sisters.

**08/12/2021**

The other day I am trying to knock out so office work so that I can get to coding for the day. Esme is bugging me about wanting to print out something from our other computer in the other room. The monitor isn’t hooked up though she would need me to break concentration on what I was doing. I press her for details on what exactly it is she that she wants to print to determine if it is high value enough to really warrant breaking my concentration and work flow to assist her. She is super cagey about her project until she finally admits that she had just wanted to print out a blank piece of paper. When I indicate the bulging pack of blank printer pages next to me she whines and says that she wanted one that was warm.

The girls pacing or running around bumping my computer or tripping over the cord. Attacking me. Biting me to the point that they leave bite marks in my arms and then looking at the bite marks sympathetically and saying ahhh… are you all right? Are you sad. And then comforting me for the bite marks that they just made in me.

Asking to click my pen until I give it to her after she hears me clicking my pen when I am thinking about something not even noticing that I am clicking the pen. When she breaks my attention to ask if she can click the pen and then I absent-mindedly hand her the pen and then pen begins clicking the pen the pen suddenly becomes very distracting and also I have nothing to write with now, which is a little of an imposition becomes as a rout learner I really need to be writing and rewriting, viewing and reviewing to feel like I am getting anywhere with my self-training.

Screaming at me—*Don’t do that Dad.. You can’t do that dad and slaping my computer. While betsy is off with the car and the battery has died outseiod e of the library and our food we ordered is ready to be picked up and she is in a shitty mood and I am getting zero coding done and this whole set up is pointless and a set up for failure.*

**08/25/2021**

I try and settle in on the couch with my yellow notebooks—I have a live writing notebook and a drafting writing notebook and a React notebook and a Rails notebook for new notes. The girls start to shuffle through my notebooks and argue over my pens.

My process is to review all the material in the notebooks and add material and eventually I will be an app developer and a novelist. My pens are being stolena dn papers scattered. Now after a timeout for stealing my pen and then throwing it back at me, Hlenea is on the floor fact crying and whining to expressive her discontent at having to hand the pen back to me. *I don’t want to*….

**08/10/2021**

*Esme refuses to put on clothes—*she is hot. She is hungry has spent the morning relaxing on the love seat reading. Had an Irish dance class this morning and went to breakfast with Mom. He attitude with me isn’t great. I feel like I have worsened our relationship by constantly feeling conflicted about work and family time. Having to absorb other people’s emotional energy in an emotional way— without a work-professional backstop is rough. Your coworkers/managers probably absorb a lot of one’s day to day animus as we slow or quick boil in our stress baths, redirecting our discomfiture towards the bodies in our gravitational rotation.

Helena— “okay, let’s have blueberries outside”

Certain words she says exactly the same each time: ***outside*, *Esme***

**07/23/2021**

Esme lost her first tooth- front left.

Helena has just started 2 yet a little bit more excited about using the potty. When I was coming in from outside she greeted me with the proud announcement that she had “pooped in her tiny potty.” This was not true, but she is getting the idea at least.

**07/20/2021**

Micah tasks Esme with finding metal scraps and screws in the yard around the building where roofers had thrown down the old shingles when they re-roofed the building earlier this summer. He offers her a 10 cent a piece bounty and the us of a footlong rectangular magnet with a wheel on each side on the end of broom-like handle. She works diligently for 20 minutes or so and earns herself a whopping $13.40 (an effective hourly rate of over $70 /hour. Not too shabby considering that my first full time job paid me a meager $4.25 / hour to dig graves and maintain the lawns at our municipal cemetery.

Gravedigger, deck hand, waiter, reading and language teacher, luxury goods salesman, writer, translator, computer programmer / web developer

**07/15/2021**

Helena is sitting on the couch with betsy who is in the process of getting dressed for the day. *You have nipples. You have big, big nipples mom?* (as she pokes at them). Betsy is getting ready for the day. She combs her hair and then pulls the excess hair off the comb and tosses the clump into the toilet. As she continues to get ready to go out Helena toddles into the bathroom to check things out. She notices the hair clump floating in the toilet and asks. *“You have hair in toilet? You poop out.”*

*I go Library Book! I can come with Esme and Mommy! Yeah I do! Now! Daddy, you not come. You stay here and work. Bye-bye!*

**07/13/2021**

Attended Tessa’s birthday

* Pizza, cupcakes, ice cream from the ice cream bicycle vendor, golden late afternoon light, warm, but comfortable, a grass expanse, a playground, the nature area, balloons, tears as the balloons ascend into the trees of wrists etc… sparkling water, juice, the Cubs are rebuilding, people are traveling to Wisconsin and Western Michigan, walking through the woods, spending lugubrious afternoons drinking beer our in their garages or under umbrellas on the beach.

06/16/2021

Helena:

“You’re garbage. Mom, you’re garbage. You’re garbage, Mom.”

Esme’s book club—reading together and discussing books.

* Owen
* Classmates
* Cousins
* Different ages
* We could have a book club or a story club.
  + 12 stories…

06/14/2021

Me: Do you want a piece of toast?

Helena: They she grabs one—“want honey on this.”

I spread butter and honey on the toast and cut it in two. This cause her to freak out—“You broke my toast! You broke my toast!”

You want a new one? No. No, new one.

06/06/2021

*I want red one,* Helena wails. Esme has an orange one. *I want red one!!*

*You want this one, Sweety*? Esme asks. She is being intentionally cruel to her sister now. *This is red, Helena.* She says of the orange balloon. Esme has done this since Helena was very small-- telling her the wrong color for things. Helena knows its not right and Esme knows she knows so she just keeps calling the orange balloon red just to make her sister crazy. *You want this one, Sweetie*?

*Want red one*, Helena whines and cries and blubbers in desperation.

Now I am holding the balloon above my head. The dishes, the laundry. Why does it matter-- I suppose because the 2 year old will start shrieking bloody murder if the 6 year old gets ahold of the balloon, so I hold it up with left arm elongating , reaching to extension perched up on the top of my left leg, suspending the balloon a good 8 feet up in the air. Idrive my right leg into the floor and the extension fels really good-- just what my tight bupper back and hips and ankle. Then the six year old tickles me in the armpit and my arm flies down in reflex and smacks her right in the face. She santches the ballon and scampers away and I am relieved that I didn’t accidently break her nose or anything.

Esme is “tsking” at Helana and Helena is disconsolate. I bang the cupboards for effect and implore Esme to top intentionally making Helena cry. But Esme protests that she isn’t doing it. She’s not making Helena cry. She’s not crying because I’m “tsking” her, she’s crying because she wants to play with my balloon.

Later Esme is sulky, but suddenly brightens up when we decide to dissect an owl pellet. No sooner do we decide to do this than Belle Belle appears demanding a diaper change. Oh, shit if she is asking to be changed it is likely pretty bad. She’d pooped in an already sagging overnight diaper and it had leaked on to our bed through both sheets and the mattress pad-- I now had a laundry, poopy clothering and messy two year old situation-- in addition to a disgruntled 6 year old who wanted me to focus on her and her owl pellet dissection.

“Messy me,” says shit covered Belle Belle sweetly.

At 13:13 sharp we have fish and French fries. Helena tells me, “I not hungry (hung-gee).”

06/03/2021

Helena and I in the sunny front room with white shag carpet playing “Tear Water Tea” where we think of sad things to try and make ourselves cry so that we can make tea from our tears.

“Book broke,” she says.

“Broken chairs,” I suggest.

“Baby broke,” she says somberly.

“Owies”

“Injured birds.”

06/02/2021

Helena: “I love birds. I love this one.” Pointing at the yellow winged bird with a red head in the *Scholastic* Bird book we’re looking at together on the couch.

Helena playing with the blue Fischer Price woman with blonde hair. They one that for some reason always makes me think of Vanna White or those smartly dressed women from the Price is Right. She pats herself on the toe and then pats the little figurine on the head-- *Yours, mine*. *Mine*, *yours.*

I say Helena’s name and she responds with her flat “*What?”*

06/01/2021

I just bit my lip. I hate when you can hear it *crunch*! Explains Esme

05/26/2021

Helena’s Valley Girl – “ah-K”

05/24/2021

Mom goes for a walk, I get lost in my writing and you and Helena are playing so sweetly and relaxed in the front room. The temperature outside inside is 84. The temperature outside is 85. Thankfully inside is a bit shadier and we have the windows open to let any breeze through that occasionally might puff up.

05/22/2021

“Your perfect just the way you are.” (Esme to betsy)

Library- picked up Harry Potter

Bottled water from Dollop

Frozen yogurt in Lincoln Square.

Took a reading walk, stopping along the way home to read a few chapters of the book.

‘This is my lucky day!”

05/19/2021

Helena: “ear whack” == “ear wax”

05/11/2021

So much more risk adverse

and slower now,

so bland-minded,

sober and kind.

Playing with the children

Dragging myself holy and grimacing,

Eyes rolling back in my head,

Sick spouting halfway up my throat,

through the ritualistic act

sublimating self for love.

I play “Little Wounded Dear”

with Esme of the umpteenth fucking

thousand time. You’ll apologise my

parsomonisious inclusion of context for “Little Wounded Dear”

which I should really include for posterity, because really

someday I will think fondly on it no? I will praise her creativity and humanity.

But the same scripted act over and over again.

Finding the deer. Haivng to get the deer out of the buses.

Coaxing it. Always having the dear resist my help and spending most of the game trying to

Convince the deer to allow me to give it a shot or bring it back to my remote field hospital

Or finally to my home well appointed hospital where she can return with me to make a full

Recovery and then stay on to become my personal assistant and continue rescuing other animals in the

Woods from Bobcats and hunters and poachers and random unfortunate injuries or illnesses

That my befall them.

05/07/2021

Helena telling me— “You go work! You go work!” as she points to the workroom. Just after betsy and I finished discussing and deciding that I would work another half hour and then we would make dinner together.

Helena is now repeating everything. She is making longer and more complicated sentences. “Marcel jump off my elbow” as Marcel scrambles off the massage table and scampers away.

Her adorable “sh” sounding of s’s: ie. Bearsh… Massash…

Asking me for a Massash and crawling up on the table and putting her head right into the face pillow area and relaxing and holding perfectly still for me to work on her little chubby legs and feet and dear little spine.

Esme likes the massage table too, as does betsy and I am slowly working it into our family culture. I think it is very healthy for the girls and good for my hands and body as well.

05/02/2021

* Visited Anna and Paul and their kids in Beverly.
* Beautiful, breezy day with the wind high in the trees and the May canopies already sounding heavy and full. The whooshing of schools of fish in the sky a one and many undulation of the currents of the wind.
* Touched a fish, picked up chickens, chased them around and caught them.
* Play hide and seek with Ren and Sonya.
* Drinking beer and standing in the grass.
* Talking about the butterfly garden at the Library in Blue Island.
* Language Arts and history, middle school teacher. Why didn’t I ask him about the topics? The Technology? Why am I throwing my ideas out there. The ideas that I am not even happy with. I don’t even want to accept. Can’t accept.
* I should have asked Daniel if he knows the basics of HTML. I should put together my WEB page launch kit. Package it not as a full education in web development, but a pragmatic toe-hold that delivers immediate functionality and competency.
* Images and impressions of Italy, so wonderful that you were able to take that trip, inspiring to think about traveling with one of the girls. Or even betsy! Turning a lot of things off. Putting things off. Pruning. Simplifying. Focusing. Resigning. Trying not to worry about.
* Hymns in you cozy living room. Your kind, thoughtful kids.
* Kids being kind and thoughtful and tired and cuddly and grateful and kind. Helping each other and treating each other with respect.

05/01/2021

Where does the line in conversation and letter writing and especially in letter writing perhaps because it is both our form at hand and so seemingly more emphatic, statement black and white upon the printed page. It’s a very exposed position to be in. And yet our modern world has embraced the instantaneously publishable word. Making words to some extent worthless. That said, literacy has never been more valuable. Esme’s literacy would have probably taken off right about now anyway, pandemic, or no pandemic, but I have to think that all the extra reading time she got at home with betsy and I and betsy’s mom regularly over facetime and down in the garden with the weather warmed up with our downstairs neighbor Anna. Esme has 5 fairy lit mothers: Jinn- an artist who has relocated to Berlin but keeps in touch via letters and occasional facetime. Her last letter to Esme included some flash cards of some particularly delightful words. Esme of course has a sense of the procociousness of it all, but its just a game so she’s game to see a new word and roll it around on her tongue and add it to her word list on the fridge and make up elaborate rambling stories linking together this sometimes macabre collection of words: typical, optimist, pessimist, versatile, nonchalant, neglect, humiliate, offend, subtle, mammoth, essential, zealous, contemplate, minute, enforce, epilogye, cloying, frigid, foliage, fragrant, evidence, miniscule, discreet, taunt, consistent, unanimous, morose, bizarre, glum, persuade, orbit, monotonous, partially, foul, despise, loathe, meticulous, irrelevant, precise, unique, livid, remote, postpone, delirious, temporary, spontaneous, vapid, solitary, vigorous, drab, artificial, prolific, smitten, oblivious, quarantine, empathy, chaos, melancholy, aggressive, simultaneous, exaggerate, specific, massive, agile, incredulous, vacant, ominous, taper, rhetorical question, numeral, noble, inevitable, fraud, swindle, reluctant, onerous, ceaseless, dismal, euphoric, dissolve, disintegrate, predict.

04/29/2021

A rainbow. A double rainbow after a very grey day and then light shows and then suddenly heavy showers right when betsy and Esme went out to walk down Lincoln to buy the special flour that she needs to make traditional Irish soda bread. While none of the of 4+ different grocery stores betsy frequents (Trader Joe’s, Aldi, Fresh Tyme, Harvest Time, World Market, Whole Foods) carried it, but the Irish pub that also has an assortment of Irish grocery products has it available for purchase between 4 pm and 10 pm each day! betsy recently made a load of Soda bread with a substitute flour and it was definitely tasty. She was not completely satisfied though, so we will have to see it we notice how the authentic flour works its magic. My absolute idea homemade bread will probably always remain Mrs. Sigried’s Swedish Rye. That bread, toasted and buttered was just delightful. I think you guys would be baffled by how fast we’d go through it. I just loved it and I’m sure others did too.

Then the sun breaks through a rainbow appears to our south and Helena and I go out to se it and her reaction is even better than I expected. She’s excited and pointed and saying her “Over der. Over der.” I ask her if it’s a huge one and she say “No! It’s a tiny one!”. And I suppose it does look kind of tiny way of in the distance. It would be much more imposing if it were right next to us, just an impenetrable wall of color cascading up into the sky. That might pass as a huge one in Helena’s book, book today rainbow was a tiny one.

04/29/2021

Helena: indicating where the purple reuseable bag is to be rehung in the utility closet: “No right, der. Right der!”

“What’s your name?”

Helena: “Bo-bo.”

She’s repeating everything these days. Had longest conversation with her to date yesterday discussing

04/17/2021

Helena; “Sure!” Her enthusiastic affirmative response to most offers of activities or snacks. She muttering and mumbling and jabbering peppering the incomprehensible with some of her catch phrases: “one”, “sure”, “that”, “this one”, “book”, “Hilda”, “Mona”, “Mum”.

Her screeches of indignation. Her complaining diatribes when mother upsets her and she runs to dad to complain or describe her injury or her frustration. She gets frustrated with toys a fair amount. When something won’t fit together or won’t fit inside. She gets mad. Throws things. Throws herself down on the ground. Not always. But her temper will flare up not infrequently from frustration.

04/13/2021

Me: “Did you sleep well?”

Helena: “No,” she chirps and begins slurping and blowing bubbles in her vanilla soy milk at the bottom. She sucks up a piece of cereal through the straw and shouts “Cereal pop my mouth!”

“Again!” She gleefully implores in her ausslussloranian tone, her ancient posture arranging her windpipe just so- running up her pink bellow, her oval mouth and ready teeth.

Helena has her hand in her water. She puts her ear to the cup and her mop of blond hair flops down around it. She sits up and beams -- “Ear!” She puts her ear back to the rim of cup. “Ear!” She squeaks when she pops back up.

04/12/2021

Me: “Can you do it by yourself, Helena?”

Helena: “Sure!” A few moments later. “Daddy, help me!!!”

04/11/2021

Esme : “Something told me that you would. And I looked into the future and you did.”

04/10/2021

Esme to Helena: “No, honey, I don’t think I’m going to tell you the legend of Santa Claus right now.”

Helena: “ Do-de-doo-de-da-da-doo-dee-da-da…

**04/09/2021**

Helena is looking lokng and rangy in her pink full body pajamas patterned with hearts. “My ear whack!” She says. “Get my ear Whack Daddy!” Coming up on 26 months and her speaking is really tacking off. New words everyday-- new expressions, emotions…

Esme-- distracted, pacing around in her fannell night gown not getting ready for her zoom class at 9:00 a.m. Me “fighting” my way to my desk. Just a few pushups then. Helena is on my back and Esme is pacing around complaining/ whining that she wishes she could do that without being yelled at. This is a conversation we’ve had before. It’s tiring to have the same conversation again and again and keep your composure and keep it constructive, instructive, on point, on value, on brand, on totality, gestalt, the one, the many, many nodes, one knowledge base, consistency, revision, stamina.

**04/04/2021**

Helena golden up on my shoulders—“me happy”

Esme drops the recently learned *Hibernaculum* into a conversation… or was it I couldn’t remember the word so I asked her and she had it right away.

**04/02/2021**

“Gave egg back to him”

Girls snuggling up on the bed together, chatting and then falling asleep. betsy separates the girls when she comes up. She sees Helena’s empty bed— “Oh, Helena, where did you go?”

**03/30/2021**

*Little Girls* from Annie has been Esme’s favorite movie lately. She’s cued it up a bunch of times on Youtube for an impromptu Karaoke style-sing-along.

“Oh-- she is so tall!!” (said about Helena by someone who hasn’t seen her in a while)

“Yeah, she’s a covid baby.”

“What?”

“I said she’s a covid baby. She’s grown up during the pandemic.”

**03/28/2021**

Helena:

Ear Whack = ear wax

Enthusiastic, expert cat sound = “neeeoooww”

**03/27/2021**

Precious. Simple. Untested. Simply set up to be—but still unclear what work is—what is work? How and why do I do it? Do we do it? I write nearly two pages before I hear Esme up quietly and sweetly calling for Marcel in a soft sing-songy voice. *Marcel*. Helena has begun to call Marcel *“Sal”,*  just like Esme did at 2—Niao (as in the cat sound bu with an N instead of an M) has been fading in usage, but “hee-haw” (donkey), “woof-woof” or “woo-woo” (dog), “bum-bum” (elephant), “wae-wae” (duck) are all still going strong.

Helena’s sentencing are quickly getting more complex:

“Daddy, book read me please!!!”

Or

“Me bit daddy aGAIN”

She loves to say aGAIN… really stressing GAIN (as in increase)

Each time she extorts us for another round of whatever.

betsy and Esme are up—“Hey, dad, guess what I’m making Helena for Easter for you to put in her Easter basket— a “T-O-T-O-R-O” she spells out.

Overcoming the heart-stabbing sobs of the two-year-old left out of a round of checkers. Daddy hard at work on his correspondence course—ignoring the wild shattered toddler heart lamentations that would strip his flesh from his old rack of bones.

**02/26/2021**

Helena, tow headed, teen dream bangs and side-feather sweetness:

Me, plea(se), uh-gain (again), one, two…

She’s repeating so much more now—was singing wheels on the bus with me.

She is willful—relatively easily frustrated by toys or tricky to pick up bits on her plate.

Sometimes my daughter’s irrational whining and protestations fills me with irrational rage and anger and frustration and despair.

**02/25/2021**

We had a circus last night after dinner. We clipped up a utility lamp as a spotlight and cued up some circus music on the computer. Let the show begin!!

**02/24/2021**

Betsy is trying to Marshal the girls out the door. Esme is protesting – she doesn’t want to wear new boots from cousin, but her old boots which are too small for her and hurt her feet. Though they don’t actually hurt her feet, but she said that they did the other day so that she could convince betsy to take the ‘el’ train home instead of having her walk. Her toe had hurt so badly she had said that that they just absolutely had to take the train back home from preschool. Esme, you sobbed on the sidewalk and said you couldn’t take another step forward.

Can you help facilitate a little—I am facing the wall playing guitar, happily deconstructing a B chord—feeling music freer and more immediate than at any other time in the previous 4 decades. Something has opened in me, some faculty has quickened or developed or something else something else in me stepped aside, retired.

Don’t confuse the ritual for the reward.

Esme lying about boots setting up tearful standoff as the girls head out to the library—I am keyed up and want to get back to work—betsy and I are annoyed with one another over my weed consumption.

02/21/2021

Esme woke with a swollen left eye. Just bulging and fluid filled, but not causing her any pain. Allergic reaction? Cellulitius.

02/14/2021

Waking up today to Valentine’s Day and Helena’s second birthday!

Helena’s two-year-old vocabulary:

* “Da-dee” daddy
* “Bla-loon” balloon
* “Lo-lel” Laurel

betsy came through once more with the birthday magic!

* Dark chocolate *Totoro Cake*
* Coconut Macaroon *Soot Sprites*
* Kropser
* Valentines presents at breakfast place, balloons in view of the crib in the morning.
* Wonderful gifts:
  + *Totoro* Animal book with hand-painted Totoros by David- David and Marie
  + Wooden Chinese character blocks*-* Dan and Trisha
  + Doorbell house with keys
  + Books about art and imagination and ethics
  + Bird Feeder to attach to kitchen window for bird and squirrel watching (from Birkeys)
  + Paints and book – Susan and Micah
  + 3 segment creatures
  + Baby doll from Marcela
  + Homemade doll bed- betsy
  + Jumper, book, and magnifying glass—Lo and Beaux and Ivy.

Me to Helena: “Happy Birthday!”

Helena: “To me!!”

02/12/2021

Leave things out, don’t bike up, have to nag to keep on task, drink water, whip self, crabby at wake up, carry me, pick me up, food rubix cube

02/08/2021

Esme talking so incessantly you finally have to ask her not to. Is it abusive to ignore a particularly verbose child who doesn’t seem to even notice that you have stopped listening.

The manic creation of paper artifacts and recording is the exact creative act of my daughter. The main difference between me and her though is that she is not inhibited at all. She is an artist and kicks with the kinetic bliss of the Phoenix.

02/05/2021

Belle Belle’s broken heart calling for mother’s milk on the first night of its denial. And then on the second night screaming in her bed arms extended up when I reenter the room to comfort her, she needs me now and comes readily into my arms and nestles her head and neck and shoulders into the crook of my left arm. She snuggles in and then turns her face towards me and mumurs “Bee-bee” which is her way of requesting our perennial lullaby- *Oh, my little baby*, a little ditty I have been making up verses to most nights for the better part of 6 years now. The melody is the same, but the words are always shifting around and rearranging and rewriting themselves. Soothing is the main intention here. Takes a lot of pressure off the content, so long as you can keep it all from being too sharp or jarring.

02/04/2021

Esme has a bad attitude. We punish her by taking away all her *Hilda* graphic novels and chapter books.

01/27/2021

You’ll have crushes and heartbreaks and you’ll do feel pride and certainly some shame along the way. The full palate of human emotions. Played out in the decades of life. Colors across an advancing screen. Take the time. Find the wherewithal. Endure. Make peace with your decisions and try to be clear on why you decided to do what you did. Or say what you did. Ground your security in concrete actions that you have the power of taking. Radical change is rarely ever necessary, simple orientate your life towards your stated goals and proactively take steps to remain grounded on the path. If the path is not sustainable, it is not a path to take.

Began editing first movie with Esme- “Spy Esme”!

Shot some scenes in the apartment for another scene of the trailer? The film?

Helena word list:

Honey, up, down, yo-yo, go, Mum, Ya (yes and esme nick name depending on inflection, my, mine, no, ball, Dad, niao (cat), moo (cow), milk, wawa/water, baby, one, tofu, two, three, gain, more, circle, walk, cold/hat, you, Totoro, Kiki, Laurel, hi, bye, woo-woo (aka woof-woof dog), poop, toot, haunted, knee, toe, eye, nose, shoe, key.

She is babbling so much and is so engaging and often addresses us with exhaltations. Mom! Dad! Followed by some excited announcement that sounds like speech (intonation etc) but is of her own invention. This pseudo speech seems really important. Gibberish. She feels like she is making a meaningful expression and she is in the sense that she is making a meaningful transitory expression

01/19/2021

Mudgie and Wudgie framing for play with Esme.

She tells me—“you have tetnus and you are delirius and your mouth is clamped shut. Later I regain my speech, but she instructs me to forget how to talk. She then comforts me in the tragedy of my forgetfulness. “Oh, Daddy, oh, daddy,” she soothes, attempting to comfort me in my bewildering dumbness. x

01/18/2021

“The boy gave the sad cat a pat.”

“the tender-hearted youth gave the melancholy feline a gentle nuzzle.”

01/15/2021

My fingernails are painted. Esme painted them for me. Teal thumbs. Blue with silver sparkles: index finger, middle finger; black with gold sparkles ring finger, black pinky.

01/07/2021

Reading tonight

Esme(6) and mommy: *Ramona and her Father*

Helena(2) and daddy: *My Neighbor Totoro* picture book

12/11/2020

“Esme, come on!” I call.

“Here I come!” she replies in her most agreeable and crystalline, child-pure tone of self-assuredness and goodwill.

12/10/2020

Pink in cotton, pink in flannel

come to the morning kitchen

For their Christmas calendars

From Aunt Linda

Bite-sized chocolates tucked

Behind each date’s little paper door.

Sun for some days

None for others.

12/07/2020

Esme in her ankle length flannel nightgown that is creeping up to her kneecap as she seems to sprout taller by the day.

Helena in her pink footie pajamas— a mercurial beast, full of cuddle and chaos, kisses and teeth!

12/06/2020

Helena, on the other side of the workroom door, in the kitchen, just out of her highchair, breakfast fed, diaper changed (seemingly without a need or care in the world), is screaming bloody murder, whining, whimpering, and calling for her daddy. betsy, who has temporarily reached her Toddler-Tolerance-Breaking-Point (TTBP), is tensely sipping coffee in the living room, ignoring the Malcontent (or at least trying to)— giving her some time to work out her Monday morning complaints (does her hair hurt?). Of course, I would love to go comfort Helena, scoop her up, hug her, revel in my miraculous powers of pacification as her cries instantly cease the millisecond I scoop her up, effectively lowering the tension level in our living/working/learning/everything space from CRITICAL CRISIS to DOMESTIC BLISS. But I’ve got to get moving, gotta focus!! Tugged, stretched, drawn & quartered in opposing directions, I slip my noise-canceling headphones on and simultaneously feel like a good and bad father. . . like I said, this “dad gig” is not easy! (…from birthday letter to Dad 12/06/2020)

11/30/2020

Helena is sleeping in. Its already 7:45 and she’s still not up, some mornings she would get up at 6:00 a.m. bright eyed and bushy-tailed, laughing, calling “Mum-mee” and “Dah-ddee” from her crib.

Helena is the sweetest— babbling bouncing on my lap.

Helena word list:

No (very serious); Mum-ee; Da-dee; Yie/Yeah/Yah (Esme);

Niao (cat/Marcel); Totoro (doe-rou); go; bye-bye; uh (up); key; na (that)

“mom-mum, da-dee, mom-mum, da-dee, da-dee, mum-mum, de-dee, uh-uh, uh-uh, uh-uh”

11/29/2020

Transferring Belle Belle from nursing with betsy on the couch to her crib she flops over sometimes soundly sleeping, sometimes drowsily awake, smiling her gummy greeting, arms extended towards me— “Daddy”. She loves naps and bedtime and rarely fights the process once we have her diaper changed and clothes changed. She is a long, sweet, ruddy cheeked angel, precious weight in my arms, her head on my right shoulder nested into the crook of my neck. I carry here to our room and untie the sash of the curtain to darken the room, then I settle her into her crib between the blankets, one lighter, one heavier, a few stuffed animals scattered about. I cover her with the lighter blanket and nuzzle her stuffed pig “Piggles” next to her. I turn on her sound machine. Slip out of the room and close the heavy, loosely latched bedroom door. Nap time on a Sunday.

11/24/2020

My girls in their long dark jackets and knit hats. Esme wearing the peaked knit hat that betsy knit for her in a variety of sizes over time. She is so talented at bringing these types of creations into fruition. So much of her artistry has been plowed into wonderful knitting projects and paper crafts alone or with Esme. Esme is picking up her skills and has now at age 6 folded way more paper cranes than I have at 41 and likely ever will.

Helena is sleeping. Still such a good napper. Marcel is chewing something. I am letting the girls get on they’re way. I will be spending the afternoon cloistered away trying to get through some paper, the desert. I am crossing the desert to the source… which is ATMAN… which is ME… which I apparently have to cross the desert to get to.

It’s November 24th, 3:42 p.m. It is raining, in the high 30s, and betsy and Esme are out at Jo-ann’s Fabrics. The blower kicks on and begins circulating another blast of dry air around our closed up cabin.

Esme was our talker.

Helena is our listener.

Helena: “Watch this”, “Daddy”, “Dah-di”, “Dad-di, hi!”

Typical cleanup. “Esme, can you please bring me the basket for the wooden fish. Helena wordlessly shows up with the basket as Esme manages to slink around the apartment distracting herself.

Esme has a leather bound word book that she has been writing her new words in. This afternoon she insisted that betsy add the word *vapid* to it.

Artificial, prolific, smitten, oblivious, empathy, melancholy, aggressive, ominous, rhetorical question, meticulous, vivid, livid, spontaneous, postpone, delirious, through, under, which, world, year

When we approach language naturally, wholistically, with enthusiasm and support and materials the flow of it is truly beautiful.

I need to read to the family more. More poetry.

Esme quoting Templeton the rat from *Charlotte’s Web*:   
“No one brings my dinner in a slop pail, I have to live by my wits.”

11/23/2020

“One, one, one,” Helena says in her sweet bleating voice.

11/22/2020

Helena barging into the workroom rummaging around Esme’s art cart. Helena at the kitchen table at “school” opening markers and pulling things out of Esme’s supply caddy.

She hums and then points excitedly at the Turkey’s we made out of construction paper yesterday.

Esme is typing up a Christmas poem she has written. She wrote it by herself and it is a poem for Christmas for betsy and I.

Playing a lot of *Uno* with Esme recently.

11/19/2020

Esme folding paper cranes in her blue shirt with white polka dots and flouncy sleeves.

Helena barges in lumbering and jolly, she is in grabby fingers mode, betsy follows her in and seems cross, she expresses her frustrations, but doesn’t take Helena back out. I feel my unraveling time, unraveling and getting away from me, unraveling and unspooling through my fingers. The resentment moon waxes and wanes.

11/17/2020

Esme: “Wait. Do people eat Koalas?”

Me: “No, honey.”

11/08/2020

Impromtu hungry, hungry hippo match with Helena after she accidently spills her baggy of Goldfish crackers and banana chips on the kitchen floor. She gives me a run for my money as we snatch up the snacks and stuff them in our faces.

The spontaneous engagement of a child. Fully engaged. So much non-verbal cooperation. Opposition.

Over a week after Halloween Helena continues to love putting her Totoro costume on and dancing to the Theme song. Her cosplay is strong!

Frequent words:

Toe, totoro, Mummum, Daddy, Yie (like Jie 姐 but with a “Y”), wawa, up, Na (still her catch all for “that” used as an effective indicative expression)

11/07/2020

Tonight, Esme, you were reading solid chunks of Robert O’Brien’s “Mrs. Frisbee and the rats of Nimh”

Which is a guided reader level “V” book. Which is theoretically way above your current reading level, but more and more you are just jumping into texts and willingly moving through them. I am impressed and proud and excited for you.

11/06/2020

We take a picnic in the Rosehill Cemetery and the day is bright and golden and vibrant and plans fly over and we spread out a picnic beside the grave of James Taylor. All these lives lived meaningfully, loved, missed, grieved, celebrated, thanked, helped by, murdered by, neglected, well met. All of these relationships, the golden maple leaves catch the sun as they fall around the concrete death statue, still in the park while real deer move amongst the gravestones with the Lord’s own Stag propriety. Geese cluttering in and out of the low lagoons in the cemetery’s interior. The wall around the cemetery keeps a lot of the street sounds out, but not the airplanes flying overhead, who call out and scroll across the blue with the stark white streak of their steady handed calligraphy.

11/03/2020

Esme’s literacy has grounded me deeply in the magic of language once again. The wonder of WORDS! These subtly shaded abstractions, strange stews of connotation and rhythm and rhyme and image and logic, sensation, sentiment, something of stone, something of ether.

10/29/2020

Helena laughs, Helena cries.

Shut doors and tucked away father.

Esme feels like she knows her mother more than her father.

I joke that a lot of kids feel that way.

Helena you love to stand on the counter.

You have a strong will! If you do not want to do something you let us know.

It is a little annoying sometimes because you consistently fight with us about routine things: getting in your height chair, washing your hands or face, brushing your teeth, getting you dressed, changing your diaper, getting you ready to go outside etc… that said, in general you have a delightful personality and are great to be around. I suppose its just those transitions, those flex points that cause alarm. Does this make us love you any less? Absolutely not. We love you more and more each day.

You are taking your time putting sentences together, but are an incredible listener and we are continually amazed at what you understand. You are repeating sounds more and more. You do a bit of counting and we have a trick where we cou three and then throw our arms out wide- it’s a show stopper! Mummum, Da-ee, and Yah (which sounds kind of similar to “Jie”) are the names you have given us. Marcel is “Niao”. You do a lot of pointing and babbling now and are very expressive and articulate despite still being non-verbal. Through your pantomime you recount your various injuries and frustrations. You are hilarious and adorable.

You generally wake up between 6:30 and 7:00 and nurse in bed with Mom. Your nursing days are numbered, but you still relish it in the morning and at nap and in the evening. You are close to your mother, but you will also push her away if you are not in the mood to cuddle. You call for me a lot and love being held by me. I love holding you, but have had to work through separating from you to get into the office and get my work done. I have been in a transformational process these past months and I am hopeful that it is making me a better person and a better father to you.

We must not be angry in this world. We must fill our hearts with love.

My father sent me a video of a Jewish man, a

Harvard/MIT Jew, a smart one, that was so smart he converted to Catholicism

After being visited by an apparition.

10/14/2020

Helena, bursts through the closed door of the work room with an exhuberant “Hi!” She radiates enthusiasm and good will. And then in turn crushingly needy and startling independent. We are blessed to be in this together. I am blessed.

Tessellations of my heart. My girls crowd close and I am whole at last. Heart still filling fuller, despite my forty years.

*The Empire State Express*

Up into the huge black 999.

With you so small at five.

And me so small at fortywhatever.

And the whole old world still older still.

And little you making everything new.

My girl you are truly a beautiful instance of this human being.

10/7/2020

Esme has such a wonderful supportive group of people around her: Anna, Ellen, Mema, Grandma Birkey, Bari, Susan and Micah, her school, her sister, her parents. She is a blessed girl and we are blessed by her.

10/2/2020

Up early with baby Helena wrapped in a blanket, pressed against my shoulder, the eastern sky brightening red, the clouds a canvas for day-glo galore and she is such a precious weight in my arms and a better fit in the crook of my arm than even the clouds in their places in the sky.

Esme you are helpful, sweet, willful, joyful, a dedicated friend and an eager learner.

8/3/2020

Such a nice evening with Esme. We played Uno and Go Fish and chatted at the kitchen table and then got ready for bed and she was heartbreakingly good, changing faster than supergirl and getting her toothbrush all together in the bathroom dampened with toothpaste on and standing at attention beside the sink waiting to have her teeth brushed..

We then read the *Hilda* stories— a kid’s graphic novel she has been into.

8/1/2020

Overheard:

Mom: “Esme, you didn’t finish your job!”

Esme: “What? I did a great job? Thank you!”

7/29/2020

Helena, while happily, mostly non-verbal is still quite demonstrative. She gets a long, long way with “naaaaa” accompanied by a furtive point to indicate somethings she wants. She loves to wave and greet people and say goodbye. Just beginning to say “up” (*ot)*

7/7/2020

Esme I’m so glad I’m the dad that got to feed you raspberries at the kitchen table while you read one of your first books at 5 years old (Mrs. Brice’s Mice- Syd Hoym?)

5/27/2020

The loft is finished and I feel like we are in the aftermath of trauma. Scheduling, bickering, feeling tired etc… there is more work to be done.. there is more work to be done.

5/23/2020

Esme woke up early and came into the kitchen around 6:45. Betsy had been sanding or dremmeling in Esme’s room working on the new loft she had built. Bolted a six-foot platform at 5 feet high straight across the room, bolted into the studs. She had pulled the whole thing together from ideas off the internet and a couple of phone chats with a guy she connected with through a neighorhood social media app for building tips. Esme has been sleeping in the living room in the green three-person domed tent that we’ve had since I spent that summer in Orlando when I was teaching for IRD and living off Robert Kermit Jones Pkwy and McDonalds were the three closest restaurants to the long-term stay apartment complex the reading enrichment company was providing me with.

5/25/2020

betsy was working with Helena on ‘little Miss Muffett” today carrying on the tradition from Esme. At 15 months she is starting to get it! I could hear here from the other room yelling “Whoa!” as she ran away from the spider. Her “Whoa” is one of here defining “phrases” at this point and it is breathy and sweet and full of enthusiasm. She is such a positive, curious, sweet beet. Though can also be pretty sensitive as toddlers are want to be.

Appreciating all of betsy’s talents and panache. Last night at Humbolt Park (beautiful day 80, meet up with Dan and Trisha and Owen in the early evening). she just jumped right in with an old Jazz band and played a couple of lovely fiddle tunes. Then this morning is working with Helena on her skit and playing violin for her, after waking up and making pancakes for us all that she had premade the batter for. I am working until 10 this morning and then from 10 to 11 she will be putting a few finishing touches on the loft project that she is doing for Esme- all the way from design to execution. She is such a clever person and so good at figuring stuff out!!

5/22/2020

I love how Esme will make very mature sounding pronouncements about children and childs. “When the childs…”

Esme described losing her place on the page with words in a way that struck a chord with me from my experiences with reading. I definitely had some kind of eye jump that made it more difficult for me to read.

4/27/2020

* Celebrated Esme’s 5.5 birthday with a dinner of her choice: 饺子; then we watched the movie of her choice: *Totoro*.
* Esme is loving the music from *Annie* and *The Sound of Music*

4/23/2020

Helena totters into the office with a white refrigerator magnet that says talk and another one that says little catch phrases.

4/22/2020

Helena you are active and squirmy and you toddle around picking up books and toys. One of our favorite things that you do is pick up a board book, drag it over to the loveseat and cuddle up to “read” a book to yourself. You carefully tun each page, getting more and more adroit with your long fingers by the day. You are not talking talk, but you are very communicative. Your eye contact, often accompanied by a head tilt to the left. Your calm vocal modulations. Your incisive “ah” with your right hand outstretched which is your universal requesting action. She smiles with her teeth even though at this point she mostly only has teeth on the left side of her mouth.

Sometimes before handing you over to mom to nurse before going down. I will take you on to the side porch and we will look out at the night. There have been starts lately on clear nights. I think we saw Orion’s belt. We’ve looked for the moon. We’ve felt the wind. You will often let out a sort of “ooooo” cool. Like you are surprised or impressed or chilled. You don’t seem to mind.

Esme loves pasta and pancakes and all things sweet. She gobblers up cheese and Ovaltine. She was adorable in the run up to Easter. Talking for days ahead of time about how Easter would never come. We got lucky the morning of Easter Sunday with good weather and had an egg hunt outside with the girls.

The weather was fine and the day was lovely and for some reason I felt low and pretty run through which was upsetting, because I had no real reason to feel that way. This past Sunday I managed to waste the day away working on my various projects and writing stabs. Sitting in the backroom just stabbing and stabbing and stabbing the keyboard.

We watched Disney’s *Robin Hood* the other night. Of course, Esme loved it. Her favorite characters were Robin Hood and Clucky, Maid Marien’s Lady-in-waiting, because they were the toughest and best fighters. Esme also watched *Charlotte’s Web* recently and has been “really into pigs”. We started Mary Poppins last night and she figured our pretty quickly that Mary Poppins is “quite wonderful.” We recently finished reading her *Danny, Champion of the World* and a hundred plus page chapter book of the *Hilda* series. She continues to be a really engaged listener and has an insatiable interest in stories. *Totoro* remains one of her favorite movies and was the first film that she say in a theater. She went with betsy and Dan and Owen Chainer to see it at the Music Box this past January.

Esme- “Mom, I just pooped and I had such a big fat poop that now I feel like I am going to throw-up.”

Helena’s feet are getting a lot faster. She pivots and she rotates in these tight little circles. She moves like a surprisingly agile 80-year-old with a low sense of gravity.

4/9/2020

Handsome baby

soft blonde-brown hair in the morning sun.

white highlights in her hair

in her blonde-brown hair in the sun.

4/6/2020

Esme Poem:

Horses like hay

Kids love to play.

Lions half-tamed

Can’t be blamed

For their claws

Or their jaws.

So kids, it should cause you pause,

If the beast invites you to stay.

1/16/2020

“I’m ready for my 1st movie *Totoro* at the Music Box!”

“Hey, can we write our own stories here and then act them out. Or I’ll tell you a story and then you can write it down and we’ll all act it out.”

“Have you gone potty yet this morning?”

“No.”

“Go potty and then come back and we’ll do it.” She runs off. Helena immediately appears.

01/04/2021

Stretching with the girls.

12/26/2020

Helena’s fun spirit dancing and shouting her own set of lyrics through *Frosty the Snowman*. Singing in the stairwell to Anna and in the downstairs lobby to Susan and Micah. My guitar quickly falling out of tune in the cold.

Helena pads out of the bedroom in the morning, all tossell-haired and cuddle ready, sweetly singing “me-do-me, me-do,me” in a husky sing-songy voice.

Esme: “Your heart beat is perfect. If it wasn’t perfect I’d have to give you two shots, so the good news is I only have to give you one shot.”

“Mine!” Wails Helena.

Our girls are so wonderful. We are so blessed. We are so blessed.

12/23/2020

Helena’s words: *one, daddy, mum-mum, go, (“one” has replaced “na” as here general indicator of things.)*

12/22/2020

Aaron: 193

betsy: 148

Esme: 54

Helena: 29

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Family: 424 lbs.

8/2019

If your child won a seat, congratulations! [You have successfully gotten your child into a school that is harder to get admission than HARVARD!!!](https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2008-02-26-0802260180-story.html) It is time to **“Celebrate!”**

07/03/2019

“How’s your practice going?”

“What?”

“How’s your practice going for your song?”

She looks super serious and stands with her back straight half looking back over her right shoulder.

“Good.” She nods her head with her brow furrowed.

She goes back into the other room and [*Xiao tuzi guaiguai*](https://lyricstranslate.com/en/chinese-children-songs-xi%C7%8Eo-t%C3%B9z%C7%90-gu%C4%81igu%C4%81i-%E5%B0%8F%E5%85%94%E5%AD%90%E4%B9%96%E4%B9%96-lyrics.html) slips sticky sweet out the living room speakers from youtube. Mother and child, mother with flush cheeks and the deep purples and reds of a Venetian Merchant, child- a girl, short bobbed hair and a serious angle to her chin, study the text and practice the phrasing for the lipsync they’ll film for the upcoming family reunion- OCB[[1]](#footnote-1). It’s a Chinese song about a wolf trying to get inside the rabbits home whilst mother rabbit is off on errands. The young rabbit is *guai, guai[[2]](#footnote-2)* though and doesn’t allow the hungry wolf to enter.

2/2/2019

1:45 pm—I am at work. Betsy and I talk and decide that I should come home from work. She is feeling very crampy.

3:30 pm. Esme, bets, and I go for a walk around the neighborhood. Esme and I jog and play hide and seek in the square.

4:15 pm. Betsy loses a bit more of her mucus plug. Her cramping factor has marginally lessened. She felt more earlier today for sure.

5:00 pm—Esme watches Mr. Rodgers. Betsy and I take evasive action.

8:00 pm—more cramping and pressure while making dinner. Esme predicts that the baby will arrive tonight. Mema predicts tomorrow. Betsy all along has had the 8th in her mind as the due date. We discuss timeline of birth up against my limited paternity leave. Tomorrow or anytime in the next 48 hours would be great!

2/8/2019 partially sunny 3\* to 13\*

8:00 am. After an initially good night of sleep and the some early morning harassment by Marcel, betsy and I take evasive action part II. We decide that I will stay home today and probably go into work tomorrow unless there are further developments today.

2/10/2019: “What the fuck is wrong with me. I feel like screaming and beating my head against the table.”

2/11/2019: “Still no baby, baby soon.”

2/10/2019

Still waiting on the Plum one day before her due date. Betsy requested a glass of cold water in bed this morning to wake the baby up. Baby was asleep and felt too still to betsy. I am off today and have the option to go in tomorrow if there are no developments. We are in limbo trying to savor the approach of this next chapter, but at the same time anxious for a major development! Something to move the story forwarded!

01/2018

We drove to the park by the lake and parked and skied with the sled behind us and I pulled up and down Cricket Hill until you were cold and then I skied down the hill with you behind me on the sled towards our car where we could warm up on the short drive home.

November 8, 2014

        betsy and I took Esmé for a walk this afternoon.  We walked by the bowling alley where its rumored that Billy O’Neil works and we stood on the bridge looking south down the river towards downtown.  The sky was stunning.  November clouds low and full of color, cut up and layered, one lain on top of the other like scalloped potatoes in a Pyrex dish.  The sharp contrast of big buildings downtown standing out against the sky makes my eyes feel keen. After two weeks hunkered down in our apartment with our newborn something in me leaps me. Looks outward all of a sudden and is excited.

        Sweet baby Esmé is incredible on the walk.  She was silent and sleeping and I kept a close eye on her to make sure that she wasn’t being smothered wrapped up against my chest, under my jacket in her moby wrap.  She was fine and comfortable and dear.  I love her little nose and her wrinkly fingers and the scrunched up expressions she displays her incredibly wide range of emotions with.

        We stood on the bridge looking downtown and I thought back through the years and I reflected on the fact that my dear daughter was a Chicagoan.  Her story begins here among the big buildings, four seasons, sprawling neighborhoods.

**Edited 08/26/2021**

Years from now when people ask where she is from she will tell them Chicago and that will be exactly accurate.  She will not just be some kid from some random place, some difficult to place *place*, some randomn town or suburb, she will be from where she is from— Chicago.

        This is one of the reasons I want to do my work in Chicago, this is one of the reasons I want to do my research on Chicago.  This is one of the reasons I want to ingest this city and digest this city, so that I can pass this city on to my daughter and she can live in it well and understand it and build on any little bit of understanding that I have collected over my years here. Even if we move on and Chicago fades to a feature, locale of her origin city.

Perpetual discovery and reorientation. Living here we will be able to present our daughter with a lot of possibilities.  We will be able to give her the chance to study at good, supportive schools.  Possibly better schools than we have had the opportunity to attend.  And we will be able to help her describe and define her vocation in a way that we were never able to exactly describe and define.  Or at least, not yet.

**Activities/Games:**

Games/Activites:

* Karaoke
* Cooking
* Exercise
  + “Darting” both around the yard and through the surrounding alleyways, staying hypervigilant of all the vehicles lurking around and complete with elaborate and evolving arm and hand signals.
  + Roller coaster (flying and whirling Esme around)
* Travel
* Reading
* Shows
* Walks
  + North Center
    - Went to see the dead Rat.
    - Went to see the mosaic pothole Chicken on Wolcott north of Cuyler.
    - Admired sidewalk chalk in the neighborhood— trend of “stained glass window” drawings
* Family Song Book
* Writing
* Board games
  + Uno
  + Euchre
  + Go Fish
  + Elaborate “Sequence for Kids” game modified with stacks of play money
* Imagination games
  + Little Sick Kitty
  + Little Wounded Dear
  + National Park aka Who Pooped in the Park?
  + Bear Hunt
  + Bobcat Hunt
  + Cougar Hunt
* Family Survey
* Photobooth
* Catch up video?
* Hide-n-seek
* Hide the Horseshoe
* Climb to Sunshine Galore
* Tag
* Dance Party
* Dictating Naught Monkey Stories to me
* Dictating Injury Stories to me
* Dictating letters
* Art projects
* Teaching me how to do projects— having classes
* Geography Globe
* Reading- (2020)Danny, the Champion of the World, Hilda- graphic novels and chapter books, The Ruth Chen Witch Books, and the Betsy Books with Grandma, (2021) Ramona Books, Judgy B Jones Books, Shiloh, Because of Winn Dixie, Fantastic Mr. Fox, James and the Giant Peach, Matilda
* (2020-2021) Miyasaki Films- “Totoro”, “Kiki’s Delivery Service”, “Ponyo”, “Spirited Away”, “The Secret World of Arrieti”, “The Cat Returns”, nature films, Hilda cartoon, The Kratt Brothers “Zaboomafoo”, Robin Hood (Disney), Charlotte’s Web, *Homeward Bound*, *Annie*, *The Return of Nanny McPhee*, *Waffles and Moochie*,
* Writing poems and stories together (idea buckets: character, problem, something fun)
* Exquisite Corpse Drawing Game
* Charades
* “Dodge” sketch
* “Cold Mush” sketch (from *Annie*)
* Reading letters from Pen Pals- Mara, Grandma Birkey, Mema, Uncle David and Aunt Marie, Ivy, Ellen, Owen, Liam, Nari, Bari Zaki, Jinn (in Berlin) …
* Sketching Walks.
* Skating on the ice in boots in the winter.
* Snowball fights
* Going to see the cotton balls under the tracks in the alley by the Begyle Building. The cotton balls magically hovered over the asphalt in the golden hour rolling in miniature stampedes riding on unseen currents of air. After seeing them two days in a row, we came back yesterday (Saturday May 23, 2020) and the heavy rain had pulled apart the carefree balls into shredded white clumps, soggy snow drifts spilled on asphalt.

1. Old Camp Birkey- the Yearly family reunion held in Ft. Wayne by the sweet side of the family. Where the three Sweet Sisters all live on the same cul de sac tucked just off a major throughway through southwest Allen County, just southwest of Ft. Wayne (population a surprising 265,000) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Obedient and well behaved. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)