1Letter

* [2022/04/02-- letter](file:///C:\Users\aaron\Creating\Writing\Pieces\Family\Birkey\2022_04_02.sally_and%20_arlan_birkey.docx)
* [In progress](file:///C:\Users\aaron\Creating\Writing\Pieces\Family\Birkey\2021.04.04.sally_and_arlan_birkey.docx)
* [Grandfather Swift](file:///C:\Users\aaron\Creating\Writing\Pieces\Family\Birkey\Grandfather_Swift.docx)

12/22/2021

Today is the day that we find out how bad dad’s cancer is. I guess that is what we are doing today.

This all might just be in progress….

06/14/2021

Has been a gorgeous blue sky and billowy, pillow cloud kind of day, Helena— now 2 and a robust towheaded brute— and I are out in the yard and she is ambling over inquisitively toward our small garden plot, bee-lining, in fact, straight at a recently planted maroon and forest-green shock of leaf-blades.

“Do NOT pick my Chard!” I preemptively scold, nearly adding “or I will spank your bottom,” though I do not ultimately add that last part because I know how deadly serious I am, and I sense how deeply uncomfortable it would feel to threaten a child with violence over a salad.

Little backstory, recently she has been insisting on picking the buds and leaves off all of our botanicals almost as fast as we plant them. I, being somewhat more experienced with these kinds of things, find this approach to gardening messy and self-defeating.

We had a similar difference of opinion just the other day about whether or not it was appropriate to re-pot a goodly amount of loamy topsoil into my tantalizingly sweating mason jar of chilled water.

Years ago, before I had kids, I was once at a brunch get-together where I observed one of my friends, who was already the father of three, being a little short with one of his girls over some issue with a cup of orange juice or something. At the time I remember feeling kind of surprised at how impatient or even almost unkindly you were addressing your angelic little Tomte. Maybe, he’s having a particularly stressful day I had thought at the time. Now I realize he definitely was having at least a partially stressful day because, you know, he had children and he was likely not being mean to his child at all, but was, in fact, exerting incredible, if not saintlike-level patience, artfully teasing out and expanding just a bit more your reservoir of that most precious of parental commodities, that greedily gobbled up resource that well before this cup of juice or even this very morning had been pulled and stretched as thin as a gossamer shroud though still somehow holding— together and true through some miraculous act of superhuman effort. Love?

Best,

Structure:

* Your amazing daughter…
* Growth of the girls… growth of our family

Dear Ma,

Sometimes I refer to you to myself as “Ma Birkey”. For some reason it has the connotations of that old archetype of the matriarchal crime boss. They say that the spark of humor can sometimes pop out when you compare two opposite things. I suppose that is irony. At any rate, it makes me smile to call you Ma Birkey.

妈，麻，马，🐎，骂，吗

In Chinese “ma” has a lot of meanings. It can mean mother of couse, 妈（mā), but it also can mean hemp 麻（má), 🐎 马（mǎ）, scold 骂 (mà), and even has an extra special roll as an “interrogative partical” (a useful little syllable to add to any statement to turn it into a question) 吗 (ma).

List:

mā, má, mǎ, mà, ma

Just being able to regularly have lunch with my three girls has been such a gift. Did not expect to be grateful for lunch this year. Lunch last year was not much fun. My lunch routine last year was certainly not a highlight— mostly consisting of hurriedly scarfing up food I brought from home while I half read the news headlines on my phone and half watched the huge screen displaying the CCTV feeds around the store. Had to keep an eye out on the store getting busy or having a client come back. And if so, drop lunch rush back down the stairs like some kind of dress suit fireman. Or I would not have brought a lunch and I would have to zip out to one of the downtown lunch options. I would inevitably have to overpay for something that was probably much too greasy and salty for my own good. Hurriedly eat it up (no time to savor) and hustle back in time to brush my teeth and get ready to be back out on the floor. My lunch was alone, hurried, and unfulfilling. Now it is generally well-paced, cooperative, full of company and companionship, and so much more healthful to boot. To date since leaving my retail post I have lost 20 lbs. and feel trimmer and more nutritionally whole than I have in years!

Your daughter is the center of all of this. The care and attention that she brings to things makes her food delicious, her crafts and projects marvelous and surprising, much of this is from her nature, but so much (her nature too I suppose) I see coming from you and Arlan and I feel so blessed by that. Your home and the home that you gave betsy (and home is important because I am understanding more and more that home is so much more than a physical place, but it’s a set of relationships and stories and shared memories and favorites dishes and conversations, and games— its an environment whose sum is greater than its parts and whose sum transcends the sum of its parts because of the emotion and attachment that is cultivated, that is actually grown and developed in that place, in that garden, near the warmth of that hearth. And that is mysterious, and wonderful, and not something that everyone has. It is a wonder that everyone longs for and one that when left is not easily replicated.

I am grateful for our years of forging our family without children. I do not think that they were essential, but I think they worked for us and stirred up the soil and stirred it deep for our life together to grow and grow, our family together to grow and grow.

It has not always been easily. I think we have taken a route that has been “organic” not always super well planned. We have followed our hearts and our intuitions and while it has not always been the smoothest or most bountiful of paths, through it all we have found ways back to each other to have our family at the very center of our lives. We are blessed by these girls. Yes, having children makes many things harder, increases certain pressures and constraints, at the same time, nothing has helped to refine my vision for life more than having children. Its like I had been waiting for children to fully grasp some essentially aspect of making plans or closing in on my truly heart’s desire. I suppose it turned out that my true heart’s desire was for my children, for my wife, and my true vocational desire is to find a way to work that allows our lives together to flourish, that allows our garden to continue to grow and grow and grow…

Esme and Helena anecdotes:

. The extra time I have had at home with the betsy and the girls has been so good. Helena, since March, has gone from a fledgling walker, to a full on runner, dancer, climber-of-three flights of stairs (though she still retains the right to be carried when she is not in the mood to climb by herself, she has developed this really affective full body flop to express that she would prefer to be carried). She is now a speaker of words. Her favorite being her self-invented “Na” which is her catch all word which boiled down generally is used to make an insistent request for “that” or “those”. Incidentally, this was also the first word that betsy and I learned when we moved to China, as the Chinese word for “that” is also “Na” (那 nà). We got a surprising long way with 那. Especially when paired up with its partner in crime “this” (zhè 这)

While Belle Belle (nickname that developed from many renditions of Helena-Bo-Bellena) has yet to develop a “this”, which at this point seems unnecessary as her pointing ability is really quite advanced and communicates quite precisely, especially paired with an emphatic “Na!”

Reading with Belle Belle we finish our stack of books and I ask her if she wants to hop down and get us a few more books. Without missing a beat she puts her small but insistent arm on mine and says- “Dah-di— Go!! – Bye-bye!” Said with a little smile and a wave, and I am sent off to collect more books

Helena greeting me the second I walk out of the workroom. Beaming at me as she works hard on some scribbling. Then she carefully puts her pencil down and lifts up her page and proudly displaying it to me. Seeing first hand the march to literacy that begins with curiosity and procedes scribbling and then somewhere in the midst of all the good stories and cozy reading time and retelling and discussing and referencing and questioning the scribbling transforms into a Kindergartener secretly drafting a Christmas poem in pencil and the working on the second draft on our personal computer. May I type something, “Dad”.

Literacy goes a long way to both helping us to understand ourselves and discover how we would like to live in this world. The multiplicity of experience that we can enter into through books is so powerful. Truths that can stand plainly on a page without any extra sensory nudges from swelling music or epistemological judegements drawn from the talent or dearth there of in the actors. Our minds supply the actors. Our minds supply the context. The systems. These scripts ae programs that we meet with our interfaces, but whose import can break through our interfaces and actually change the way we interface, live, engage.

It also gives us such a wonderful opportunity for stillness. The child’s life is so kinetic! What activities are as still as reading? Sleeping, resting, eating— all essentials. It partakes of the essentials. Offering nourishment, not always, refreshment, not always.

At times I have been denied this place. You have to fight for it. For the time, for the space, for the wherewithal to make room for a new story. People are necessarily very invested in their own story, but I think that our own stories can fill us up so much that we don’t leave room for other people’s stories. And we need those stories. They are scouts, reporters, imaginary flights that we haven’t even considered. Sitting down with a professional imaginer! And every child has this imagination!! This plasticity that makes all things possible! This creative muscle can weaken over time— passivity does this too us… too much unconsidered input, too much mental expenditure on responsibilities.

There is only one TEXT.

The whole world is a text….

Esme pairing her stuffed animals with babies. The species without young she has determined as the go-to foster parents, as well as Dollhouse how is a Ballerina Rabbit with magnetic hands. She is the youngest of the group and doesn’t have any children sdo sh has adopted all of the babies and is the go-to babysitter in the mix.

Samantha and Marsela and Taylor at the play lot.

Dude the skateboard dog and his friendly handler Romaine.

The Cantonese speaking Chinese restaurant workers that she waves to and chats with from the back alley porch of the coach house. The side west facing stairway that gets a long stretch of afternoon and dusk sun which she named Sunshine Galore (her own reference to Bye, Bye Blackbird from 1926, Josephine Baker recorded a version in 1927).

The naturalness of language “beyond” her.

Subtle, mammoth, essential, zealous, contemplate, minute, enfore, epilogue, cloying, frigid, foliage, fragrant, evidence, miniscule, artificial, prolific, smitten, oblivious, quarantine, emathy, melancholy, aggressive, simultaneous, exaggerate, specific, massive, agile, incredulous, vacant ominous, taper, rhetorical question.

So many delicious meals— sesame noodles, Chinese dumplings, stir-fries, Roast Onion Bolognaise, Salmon patties, Salmon, Roasted vegetables, salads with fresh homemade dressing, muesli from the oven servered with a chilled mixture of frozen berries and Greek yogurt. Tacos, taco bowls, taco salads, burritos, tostatas, homemade veggie burgers, salads, smoothies, backed oatmeal, Finnish back pancakes

Dear Mom,

I am so sorry to hear about your compression fracture and intense pain you have had to endure.

I’ve been doing a ridiculous amount of stretching lately trying to get “out of the box” that a lot of computer work puts you in. I used to train so I could move well. Now I train so I can remain still. I used to think exercise was just about tiring yourself down and shaking the BROWN OUTS out. Now exercise is much more about being rooted and balance and reset to take on the next challenge or to be open to the next joy.

I like this idea of need to be ready for joy. In the same way people have to put effort into preparing for future challenges, they also have to anticipate future joy.

It has taken me some time for me to get to this point where I can freely write and express myself and my path on this road continues to unfold. I am seeking silence and I am seeking perfect ways to work in this imperfect world.

The absence of this is instructive.

The absence of distraction.

The finding of rhythm.

The investing of time in the process.

The deep belief in the process (in life) is what sustains me. The conviction that yes, this is it, this is all there is on this side of the mortal veil, we accept this and attempt to surf the silver linings. I like this sentiment, surfing the silver linings. More movement metaphors. I am writing something larger, more expansive than I have ever written and honestly I don’t know if it will every coalesce or if it will simple flitter out of me leaf by leaf until the tree is bare and stripped and perhaps that is the work, the great tree losing each leaf one by one to the season. I have changed in the seasons from bud to green to withered old grey and fluttering away before the grey of the day.

I have felt alone and abandoned in this process. I have felt misunderstood and challenged in this process. I have had many of my insecurities laid bare before me. I have had my ability to forge new connections and relationships stripped for me as an instinct of intense consolidation overcame me. I turned within. I smoked weed and meditated and stretched and created quasi-shamanistic rituals to purge and settle and center. I have sought to flip my ego inside out. I have fled from pain, I have run headlong into pain. I have been drunk in the afternoon I have been stoned in the morning I have stayed up all night stretching and meditating. I have written songs and shouted them to my empty apartment and then forgotten them the next moment. Oh, my fog, oh, my amphedimines, oh, my pearls.

The past comes back to me with packets of pain, packets of joy. Nothing is clearn. If you remember it being clearn you must be misremembering or you simply narrowed the issue down to a clean framework. Something that worked for you to get clear. Get free. Some new way to rationalize your way out of the muck. Some new way for you to rationalize your way through to the other side of the field. Where the grass has always appeared so green and just might be.

I have fallen out of my coding rhythm in an attempt to get my writing going and begin 2021 as my strongest writing year ever as well as my strongest coding year ever. We begin the year with 900 hours to beat for coding and 30 hours to beat for writing. I think we can do. I know we can do it. And this is the big realization that I have. This is the million dollar skill-set that I have sought to develop- commitment. I am committed to having the best year or writing and the best year of coding that I have ever had. This can be true whether I publish anything or not. This can be true whether I find a coding job or not. Neither of these two ends are the only proofs of my success. My success is simply work. Work with coding and work with writing. The work that I do is success itself. The time I spend is the achievement in itself. I am committed to making my time the achievement. A focus that makes the trajectory of the process OBJECTIVE and CONTROLABLE.

I tell people the little anecdote about making the program and they don’t get how profound that was for me. They don’t get what a huge step froward that was for me— I wrote a program that can read and write to disk from the COMMAND PROMPT of the computer. I have entered the matrix and wisely created a simple structure that I can use to motivate my progress as well as track it and I used the skills I have am trying to learn to create the structure.

I should read something about creating structures… finding synergies. Finding profoundity in simplicity.

Stretching = sport.

Music = salvation. (music more than politics can bind together. Music is language.)

Time spent = success

Everything is interface

New metaphors: achievement is application, stretching is sport, obsidian stone (aid not block), Maintain (achieved) silence.

In some ways, sometimes, I feel like I am caught in a loop, and I think, to some extent, I am, but thankfully the loop is expanding and stretching and beginning to build my speed as my arc cycles out and out.

Esme hands me a metal slinky to see if I can untangle it. One look and I know that I can not help.

Helena points at the slice of pear on her tray and rather emphatically declares, “My tofu!”

Helena emerging fair and tousle-haired, still cuddly in her sleep sack that betsy made for her out of a fleecy blue material with glow-in-the-dark stars. We were not initially sure about the glow-in-the-dark starts but have really come to appreciate them as they help us to identify what configuration Helena is lying in her bed in the dark as well as if she is covered up or not. If too many stars are out its going to be a cold night for Helena!

Esme’s world is populated by Romana and Junie B. Jones and the Rats of Nihm and the Fantastic Mr. Fox, and James and his Giant Peach and on and on. We are having so much fun with stories. Thye are our compass and our pass time.

Snow fell as we slept and we awoke in the morning to a world all in white

1/14/2021

we received word this morning that you had your surgery! We were so relieved that it was able to get it moved up.

Back pain of any form is so debilitating. Betsy and I have been , this year in particular, in the process of learning how to deal with our 40 year old bodies. Stretching has become our favorite sport and the simple exercise bike had under our Christmas tree has been getting some good work. Exercise used to be a “performance” thing for me, now it’s just about function! Practicing good health. Practicing to sit still and type for long hours without feeling like I am boxed in through my neck and shoulders and up and lower back and hips…

Helena is in getting dressed for the day. She is whinning and complaining like betsy is doing something very unreasonable (possibly even cruel) to her. This is a daily battle and one that despite my best efforts I am not able to just tune out. There is something about the desperate brays of a child, especially when it is your child, that puts you on edge. I think the silver lining here is that when I am back in the work force and going into an office I truly believe my powers of concentration have improved. I really don’t think there is anything that a job I will work that will be as soul shakingly stressful as a braying child. Sure there will be other kinds of stress, but nothing like that, crying and complaining even when cause is unfounded is disturbing, especially when it is someone your car deeply about. What is it with the psychology of this child that she hates getting dressed so much sometimes? It might be a power thing? She doesn’t like to give up control, or perceived control. I don’t think any of us like this. This is a terrifying thing in life. And something that apparently causes us a lot of stress straight from the get go. As we mature and age we take control of certain aspects of our lives with greater or lesser competency, though we never achieve complete control— especially if we embedded without community: family units, friends, neighbors, citizens, etc. Control at some point becomes about cooperation. We begin to recognize the illegitimacy of the TOTLITARIAN “Because I said so.” This is a fine response from a parent who is not subject to reelection, but from a public official it does not cut the muster.

And here I go rambling into the political while trying to get at the challenges for living and working in a small apartment with a 1 year old and a 5 year old and a put upon wife managing chronic back pain.

There are some themes emerging here- politics, control, back pain.

Control, or lack of control, has hit betsy most directly and unnervingly through her back. Our existence is predicated on strong backs. We are like Swiss Family Robinson in our third story tree house. Both girls plead to be held daily and tact back and forth between protecting our spines from our 30 and 50 lbs. bundles of joy, and giving into our desire to hold our babies.

We are managing this… betsy with her stretching and biking and being smart about not doing too much. Me by shifting my favorite sport from Running to Stretching. I think I am officially middle-aged now that STRETCHING is my favorite sport! I have periodically over the last 20 years gotten on to some stretching kicks, but this feels different. This si feeling more like a PRACTICE and one that is really showing results. My weight is down 20 lbs. from pre- Covid. I am having less general back pain and tension and when I do I am getting better at identifying the trouble area and working it out. This development has been huge as my body adapts the the change my computer work has necessitated.

Your daughter is amazing and I cherish her so much. Betsy’s amazing, tasty and varied cooking. Her strong sense of order and organizing touch on many aspects of our lives, she makes our travel plans flow together.

We have our roles. We work together. We amplify our respective abilities.

I am so grateful for this partnership. Though that word partnership doesn’t quite capture how I feel. I am this partnership. My parents showed me , as have you and Arlan, that his partnership, this commitment to another being, to a family is such an amazing thing.

The beauty that can grow in a committed relationship, and only with commitment to the relationship over a long period of time.

Begs the question though, what else do you commit to, and how do you choose judiciously so as not to allow your new commitments toendanger the health and flow and responsibilities of your other commitments.

Before kids my career ideals were fairly abstract. I was more concerned with interests and language and writing. Not even really to any kind of a widdled economic point, simply as an engagement decision. This is what I am interested in, this is what I like to do, so I shall do it. Obviously, it was not as simple as all of that with the numerous other limitations on our time, but I just had this sense that if I continued to pursue the things that were interesting to me, that inspired me, that spoke to my imagination and intellect and emotional being that I would settle into my economic place in our rich and diverse system… and to this end, I wasn’t really wrong, for I did find a job/career that supported betsy and I and insured us and provided for our daughters and that had started to bear fruit as far as savings towards a home (and suddenly within the last few years home ownership has suddenly become a rather important goal of us, this settling which seemed so incomprehensible before- how can we possibly settle, there is a whole world to explore!- had become not our punishment or sentence, but our dream, our goal, a powerful organizing principle for our lives. And that is a good thing, and much like the decision to have children something that betsy and I came to organically, mutually.

A year ago it was very apparent to me that I needed to take my career in a new direction. Both for myself- goals, body, mental health, but also for my family- security, availability, predictability, sustainability of schedule. My budding vision of becoming a computer programming, while an inspiring goal, remained amorphous due to the great chasm of nonexistent time and space that stood between my current knowledge/skill level and where I would need to be to be gainfully employed. The fact of the matter was that despite my best efforts to sneak computer study in before or after work or on my days off, coupled with my other responsibilities and my finite amount of energy and concentration ability the thousands of hours required to get to where I needed to go seemed like an imaginary resource given the current configuration of our lives.

2020 certainly shook up the order of things for us and the possibilities. While I still have some distance to go, I am now 1000 + hours into my programming journey and every hour I am firmly believe that every hour I get under my belt moving forward is inching our family towards the long-term, sustainable career that I have been longing for (especially since becoming a father).

The other day Esme and I were talking about relationships as being like a garden. We have all of these important relationships in our lives and for them to grow and flourish they need nourishment, perhaps not light and water, but certainly, attention and conversations and shared meals and celebrated occasions and relayed stories and expressed sympathies and exchanged prayers and quiet times together and experiences and interest and intent. All of the notes and letters and visits and calls are the good work of the constant gardener. I feel so blessed that Esme has such a green thumb for people. Just at a time in my life where I feel hamstrung by my responsibilies to be incredibly social (my social garden is a bit sunscorched at the moment from inattention), my lovely girl has given my such a wonderful example of effortless gardening. Her interest in other people and connection and wanting to do things for them and send notes and write letters and draw pictures and make books. She is a creative force. And I am grateful for the inspiration and I am quite happy to draft off the movement of her good gardening to learn a few techniques myself.

Letter writing used to be (at various points in my life) one of my favorite occupations. Somewhere alone the way the practice was sidelined by other busyness and I suddenly found that when the sweet, life-affirming inspiration to write a letter popped up it was instantly greeted with anxiousness and uncertainly- I don’t have time to compose anything worth sending! What could they possibly want to hear from me? A few years ago David and Marie gifted me such a wonderful stationary kit. I was almost certain that this was going to be the moment I was able to break through the inertia and begin writing letters again, sporadically, if not regularly. Sadly, it was not, and while I have managed a few letters over the years, the practice or habit of letter writing never really returned…

I have felt much less of flourishing gardener. I am turning the corned on this though. A goal of mine for some time had been to write more letters to people I love. In fact, every year for the last few years, “Writing more letters” has been at the top of my short list of new year’s resolutions. The results have been less than spectacular… a disappointment actually, setting in motion a vicious cycle of good intentions meeting the unfriendly realities of time constraints and limiting commitments. The practice of letter writing never quite materialized.

Over the past six months though, this has begun to shift. It is also six months since I injured my Achillies heel on the 4th of July. One of the significances of this injury is that it stopped me in my tracks, literarlly. Before this injury I conceptualized myself as a runner. And looked to running as the physical activity to keep my body strong and functioning well, allowing me to sit for long periods of time and work at the computer and write. Since this injury I have been in a process in which stretching/yoga has replaced running as my key physical activity maintenance tool. Six months later I am writing and sending letters and postcards at long last, my Achillies has healed well and my stretching has truly become an essential practice in my life.

I now have several essential practices: family, yoga, writing, tech, music, language.

Betsy has been incredible in this challenging year- overcoming her back pain, overcoming being locked into an all-day, every-day schedule with a hyperverbal 5 year old and an occasionally cripplingly needy and oppositional 1 year old. All while digging deeper into the trenches of the never ending kitchen work of meal planning, shopping, prepping, cleaning… the unceasing schedule of meal times, and incessant snacking demands of our growing Locusts.

Distance makes the heart grow fonder. At home distance has been distant. Distance is a distant memory. I took the girls out in the morning giving betsy some time at home alone. The first she’s had in a while. She took the opportunity to shower and pay some bills and play her violin for 5 minutes before I came back in with Helena whose poor fingers were freezing (partially due to her/our inability to get her thumbs into the thumb spaces of her mittens.)

Betsy said the time alone in the apartment was blissful. I know exactly what she means. There is some really powerful qualitative change that comes over the apartment when the girls are out of it and you are home alone.

Betsy and I have begun to whimsically dream about a candle lit dinner, just the two of us, some day, obviously, not because we do not like our children or resent them or something, but merely because our attention feels so constantly divided that it is difficult for us just to hold a full / non-fragmented conversation, much less have a leisurely/romantic dinner! This is all just to say.

I remember how wonderful our apartment felt when I zipped by when betsy and Helena were still at the hospital and Esme was staying with friends just after Helena was born. I remember being home and having the part feeling tidy and settled and homey with a cat lounging in the sun and the sun coming in from four windows and the 10 foot ceilings which we usually take for granted feeling grand and spacious compared to the cramp safety window nook of a recovery room we’d just spend the previous night.

The evening after Helena was born I walked south from the hospital to Lawerance and ate a huge bowl of pho in a divey sort of Vietnamese restaurant across the street from a laundromat (Bubble land) and just over the river from the National Cambodian Heritage Museum and Killing Fields Memorial. I purchased a bottle of Fat-tire at the liquor store across the street. It stands out as one of the more satisfying bowls of soup I had in the 2010s.

1/15/2021-

You spent the night in the hospital with pancreatitis, pain, low battery on phone, all on top of recently repaired compression fracture in spine.

After the heavy fluffy flacks feel in the morning the sun broke through the the clouds broke up saucy mashed potatoes collesed into fluffy dumplings soaking up the January sun.

Today the sky is a single panel of grey. Pigeons congregate on the 5 story concrete grey bank that is just south of us on the opposite side of Irving Park.

Tonight the crayons really came out for the sunset. The shades of the disapating rainbow were very specific. Burnt red. Marmalade orange. Custard yellow. Glazed green. And blue in all the many blues from the box and some that have never been in a crayon box with the blue spread up off the whole sky and up and behind us, fading, fading away in distant shades retreating to the sea of black in eastern skies. The day retreats with long sighs and the crisp, husky hydraulic breaking sounds of the trucks on Irving Park Road. Helena did not nap today. But and Esme did not have class. She read independently to herself and some to Helena. I made popcorn on the stove and the girls sat at the table looking at books and snacking on popcorn.

2/2/2021

betsy has made this possible. She has done so much work with the girls, gathering our food, preparing our food, laundry, keeping house, all of her home improvement projects- decoration, painting, the loft, shelves, shelving unit, rugs, delicate organization of our very limited storage space. She has been my rock partner to make this possible. The fact that I am doing it for her too and she so supports me is so wonderful and humbling and I truly feel like we are building something together. What does it mean to build a family? Grow a family? There is so much subtlty and nuance.

I think at some point in adolesance you here that message about go to school, get a job, get married have kids settle down, blah, blah, blah, boring, boring, you’re going to get trapped, unavoidable, you’re going to sell out, be defeated, get caught, get broken… perspective is important here, because the need to serve somebody or something or do something or do some kind of work or toil by the sweat of your brow of the spunk of your intellect or personality or whatever you have to do to make a buck, because we all have to eat, we all have to live. This world really does get pretty jungle like if you start boiling things down and start considering the relatively narrow paths we all must thread out of desire or necessity depending on our own personal circumstances.

2/4/2021

The moon waltzes east towards the dark inland sea.

Alive with a whirl for each fleeing white whisp

While all heavely bodies advance west to east

Away, away from the desiccated peach.

The sky on my birthday in the evening explodes in scarlet and the dappled cloud mountains have a patterned weave of purple and pink

2/15/2021

Beautiful card and note practice. Paper. Handwriting. This could be sentimental, but it is also practical. It grounds us outside of the digital sphere. The digital is not all. The digital. Such a wonderful PLACE to create culture. On-line culture is too leaky and intertextual and commercial. A Preference Press more than anything else. Like … emotion … I don’t always trust my preferences, nor feel the need to advertise them. Paper and pen. Isolated message. Isolated reflection.

Parenthood simultaneously woke my AWARENESS of NEEDS and shattered my wherewithal to meet them.

Black crows dropping off the five story modern condo building are whirling towards me through the snow strewn air. Wing winging up at an awkward angle as the black bird banks against an eddy.

Heavy snow today, the spire of St. Ben’s is completely obscured by the snow and then look up and it is back. I look up again and it is completely obscured again.

02/22/2021

We believe the worst of winter has passed. Te temperatures are warming up, trnding up. The snow seems to be receding. The street soot has finally caught up to it and the street side piles are ever more dust dune like in their sahara khakis. Our of Afrika or what not.

“Oh, no”… usually combined with “Mom” or “Dad”… “Oh, no, Mom!”… “Oh, no, Dad!” In her dramatic soulful little voice. She has a lovely little singing voice. She finds notes. And again what we has yet to full form linguistically, she seems and internalizes and expresses emotionally, creatively, humorously. Her range of dramatic expression is prouder than Shakespeare. The toddler contexts that this emotions apply to are very specific and nuanced and we trapped in our post-verbal habits of interpreting and understanding the world have unfortunately lost touch with those rich emotive frequencies. Instead, they hit the modern adult ear as something akin to abject dissatisfaction and misery. Somewhere on the range of garden variety whining and guffaws of existential surrender.

02/23/2021

Betsy had a hard day yesterday. After a big grocery trip, she tried to help Susan out of her parking space. Susan was off to a doctor’s appointment with little Zev and was stuck in the sice and soft snow and carved out ruts of our street. It has been a long, slow snowy month. Cold and inconvenient. The pandemic still on, the walls seeming ly closing in. And then betsy strained her back pushing and what had been a pretty good stretch of being careful and cautious and overly cautious and so cautious she wonders do I really need to be this cautious and then one little awkward push in the slippery snow against Susan’s Mini-Cooper Country man vehicle of froest green with Michan and the babysitting Kim pushing too and having no issues just pushing and getting on with their day, whereas bets pushed and instantly felt like something was wrong, something was tweaked and collapsing and painful and off and debilitating and she ahd three flights of stairs to ascend with a mound of grocery bags and suddenly the winter seemed loger still though hadn’t it just felt like it was almost over, the lightening wind, hadn’t spring been on the breeze just a whiff. And she hadn’t worn a hat and the wicold touched her ears, but she didn’t mind it, the cold touched her face and she breathed the cold and she sdidn’t mind it at all, she was used to it, she was above the weather, it couldn’t get her down, she was above it and would stay above it.

There’s a Sistine chapel sunset out of my west facing window thiseenin. 5:23 and still light the clouds striate like smooth layers o fflint crowing together in the ambient light of the sun, behind the buildings now, St. Ben’s steeple a silhouette, a tower and a triangle and a spire and above beyond, away from the clourds the blue of the day still so pure, the softer light allowing your eye to take in more of the blue and let the blue wash over your later afternoon eyes, worn from there work with words and things held before you, performing small, quick, deft, unconscious movements with your intericate appendges. Your appendages and their secret, silent knowing.

A toddler’s ham fisted attempts to slip on a pair of mittens. Wheres that thumb… we keep loosing that thumb…

03/22/2021

Helena is hollowing from the other room. She is in a panic because she has picked up a game with many small assorted pieces and returned it to its external box for storage, but is having an issue with getting a securing rubber band around the big square cardboard container. This lack of finished work is driving her crazy and she throws a fit about it, until I come to find her and assist in stretching the rubberband around the box. This is the same girl who while mother and father fruitless argue a suddenly naked and boneless six-year-old who is refusing to walk back to the bathroom to collect her worm clothes and deposit them in her dirty clothes hamper which is in her room where she is headed to anyways, but when directed to do this job suddenly loses all motorskills and possibly even required skeletal structure to complete the task, mother and father becoming increasingly exasperated by her dramatic, insolent , seemingly unnecessary, ridiculousness, Helena, already in her pajamas scoots back into the bathroom and sorts the dirty clothes taking Esme’s to her room and depositing her own worn clothes in a separate clothes basket in our room. Her sense of order is at times inspiring though is completely contradictory to her larger ability to create messes and disorder.

A heavy hooded thunderhead,

blood-bruised like a desiccated peach.

Reddish-brown brick buildings.

An alley running north.

An alley running south.

Fluttering flags at the tip of the star:

Damen, Lincoln, Irving Park.

Planes thread to and from O’Hare

on invisible lines above.

Old Abe, historic and wise, spies on

from the parking lot sign of the now

defunct and demolished Lincoln Restaurant.

In the evening, after the storm, the sky is stunning— full of chemtrails dissipating and little fading, mottled clouds circling about. The setting sun reflects back from a windowed condo façade— mercurial, suddenly the same color as the clouds, as the sky. And then a wind jumps up and all the retiring yards explode— epileptic ferns, spasmodic hedges, a lamenting bush, a thatch of quavering grass, a few genuflecting pines. And the windchimes rattle in the yard. And down the block the *el* roars through eating the air it plows before it. And then it is gone. And the wind dies. And everything is still. And a fingernail moon sits above North Center, a playful Cheshire with a side-wound regard. *Perched in-flight, descending soon, early to bed with the waxin’ moon.*

.01/10/2021

Back from Ft. Wayne after a lovely visit. In your cozy , bright home, lounging with your children. Navigating the challenges and disappointments and fearful currents. Stepping across moving waters, feeling our way stone to stone.

The rolling Southwest Allen country landscape. Developments with curving roads and open fields dormant and frost-drifted with snow, gossomar burial shrouds till spring’s old magic brings new life to the all.