[**current**](#CURRENT)

02/14/2021

A Year Off: A story about staying at home—and how to make it happen for you.

2/15/2021

Artistic sensitivity: “a sense of being somehow, somewhere connected with the other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is a norm” Nabokov (afterward to Lolita).

2/16/2021

Oh, thank you muse I have a process. Guerilla style. Line up the stack Dioynsous and Apollo. This incomprehensible YIN and YANG

***Nashville, Tennessee: End of 2020, Beginning of 2021***

Train cars on tracks, brown beyond the rows of white headstones in the Nashville National Cemetery where the Wilburn Brothers-- Teddy and Virgil-- are both buried and where some say you can sometimes hear “Brown Eyes Sparkling” being whistled low and airy on humid summer nights.

Painted on clouds. Swallows like black leaves clung to trees. A puddle in the swing rut in the morning after the rain. Fading auburn light like the hues of a desiccated peach. Church steeple through winter thinned trees. 17 busy turkeys free ranging willy-nilly across the surveyor’s good work

The *Cocoa Light Tour*- wee and away we go! All around Inglewood and assorted environs. Thanks to Golden tickets and whizzing away over undulating roads, The illuminated Craftsmen with their trees flush against glass front doors-- a pine come up the walkway to greet you, candy cane and cocoa extended, big icy bear hug on offer. Sequenced lights, rolling sheets of color , Pink Flamingos under dayglo palms. Igor, Snoopy, the Grinch, Santa, Jesus, Wisemen, Shepherds, Mary, Joseph, Tweety, the Abominable Snowman, Jack the Pumpkin King, Angels, dripping icicle lights, simple white lights, black lights, all red lights hinting at a holiday punch deeply dyed and spiked with red rum.

But no snow, though found later upon returning to Chicago after grey Louisville and Breana Taylor’s ghost and lifelessness in Old Town with the Cardinals all scattered and the wobbly stadium strikingly dumb.

Wednesday night at the Richtergarten. *I do think you are Freaky and I do like you a lot.* Double Banh-mi. The reassuring smell in the Asian grocery store that all Asian grocery stores have that I used to find kind of nauseating and foreign, but now sort of relish, yet another proof that the world is large and various.

Craig Vincenes… Beaux Latham, betsy birkey… walking around the streets of San Francisco with Riding the Cable car from the Castro to the Tenderloin. Playing cello and tenor guitar and a violin and a classical guitar bashed and slashed like a drunk flamenco cad. Before a roaring gas pipe fire. Chase the chill from the end of the year. Put me in the cacophony of the swallows. Murderously claiming the tree canopies from the crows.

Music, together, so wonderful! Snuck in between fits and messes and other demands on our minds. And but yet still-- The cello! The tenor guitar! The violin! The classical guitar-- all together, unpracticed, distracted, but suddenly making good sounds, strings vibrating round the living room, before the hearth, before the girls pass out in beds and we loll In *Baskets* until sleep. All of us tired like overwrought iron.

Wounded animals making remarkable recoveries all! Porch swing and brick and soothing green painted cement. Reading couches. Birds and squirrels. Sudden predatory shadows flashing over the road as we drive. Birdsong. Swallow mob action. The church spire through the skeleton bones of the empty leaf homes. Turkeys rioting through yards. Pampered dogs in baby carriages. Rainbow flags in a red state. News reports of an RV broadcasting *Downtown* just before it explodes. And just days before the storming of the capital.

Confetti in the living room and a tossed Trump mug into the abandoned yard nextdoor. A floor to stretch on, a raging hearth to warm beside. 70 degree weather received like a gift. Travel altering exposure to warmth from above. Once again we turn the corner and begin another trek around the sun.

All the best,

GianLuigi Donnarumma

Occhi Azzurri -- blue eyes

Structure:

* Modular
* Had to learn to write code before I could freely write a letter
* Had to TAKE the time
* This is my process
* This is my faith act
* NASHVILLE -- Craig Vincenes Reference, wedding, San Francisco, Vets, Helena saying “one” for everything-- Chicago -- Esme’s eye, pharmacy, words for Dave’s 40th birthday.
* **A Year Off: A story about staying at home—and how to make it happen for you.**
* Why we travel? What we travel for. Why it is important.
* Feeling easy and free without unconsciously being exploitative asshole.
* How responsible am I for other people’s exploits?
* Am I my bother’s keep?
* America gets all the credit. THEY get all the blame… but aren’t THEY America? Aren’t there always two sides to conflicts?
* The invisible hand of the free market.
* The invisible hand of Christ- he sent a plague, he struck me lame, he sent a U-Haul truck.
* God’s touch porved by all my good works.
* Inspiring vortex of enthusiasm and goodwill
* Why write?
* You were going to write a book about spirituality or your thoughts or something.
* We were all on a roof. Ended up laying on our backs and singing hallelujish to the night sky doing the unextraordinarie acts that have always marked good gatherins. People relaxed. Celebrating. Forgetting themselves a bit. Connecting.
* Always having to have a deeper meaning. My mother being really disappointed by the end of Lost.
* Television structures. Time slots. Rhythm of the week. Thursday night ritural. Sunday night ritual. Ritual. Conversation. Connection. Culture. Created culture. Humor. Interest. Meaning. Amusement.
* There must be a deeper meaning… and deeper… and by deeper meaning it must be some metaphor about God and the meaning of life and must blossom it forth organically form the storm like the miracle of a spring flower unfolding its luscious silken cloak. And this writing feels awful and unfocesd, but I am free to throw it out there, because it is all part of the process!!
* **I write to keep an inventory of my thoughts. I write to pin my thoughts to a place and have a place to return to them and consider them and turn them over and grow them. I am not here to hide. I am not here to prepare even. I am here to live because I love to live in words and writing allows me to enter words more immediately than speech because there is so much more context that can be created with writing, or not created, you can communicate in impressions. You can allude. You do not need to set up or respond to something that your companion has just said. You can be slow but appear quick. You can marry your reticence to your most pointed, casual, let slip delivery. Feeling and weighing before speaking. Six months since I fell out with my family and no direct considered response. I want that. I want honesty. But I also do not want to write some bullshit expositional theme paper on why I am right and they are wrong. I believe we both can be right, but you believe we both cannot be write. And I will admit that believing we both can be right does seem like a very magnanimous, or perhaps arch position for me to take, but it is what I believe and more importantly how I am living my life. You apparently want me to feel conflicted about this, and I have for many years wanted myself on some level to fel conflicted about this to both catalyze and clarify the separation between us, hone my art around, as well as piously glasp to some sense of loyalty to you and your values, pushing myself for my disloyalty as an extended and self-defeating last love sustaining act. Love had become a wound carrier. A limper forward. A great numbing effort. A heroic incomprehensibility. Is my ultimate theme that it is all right to be over whelmed and that despite being the inevitability of being over whelmed the ability to still grasp those clear sky insights and stolen moments from time to time. The fuel to infuse the preparation and the work and effort with worth, the sore muscle that is both cost and reward.**
* Where is this stress coming from? Vocational stress- I don’t have a job; Political stress: election year; Cultural Stress- my extended family’s culture shifted very conservative, very Catholic, very Fox news… this makes me sad and creates a situation where I truly just do not belong in my own family and I have to expend an annoying amount of emotional capital just to engage with them. Its not super fun. And within the context of having other more stressful things that my efforts have a chance at cracking or making some impact in moving forward, I have to focus my limited wherewithal on that which is responsible, reasonable, sane, productive. Imbued with the best chance to see this most important career transition.
* Changing like the shoreline of the sea… in forests and in cities.

[August 2020](file:///C:\Users\aaron\Creating\Writing\2020年\2020%20Months\2020年08月(%20).docx)

Dear David,

* Family’s Mawkish video about the old women reciting the sing songy poem about getting old and fearing suffering and then having her reflectinong tel her that all this earthy turmoil is just polishing her jewel so that it will shine even brighter for all eternity. My Catholic family loves this and writes a bunch of empty headed mawkishness. Awesome! This made me cry! I am thinking about how you really don’t want to polish jewels and especially not more and more. You really are just wearing them away to nothing. And are certainly not going to make them shine brighter. I think the old woman was thinking of a coin or something. I mean a jewel is only really going to shine (reflect light, display any kind of livelieness and evanescence) if it has been artfully cut in patterns which will maximize the interplay of the light within the stone. Creating a hall of mirrors. Every deeping depths of light penetrating mineral and bouncing deeper and deeper into the repeated pattern of the jewel cutters artful patterning. When I found myself selling jewels I ordered a book on Elizabeth Taylor. I wanted some back stories. Some context. Some romance. Some legend. It turns out that her first husband is buried in the Chicago suburbs and that in the 1970s maybe some small time Chicago criminals tried to dig up his grave because they’d heard that there was an extremely valuable diamond buried with the body.
* Figure out what other career paths could I possibly transition to at this point in my life that were both realistic financially and relationally – did not want to go into a bunch of debt in pursuit of a career that I was not necessarily going to deliver the elusive work life balance that we desired. So I started to explore coding. I started with Ruby and ordered a $30 book and invested in a $9.99 MOOC and began working through both of them over the next two years as I transitioned jobs and we welcomed our second child into the world. I am not going to same that the next two years saw a ton of focused study but I certainly not had a dynamic openness to programming and was trying to work it into my mornings and commute and just trying to start working into that head space. Once I was laid off because of COVID and the civic unrest I was off to the races to try and cram just as much syntax and knowledge as possible. I attacked it like a literacy problem and one of my first strategems was an Excel file that was basically just my dictionary where I would record definitions and notes on general and specific web development and programming jargon. Expanding my known unknowns , expanding awareness, getting a sense of which direction to head, figuring out what are the beginning, intermediate and advanced technologies. What order should you learn them in. What kind of feedback loop of learning and applying what you learn? How much reflecting on the actual learning process should you be doing or is this just recursive obsessing at this point…
* Sleep and dream and wake and write and code and parent and learn and earn and give and grow and doubt and beat up and roll and roil and age and wither and so forth…
* Play is the most unconscious form of expression  
  I have had a really hard time playing this year.
* The challenge of the second child… my brother and his 7 children. At some point they just start taking care of themselves.
* The crisis at hand is always the biggest concern.
* When did it get so hard to play? Having a much harder time being playful as a father of two.
* What is therapy? What is relationship building anecdote? What for the priest? What for the cop? What for my fox confessor?
* A thirsty fox wanders into a well to get a drink, but when he steps onto the water bucket, he sinks to the bottom. Down there, he’s doubly screwed because there’s no drinkable water, and he can’t get back up, but then a wolf comes along, and the fox tells the wolf that the bottom of the well is, in fact, paradise, but he can only enter if he confesses all his sins to the fox. The wolf does, and then the fox tells him to step into the other bucket. As the wolf moves down into the well, the fox’s bucket is lifted out. The fox runs away, and eventually when some friars go to get water, they find and kill the wolf. The end.
* Appreciating Jazz and Classical music so much more… older or finally overcoming my youthful tastelessness. -While I have head him before, I finally gave a good extended listening to Art Tatum. And read his Wikipedia page. I am appreciating his playing and enjoying the new connotations and connection to your daughter. Drank PBR by the case and was blind in one eye. Some pianist who heard him decided to switch instruments.
* How do you intimately engage with life without being consumed by life.

Pariah does not bother me all that much at all. It is actually quite freeing. Considering the current climate it is absolution from a great deal of chaos that I finally realize at this point I have studiously sought to avoid. So yes, I accept your offering of pariah status, but now how do we work out a new interface to maintain it, make the new arrangement stick and so forth. I am honestly though. If I am not hurting anyone. I really don’t mind being a pariah at all. It is like Joseph Brodsky with his shake to himself and his typewriter. Thanks to our good friends who far excel us at earning and saving money we have a very affordable third floor rental with glorious light and a fenced in garden below where the girls can run around and we can hang out in the shade and where we’ve planted a little plot of Chard and hot peppers and will soon put the cucumbers in. Esme has a cracking pickle recipe and all last summer served us up garden to table quick pickles thanks to her sturdy legs that didn’t mind the three flights down and three flights up to the garden and the searching, searching, where’s a good one, I thought maybe, oh, my, up there, that one’s huge! Stretch—reach—twist—pull—lean—snap. And then two more smaller ones and pick a couple peppers for the parents and then up, up, up, back up the stairs to wash and chop the cucumbers and toss them in salt and rice vinegar from China to serve as a side that we think goes with pretty much anything, especially in the summer and especially when beer is involved.

Everything is revolving chaos and then clarity… occasionally…

Have you ever had the sense that you had the table set fro some serious development.

I want something easy to impart… or at least something that is not annoying.

I want to pass on reminders that the world has whisper my way.

I have shot thoughts to you as I have worked alone and been in the process of becoming a computer programmer.

Things from you book that I have cut the cud on this year…

Craig Vincenes… Beaux Latham, betsy birkey… walking around the streets of San Francisco with Riding the Cable car from the Castro to the Tenderloin. Playing cello and tenor guitar and a violin and a classical guitar bashed and slashed like a drunk flamenco cad. Before a roaring gas pipe fire. Chase the chill from the end of the year. Put me in the cacophony of the swallows. Murderously claiming the tree canopies from the crows.

Its not worth it to argue with you. Honestly, what do I have to gain? Do I want to disabuse you of your worldview… aspects of it yes, but will that really improve either of our lives. Your happiness and contentment and perspective and groundness and moods are your own business. Something out of my control. My 2 year old has emotional cycles that I cannot control. We have to communicate with her on parallel planes. This takes energy. We need patience and wherewithal and often need to subjugate our own perspective to fully grasp where she is coming from. We have to slip into her tiny shoes and enter into her emotional read of the situation and attempt to balance things out from there. This is exhausting…

The problem isn’t the problem or at least her problem with the problem isn’t my problem with the problem. We are both trying to solve a problem, but the problems are ultimately not the same one. We are not on the same problem. And in the end, like many problems between parents and kids the problem isn’t even about the problem at hand, but some larger struggle of will which likely has something to do with the natural ego/personality building that is incessantly unfolding with a child. The sequence of the resolution is as important to the resolution. We have interfaces. I love interfaces. Be it books. Or a sale. What’s my interface? I have an ability to put myself into a very neutral mindset. I think it is a learners mindset. It is something akin to depression. Or at least there is some cross over with a depressed mindset- loss of interest in many things (in the service of focusing on one project) or at least this is something I have worked to cultivate. It’s kind of a dangerous game. It puts this moat of shit between you and creation and your ability to wade through the shit to get to the citadel of creativity is the whole gig. Will you be consumed by your metaphor? Once the incubus is attached, will it strengthen you, or suck you dry completely.

Just speed read your book and once again enjoyed all the photos and just the general chutzpah of thie whole thing. You guys are incredible and inspiring to know. I’m on my own thisispossible mission and really took some solace of your reflections on the trip ahead. For me it has been letting go, and just giving myself over to the trip. Fullly committing to it. In the same way that my commitment to besty cement my place in the adult world, my commitment to this process is cemetnting bme in the adult world. I don’t have to be afraid of failing at any one thing as long as I am putting in the time. I My this is possible wouldn knocked out a few things and got a few things set up to test my aptitutde and once I felt like I had passed that and then suddenly had the time to invest in the subject, I am off to the races, because why not? How long is this process going to take. I dom’t know, but what I have found comfort in is this total commitment. To a new path, a new direction. And honestly my position now is so much less precarious than the last time I attempted this. I am wiser. More patient. We have saved some money. We have realistic outcomes to this.

* Develop and deploy a website (HTML/CSS/JAVASCRIPT)
* Learn a MERN/MEVN/MEAN stack

It’s a very consolidated achievement and a variable one. Chinese has prepared me for this process pretty well. I think it is going to go really well and it is going really well. And these are the thoughts that I am having while I have them and I am not being critical of them because this is the first draft of something that I can shape into a much slimmer, more focused narrative. I have a hard time successfully suppressing my thoughts. Or not suppressing them, but summarizing them.

And that’s when I realized that my notebook could become an interwoven

This whole project is kind of nuts. It’s completely decentralized and disprocessed. That’s not completely true, but in a large part that is true for the workflow. Or at the very least, I can say that a strong emphasis is put on flew flow and discovering and then building infrastructures with and for the the new information.

The Yellow Submarine note taking process was born out of the infinity notebook- a page numbering system of writing and editing/ studying reviewing. Information is added to the flow and then retrieved during the systematic reviewing of the flow. Input and output. Information when editing/reviewed (reencountered) can be reinserted into the flow, transferred to another project or deleted.

Ideally a lot of thought goes down in the Yellow Submarine. I want a lot of thought to go down there. And I want to give myself time to assimilate the information and play with it. iAnd I want tto bounce things off the wall with the confidence that I will get back to that ball in a timely manner- that is where the discipline of knocking out x amount of pages per day, per week etc. In the past I have had some issues with the editing/reviewing process getting super backlogged, but I suppose chasing that balance injects the craft aspect to this process. It’s a unicycle that will easily throw you at first. Once well acquainted though, you can be riding in style!

We are but messages on the wind

Artful or awfully released upon the world.

Brain feast- cornucopia of reason and imagination and emotion and faith and doubt and concentration and distraction and stirring and settling

Making peace with technology, making peace with language, making peach with my family, making peace with making.

01/07/2021

Trying to be a father

and hold a thought.

Trying to be a husband

and hold a thought.

And a brother, a son, a friend . . .

and hold a thought.

Trying to get loose

and hold a thought.

Walk a path

and hold a thought.

Acquire what can’t be bought

and hold a thought.

And then

is it more powerful

in the end

to move the mind

or just directly engage the spine?

08/27/2021

My family is worth eating stress over.

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.

**08/26/2021**

A lot of what this has bee about is voice and drafting, letting things sift though, figuring out what is worth reporting, what feels most resonant and relevant to share.

Have continued to get coffee from my friend Stephen, now in Brooklyn, it has been a consistent delight to have lbs. of his coffee just programmically show up at my front door month by month.

You asked what I’d been writing—one of the things I have been keeping track of is memories of the girls. Trying to capture little snippets of their milestones and funny comments and so forth. I’ve found it really grounding actually. A way to intentionally anchor my memories of these fleeting times and highlight or kind of encapsulate some different stages.

We are creating culture. I don’t mean that in a grandiose way, but in a tiny small, super influential way. We are help shaping, curating how the culture comes at our kids. It is fascinating and intimidating, but a lovely process to engage in.

**08/24/2021**

Children have changed the baseline of what its good and what is settled. Children have radically changed my attitude towards work— more willing to work, though much more conflicted about it. More sensitive to time.

Mastery… adequacy…

So many vehicles— where are your bikes and cars?

Grasping at perspective—kind of broken, kind of just trying to scrape my way up and out again…

**08/23/2021**

Truly lost in this process, in this life. Isd that not the groal though. To find your vocation and then just let it consume you. Feed upon your Whale Corpse.

Following a completely intuitive course with regards to composition and editing and then ultimately sending…

Over trying to pursue mastery…

Marketing Ice cream now

Writing like yoga requires tension, release, working through things, breathing, flooding oxygen in to confront the strain.

Emptying out—getting to a place where you are open to new information.

Yoga, stretching, movement, dance, et, al are all creative & nourishing acts no?

Foregoing mastery seems like a fair thing to let go. There is a lot to say about adequacy. Wherewithal has been my buzz word. Trust and Practice. These are good words. Good intentions.

Settling in a home is a creative act. A marriage is a creative act. Child rearing is a creative act. Writing / Creating / engaging / opening / connecting / reordering / questioning / approaching with emotion—gamut of emotion

Lacking perspective , lacking the full arch of the plot I am unsure how to discuss any of this. This is ultimately a good thing—it will keep me from being too triumphant about any of these conclusions or ideas that I pull together.

**Water—hydration**

**Earth—grounded**

**Fire— activity**

**Wind— breathing**

Back in September I went on a journey. A spiritual journey of sorts. I passed through a portal and in some ways I have yet to return. I have lost my mind and I hae found my mind. I have discovered myself and I have lost myself. The cloth has been cut.

We talk on the phone 4 months after your birthday. I am just finally getting to my writing from that period. I have this incredible drag on my process, which makes the whole thing feel out of whack when I attempt to force something further along the pipeline than it has naturally evolved.

Writing, creating, living— getting over one’s self. Learning how to manage one’s mind, learning how to manage one’s body…

Haunted by every cliché you couldn’t quite overcome, transcend, outrun.

Writing has to be play. Stretching has to be play of sorts. Barefoot running and now shoed barefoot running has replaced walk/jog running as my lowkey cardio go-to. The key difference being that I am now running slowly, but more in my feet and on my toes, forcing a fuller body engagement into my stride—my core engagement, calf—hopefully less strain and impact on my skeletal structure because I am not striding out and heel striking into my knees, my stride is more of an agile shuffle. Sometimes it just devolves into an earnest power walk, but at any rate, I find myself being way more experiment and challenging with the “barefoot shoes”, I have to think about my stride more. It takes concentration, but I can also focus on stretching different parts of my body as I move as well. I can focus on different chakras. Or different breathing techniques. Or key into the sounds around me, numerate them, listen fore rhythms etcetra. Did I mention I sometimes smoke weed before I jog.

Stretching has changed my life. It has connected my body to my intellect—my body to my mind.

06/30/2021

I think it is badass that you have published a book.

We have been enjoying our Swallowtail butterflies. Feeling them dill from our garden and watching them day by day transform from a parasitic looking little worm to a fat, handsome caterpillar, some molting, some chrysalis constructing, and then, and then, the transformation is complete. The worm now has wings and full color and is ready to leave its cage—that it really hadn’t been away of, because all it needed was a bunch of food and a small place to transform themselves in safety. Esme named our three wards *Foliage, Bubbles and Alexandra.* I am happy to say that they are all doing very well, hitting their milestones, and generally just gorging themselves on dillweed all day and night.

04/01/2021

K-pop Star apologizes for flirty pictures with Nazi Mannequin

There is also a story about Amanda Gorman being racially profiled and harassed.

Craft is an openness to new problems.

Kids make your life by breaking your life. They break you in. The really important things break you. You bend the knee, surrender to the process, prostrate yourself before the thrown. Settle the due of your course etcetera.

10/16/2020

Shakespeare first folio: 750 copies produces, 235 known to have survived, 56 know complete. A complete folio sold for $10 mil in October. In December Dylan sold his complete catelog of over 600 songs for upwards of 300 million.

Nature:

We know more about nature than we can at will communicate.

Nature abides as an emblem of man’s mind. The invisible world with a all her latent meaning disappears a the advent of the visible.

Traving the circumference of the invisible world…

An object rightly seen unlocks a new faculty of the soul

A well turned phrase, long contemplated maze.

Overcome by the gestalt. The images are all encompassing.

Well supplied- the city is a fine place for a hermitage.

11/02/2020

And so I came up with a plan— get back to a watch shop. Code and write and study Chinese as much as possible to keep my other fronts progressing as I made some scratch for my family. Keep us in insurance. Earn us a holiday or two. These last 7 years have been a portage— now mind you, there has been a bit of flow at times. A portage to polish my obsidian mirror. Pass through the gate, pass through the gyre, the fall, the fall, where will it lead. Laughing Buddha, mad with releases. There have been times of contentment, excitement flow. The leather bladder of wine and the Woodman bounty has lifted my mind from my mule existence as times, my good girls growing and blowing my mind daily, impressing upon me the need to give to them, provide for them— but all in all it has been mostly portage, my main effort, my spent sinews have all gone to slogging through the muck and mire, up stairs, through dense thickets without room to manuever, feeling old and dumb with my Duluth packs too foolishly full. Endure, endure, you have a plan, you have a plan, a vision, a possibility, a dream. And then the rat came back.

11/20/2020

Accepting that VOICE can be so much more than just a talking voice, a self-explaining collection of metaphors and symbols.

I am gambling with my children’s future. I could be making this transition to tech in a much more staid, focused, undynamic path. Dynamic seems to have a value judgement, like it would be some kind of capitulation to just through out my writing impulse, my creative reading imputlse, my collaging impulse, my recording impulse. These impulses that did not just spring up impulsively, but that have been being honed over the years by your lifestyle. As you commit to this and have that striped away, allow this to flourish and that to be neglected.

The banality of evil… meaning…that which allows ordinary people to do extraordinary things, could also be switched around to talk about he balanity of good, the balanity of extraordinary, each life a collection of habits and projects that unfold in time and space. This brings me back to that vision. That necessary vision. That vision that is somehow beyond the good or the cool or economically prudent or even ambition in as much as ambition is attached self-promotion and advancement, I am talking about being, I am talking about tapping into some basic need and desire and personality of the individual, realizing one’s personal aesthetic, not as a pretentious act of self-expression, but as a quiet act of self settling and acceptance and consolidation, strength sensing and weakness confronting. Committing to a process that does not end. Conscious acceptance. Unconscious acceptance. Gratitude for the easy and abundant and convenient and close, acceptance of the hard and scarce and contingent and far. Not letting your mother’s anxiety freak you out and make you feel so uncomfortable, there is nothing you can do for her really. Her health is good, can’t improve her health. She is financially stable, she has 12 children and children in law now and 19 grandchildren, she is not hurting for outlets for her mothering and advice and judgement dispensing talents.

My openness to tech was in essence just that. A changing of attitude and engagement with computers and software and web technologies. Once I had made this switch in my mind I sought out conversations on the topic. I ordered a text book. Signed up for a $9.99 MOOC which I then spent the next two years working through in my free time which I worked my active and demanding retail sales job and juggled becoming a new minted father of two, turning 40, managing a job transition (hurt coding momentum, but accepted that and committed to it, built rebuilt system), then a pandemic and a layoff, and a midlife crisis where I was compelled to add to my coding challenges by feling compeeled to pursue my writing practice with an engagement and intensity I had heretofore never been able to muster.

Despite not giving them much time my Chinese and guitar playing have been feeling really good and intuitive as well. Something again about accepting my limitations, feeling grateful for my abilities. Exploring those abilities iteratively and creatively and with some relaxed sense of discipline. The sort of discipline that awe just do and internalize like achieving proper articulation of words (in our native language or others) instead of lazily mumbling unintelligible renditions. Somethings we learn to do properly and then we just do them properly and unconsciously and that is a beautiful ting. Like typing. At some point with typing you really do stop thinking about it and your fingers just know what letters they should engage.

Despite the fact that I am gambling here… cause I feel like I have a pretty clear path to employment if I can just stay focused enough to keep my coding coming along on a solid timeline. There really is not a contradiction of goals here. In the future that is. In the future writing and coding are completely harmonious. The rub is the present. Right now. What should I be doing right now. If I am coding I am not writing. If I am writing I am not coding. But to reach my harmonious future I need to be writing and coding at another level. At a level where I just write and code and I am not conflicted about it and I am not worried about whether I am doing it correctly or following the correct process or wasting too much time or reaching my limits on ability to process new information. And I am able to cultivate these long skills— these skills that take a long, long time to really develop. Finding a peace with the slow development, something I have experienced with Chinese and writing, but experienced in such a way as to not quite be able to say that I have done it correctly because I still do not have an established career and I am broken away or been pushed away from the structures of my family with having found or founded solid structures of my own despite the solidity of my family and my friend network. Much of this writing process is acknowledging that fact and making intentions about how to proceed. Finding that right silence in which my next action is able to bubble up from necessity and order. An unconscious birthing from my values and well grasped responsibilities, liabilities, and consequential contingencies.

So yes, I am gambling, I am getting off track, eroding my singular focus on tech to take time out to write and writing what? What? Well nothing specific exactly. Just rambling. But rambling consistently, sometimes topically, sometimes personally. And there is a system to it and I am tracking it of sorts and putting it on an assembly line of sorts, with the end being crafted some finished stories, memoirs, family histories, letters- relationship building, savoring, acknowledging, encouraging, fun. But I feel like to fully realize how I can work and how I have to work, I have to work in this strange flowing expanding and contracting way. Finding my confidence in the long game dedication of it and the long game dedication that I have already shown in my marriage and my sales career and my Chinese study and my writing, despite my undeveloped process. I now have a more developed process that should do noting but increase my confidence, level of engagement as well as the audaciousness of my goals.

Ultimately, this is also a huge fucking hedge. When I am able to make my full transition to a tech industry job whether that’s in some kind of a support, sales , or actually development capacity I will do so in very solid physical, mental, and emotional shape because my process for making this transition has meticulously, obsessively, continually circled and cycled around to keep this end as the ultimate goal of this process, a goal nested and essential to my larger goal of achieving familial security and relatively settled or at least vastly improved work/life balance, harmony, synergy, the sustainability of which will provide the mast upon which we fly our family sails. My well-being and happiness and engagement and self-worth and self-fulfillment and ability to have long thoughts and personal explorations and cultivations is also part of that big tent equation, that pie chart presentation that freeze frames ones life as full and fulfilled or empty and pointless. Maybe before here you describe a pie chart that graphs each family members sense of happiness and fulfillment and engagement and development by some of GNI index number of how good their life is divided by how much they like it.

11/09/2020

Thousands of trees knocked down in a single night.

Trump apocalypse.

A tornado ripped through my uncle’s home in northern Michigan just a little west of your grandfather. That is not tornado country. Ice storms his Texas. Damn liberals and their frozen windmill turbines.

11/21/2020

In some ways it all seems very easy: set time for writing; set time for coding. Follow through. Believe that you will get back to each and every project. Believe that the process is working. Make sure to keep delivering finished results and evolving, ever more sophisticated ways in which to engage with the material and apply its learnings and insights into your ever evolving projects. Getting used to being in an ever eveoling project. It can’t be a pick a point and just run for it. That doesn’t make sense or are even good planning. The horizon line is ever changing. Why shouldn’t your specific goals be ever changing. Your direction is consistent, but your goals, you rhythm, your immediate engagement is determine by the conditions on the ground, the conditions of the trail.

11/30/2020

All couples have their challenges, but I am so grateful for the shared lived experiences betsy and I had before having children. Those years shaped our priorities and our worldview and bonded us together in an important way.

01/05/2020

Inspiring vortex of enthusiasms and goodwill

02/14/2021

A Year Off: A story about staying at home—and how to make it happen for you.

2/15/2021

Artistic sensitivity: “a sense of being somehow, somewhere connected with the other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is a norm” Nabokov (afterward to Lolita).

2/16/2021

Oh, thank you muse I have a process. Guerilla style. Line up the stack Dioynsous and Apollo. This incomprehensible YIN and YANG

**2/19/2021**

Does your politics make you unkind? Perhaps that question makes you angry. Perhaps you want to hold on to your anger. Perhaps you have already let it go. Perhaps it comes and goes and you have found ways to manage it that are more or less successful.

Modes: anger, annoyance, indignation, concentration.

How do we get in these different moods or modes. What causes them? Diet, spiritual state, emotional state, internal queue, external queue.

Listen to some Art Tatum… Emma and Tatum…. Art Tatum, Fats Waller, stride and jazz… replaced by bebop. Stride vs. Bebop.

Music, inspiration, after hours drinking and improvising. Didn’t hurt hisd playing, but damaged his health. Died at 49.

**02/21/2021**

1933-1937—utter changed by travels.

Melancholy is exorcised, chaos chased away and well being, alacrity of spirit and a thoughtful calm take their place.

“Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag”

03/08/2021

That thought of traveling out and bringing back something of your travels to your family cultural which is the seed of all culture. A new world created over within the walls and traditions and history that forms the core of our individual reality. You have expanded the world of Emma and Tatum, you have given an example of the openness and curiosity and good risk-taking (transcending yourself, your constructed guard rails, you have sought to expand the narrowness of your existence. Is there a quote from their book that speaks to this? *Journey to the West*, *Journey to the East*, a center which is everywhere.

05/07/2021

Possibly collapsing the Alex letter, the Dave letter and the Nathans letter into one text and then boiling it down to a punchy letter that I could sent to Dave and Alex. And then I could take some of the material from the Nathans letter and meld it into the Nathan and Barbara letter.

The challenge of the second child. I express the need to make sure Esme is getting into good things as being one of the concentration splitting factors of my day to day, my brother kind of responds like huh, once you have a few more kids they just start getting into stuff together. And I am thinking, yes, that is all well and good, but who is supervising them? Who is setting them up with activities and making sure that they are cleaning up after themselves. We also do nmot have woods that we can just send the kids out into. Esme would have fun in his cousin’s woods.

Facing my mother’s plaintive pressure to attend extended family gatherins kind of has the depressing effect of making me realize how little I value my relationsthps with my cousins. Which is not to say that I don’t like them or that I would not see them if our paths aligned, but I think it is the grown person ascknowledgement that despite our kinship and the shared history of our youth, our lives have developed in other directions and frankly our bonds with none blood kin in our new diasporic homes are more essential and vital relationships.

The vital relationship. Vital relationships are both the most life giving and life structing, but also the most demanding and life sucking. What they do not require is any extra amount of energy on your part to initiate them or expand your personal or family significantly to include them— there is some overlap, connection, be it geographical, temporal, responsibility, professional, etc. We cannot possible keep all of our relationships vital. This I suppose is the good grave of major holidays for checking in and maintain the connection. Acknowledging the importance or the past importance of the relationship.

I think my postcard instinct this winter had something to do with that. It was a stab at culture creation. Wadding into the political and emotional turmoil of the winter. Finding some words too attach to it. Digging them out of the past. Was this a preview of other ore to unearth through my writing process? I hope so. I believe so. There is so much back there. I just need to keep pushing ahead with this process with discipline and sustained inspiration.

5/10/2021

Staring down what? Dissolution. Coming undone. Falling into. Being consumed. Wife is hurting now. Really depressed. Have never seen her like this. Doctor prescribed anti-depressents, but she is hesitant to take them. Gave her some muscle relaxers, but she is kind of turned off by the large quantity of pills they foisted on her and for such little money. Suffering is a constant. How do we deal with our suffering. How do we transform it? How do we endure. The alchemy of this transformation. The fallout. The resulting messages and behaviors.

**5/11/2021**

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.

Even though I just stated that the Confederate Flag is not a racist symbol, you pull out an anecdote in which it is used as a racist symbol to intimate a black doctor who has just moved into the affluent neighborhood. The other neighbors respond by showing solidarity with the black man by displaying Old Glory to show that that kind of symbolic terrorism will not be tolerated in our morally exemplary community. She cited this anecdote as a way to say like, see we rich white people don’t believe in confronting the problem systematically, or even rationally, we prefer an ad hoc, face-saving approach when it is leads when its tolerated existence leads to some sort of kerfuffle in our largely segregated communities. It’s a sense of principle really.

When I mentioned that my father just sort of warped reality to his convenience with regards to his COVID magical thinking, she heartily agreed. “Right! Exactly!” Holy fucking shit. Who am I dealing with here… We have not discussed January the 6th, much less the outcome of the election. Limbaugh is dead but my father feelings compelled to post on the supoosedly apolitical family feed: “Thank God for Great Americans like Tucker Carlson” after my older brother posts a link to an opionn piece about vaccines. My brother’s tagline, possibly also Tucker’s is: “A lot of questions, not a lot of answers!”

Thank God for Americans like Tucker Carlson, indeed.

05/25/2021

06/01/2021

Leaning in to on-line shopping. Mirroring *Invisible Man*. Going underground. Disappearing. Trying to get ahold of the people in his own life that he has lost track of getting burnt out on relationships with all of his CRM work. He longs to write and sits down and tries to write these relationships back, without a clear idea of what the way forward is—without a clear sense of the future geographically, vocationally and network-wise, heading deeper out in o the ocean, throwing out a buoy, calling a sounding, building a fire, cracking a cold one.

10/25/2020

05/07/2021

Thinking of changing this to being a letter to Alex Park and David Brown. Maybe keeping the Covenant aspect. Talking through my Covenant experience freely and then distilling it down to some quintessential moments, words, images, impressions.

Watching the fans whirling on the ceiling and discovered that you could watch the whilr or you culd focus on one singular blade and watch it lope around in a tight circle. This took more concentration and would make you feel sicker and sicker the longer you did it. The sick feeling would push back the warm encroaching, womb like sleepy feeling and keep me awake for the benediction and the sermon and the convocation. I’d follow along in the bulletin checking off each stage as we reached it. The hymns, the announcements…

Church bulletins: betsy’s family’s church had a cross dressing obese man in a wheel chair who wrote a Science Fiction serial which the Aboite Missionary Baptist Church pastor would publish periodically in the church bulletin. These bulletin entries became legendary in the Birkey household. It was just the sort of text that would thrill them. As a late 70s and early 80s family they were deep in the Darth Vader death grip clutches of Star Wars. They were a pious Midwestern family that had just missed the draft for Vietnam, they seemingly went straight from the Eisenhower 50s to the Reagan 80s and held out hope for the final death of their liberal enemies.

Johnny Appleseed. Famous the spreading apples all over the mid-west and into the west. Which made him very popular as apples were a great way of making booze. Ft. Wayne. Mad Anthony Lane.

We had something like that for a minute at our Covenant Church. But then they tried to combine our church with the church from the next town over and amicably figure out which pastor should stay on. The more senior pastor was considerably less popular, thus perhaps the acrimony that started bubbling up when less senior pastor packed up and headed south to a wealthy suburb of Chicago.

Then some really tall guy showed up with his sprawling family and dow

02/05/2021

Happy year of the OX…the rat began the cycle last year. Just after Kobe and Gianna went down. The Rat should up to begin a new cycle. The last cycle was kicking off in 2008. Kobe was on his way to Beijing arguably at the very height of his international fame. Betsy and I had just moved to Beijing. Luxury watches and jewery occupied exactly 0% of my consciousness. I was jumping into Chinese, returning to China to build on the linguistic base that I had cobbled together with one year in Xi’an and two years back in Chicago trying to self-study and language-exchange my linguistic skillset into an employable asset. I wasn’t writing much English, but I was open to writing and during the year I would be visited by moy most concrete and developed idea for a novel. A seed that throughout the 12 year cycle grew from a seed to a seedling despite the fragmented nature of my writing practice.

My artistic career has been marked by

Let’s image that all the topics, observations, musings, questions, ramblings are all points, stars, generously perhaps. And the connections between them, occasionally tenuous are the implied lines of a constellation. Somehow creating a narrative or a vessesl of receptical to disparate thoughts.

The little secret here is that this letter has come out of a larger writing process that I have been engaged in rather intensely since the middle of September. It is not the fastest process. I really didn’t intend it to be, but its kind of the anti-social media post. Instead of quick and wide, it is are slow and narrow. I suppose this is how I identify if I only had two choices. Quick and wide vs. slow and narrow. But is this really even a fair comparison or a necessary one. I think we can all agree that there are many different ways to communicate and there have been for a long time. I suspect that navigating all of these different channels has been an issue for a while and has only grown more tricky and exponentially so during our life time. I have at times felt like I have lost some of my ability to have long thoughts and I am not talking about long, deep, or even profound thoughts, but just long ones, that continue on and are not fragmented or sort of tattered or scattered… during this time I have been writing a lot. Journaling. Writing poems. Sketches for stories and ideas for stories. Adding notes to my largest writing project which is some sort of Postmodern existential Zombie Space Opera. I honestly have no idea if it will ever go anywhere beyond my laptop, but it is something that I have been kicking around lowkey for over 10 years and has seemingly decided to follow me into my 4th decade. It has also turned into a sort of research receptical for all my reading in MYTH, SCI-FI, KUNG FU, SCIENCE, THEOLOGY etc… Joseph Campbell and Stephen King and Cormac McCarthy all have moved me along this trail. But writing in this very fragmented, decentralized, undulating way has been incredibly liberating. I end up writing in a very circuitous manner, but any individual project gets a lot of space to breath and can develop on its own time line as thoughts and elements are drawn to its gravity. In addition to letters and poems and intergalactic zombies I have a piece going about Politics, one about my family, one about writing in general, one about retail, one about my experiences in China. More and more keep popping up as I write material that does not have a ready home. It is like working with a river that has forgotten what banks are.

I also have a couple of different logs tracking my quasi-shamanic journies I self-led myself on this fall in an attempt to break with certain aspects of the last decade and fully embrace the ground and the grounding of my now, of my here, of my middle-aged man perspective, perhaps leaving behind some the psychic artifacts I had forged at younger ages and whose utility has disapated with my puerile migrations, though whose import and perspective and influence remained on into my scruffier, fleshier lifestage.

How can I be sure that this change is permanent or even very lasting. I can’t I have no idea. It might be just a season. It might just be a phase, but I have at least 23 notebooks at 50 pages a pop to slog through before I can put this particular process to rest.

Slight of hand has always fascinated me. Writing strikes me as something of a slight of hand act. It seems seamless, natural, unaffected. Good writing sounds true, spontaneous even. This letter has had all of those elements, hopefully, but it is a product of process more than anything. This is the big breakthough for me. I have been drafting.

To pun let’s say that this drafting technique has solved one of my greatest challenges, sustaining momentum. Free, direct creative writing, like ANY creative act is going to take something out of you. And I had always sort of assumed that was the way to do it. Like running you just had to do it enough and eventually you would get faster, more powerful, more adept and you could run off pieces, like you would trek out for an extended jog. Not so much. I suppose there are limits even to metaphors…Writing for me is much more of a sculptural question. I cannot will a shape to take form until I have piled on the material into a big messy slog of references and quotations and half formed sentences. And then once this mass of words has grotesquely taken shape I begin to strip away and combine and add and augment and in the drafting of the rubbed out material I find a process that feels much less like driving into a head wind and close, quieter, more open to discussion and process and consideration, rather than being purely an act of leeching lead from my corroded pipedream.

Thank you for being educators! Esme being in kindergarten this year has powerfully reminded me how grateful I am to other adults giving a shit about my kids. That is truly a beautiful, powerful, touching thing. It is not easy to be a parent and when you have this who group of people who want to pitch in and add to your child’s childhood experience and education it is very moving. They are passionate about supporting and education children. This fills my bucket as Esme learned in kindergarten. This is community. This is that web of human support and engagement that speaks to the genius of our societal structure— so flawed, so fraught, so fast and fleeting, but still so fucking meaningful and full of so much good!

I once taught it filled me up and emptied me out. It gave me a role and set me in relation to people in a way that so appreciated. Having that context of learner and learning facilitator is powerful. Especially after having worked some roles where learning has been much less nurturing and more sort of punitive or wielded like a threat or extra burden. Knowing my role in the classroom was so liberating. As an ESL teacher I took to heart that my job was really just to facilitate. You can’t just pour language knowledge, or any knowledge for that matter straight into someone’s head, but you can create structure and context to get the students producing language. The students did the rowing, I just had sit in the bow of the boat and bark at them at strategic intervals. It was collaborative and inspiring, topical earnest. If I lived in a more socialist society I most likely would have settle into a teaching career eventually. I ended up make the jump from private ESL training center to Luxury retail namely because I need health insurance so betsy and I could start thinking about having kids and I wanted to use my Mandarin on the job. It sounds overly dramatic, even now to say that I had been despairing for the last 8 years, but I think its kind of true.

Alex, at your wedding, betsy was pregnate and I was a year and change into my luxury watch career. I was dong well at it, objectively doing a “good job” at it— fucking hating it though and kind of hating myself because I didn’t want to be that guy who just hated his job and was all pissy about it. And at the end of the day it wasn’t the worse job in the world, but it was spretty mind numbing at times and not having any idea how I was going to find myself out of luxury retail and onto my “forever” vocational path I was often left with a nagging series of unanswered questions which weighed in my heart and my head just like despair.

How the hell was I going to provide for betsy and myself and our soon to be born Esme with enough money to support them and health insurance and all that jazz. How was I going to get financially stable while also finding a new career direction forward that I could realistically transition to in my late 30s or early 40s.

Chinese was my way forward and initially it was a wonderful hook to the luxury watch job. It was fun and satisfying to use my Chinese within this context. Especially as I learned the wonders of the “commission check” and the amphetamine motivation that comes from bonuses and sales goals and upselling your bank account transaction to transaction.

I got to be The Mandarin speaker. The resident expert in my chosen hobby. The talent that I did not start from a naturally gifted position, but was now employing as a lead skill to launch a career that was potentially going to double my income within just a couple of years. Plus, I had this wonderful free language lab where native speakers would seek me out every day to talk about something that I had had time to do a lot of conversation prep about. The context of the watches and the brand were a nice change from the more personal focus my language use usually entailed given that I had heretofore used Mandarin exclusively for educational and social purposes.

The problem initially somewhat and then moreso overtime was how exhausting the job was. The carosel of shoppers and tourists and celebrants and such, so many people, so many fragmented conversations, with clients, with co-workers, with security guards, beat cops, the environment was often pretty unhealthy. Sharky, overly sensitive, territorial, punitive, jealous, sour grapes abounded. Schadenfreud, expressions of slight, passive aggressive actions, aggressive actions, dilemmas, people being babies, people being sharks, people being baby sharks, I often had to expnd more emotionoal energy dealing with cowrokers than clients. And the Chinese clients really started to dry up. And then we had a baby and my guerilla study tactics and my language exhanges and Chinese meetups were heavily curtailed by my parental tasks, because, holy shit— I was a father! Which was fantastic and I se now as being such a huge fulcrum on moving one from there to here. A to B zhe li to na li 这里到那里

The Black Panther and the Mouse

By Esme Whitmer

Day turns to dusk

There is such a musk

Of a black panther.

It creeps toward a mouse hole

The mouse is gone…

It is looking for crumbs!

Suddenly the minute mouse scurries to a bush…

the black panther sees the mouse!

The mouse runs into the hole.

The black panther does not feel like digging.

So it strides home.

Dear Nathans,

Okay so I’m fudging this a bit for theme. Dear Nathan and Nathan(Alex). I’ve always admired the name Nathaniel. It has always struck me as a sort of heroic name. Perhaps because of Nathaniel Hale having but one life to give to his country and the fact that it is my older brother’s middle name. My middle name being the humbler Daniel. Hans Nathaniel and Aaron Daniel. I’m the other “niel” name which is fine. Not to mention Spaniel.

My father’s younger brother is Daniel or Danny. My secret namesake— secret cause unless your middle name engages in a coup and overthrows our first name due to preference or ambition or ambivalence or whatever local politics are influencing the name calling where you come from then its usually a secret. Nathan N. . I have known you for over 20 years ad I don’t know your middle name. I think I will keep it a secret. My uncle Danny is a fine man, but not someone I plan on spending much more than a couple of hours with from now until eternity. He was very cool to me when I was uyounger. Purchased me my first Ewoke when all I ahd asked for was a pack of gum but now his facebook feed is just a stread stream of puerile anti-liberal memes, which is fine, it’s a perspective, but its kind of in your face and its ultimately weird to me that so many people make such a point to socialize by wearing your proud boy polo shirt. Nathan N. I randomnly checked out your rate my teaching thing on line. Your numbers look good! Your students find you konledgeable, you give moderately challenging exams, though you don’t stick to the text book super close. 100% of the respondents identified you as “easy”.

The uncharitable assessment of my uncle is that he has the same dee-seated wounded anger issues as my dad— their father fucked the family over by fucking one fo the secretaries from the HVAC company where he was employed. He ultimately left my Grandma Pat for Grandma Shirley. But instead of spending the last hlef century aggressively running out his broken heart on the paved and unpaved surfaces of the upper Midwest like my father, he spent 25 years in prison. As a guard mind you, but I feel like 8 years of spending time in luxury retail boutiques have left an indelible mark on me. Can’t imagine what the guy has been through and the strange places he has gone over the years.

The prison interestingly enough— a federal peniterterary was built in WHAT YEAR on the grounds and repurposeing many of the site specific facilities while had previously housed a state mental hospital which was the original reason why my mother and her people moved to the UP in the first place. After an iternerate existence wandering between Missouri, South Dakota, Washington State, and Alabama my grandfather settled into the head admisnstrative position at the Newberry State Mental Institute. Newberry was kind of regional known for the hospital making it an easy joke to make about somewhere if they happened to be from Newberry. Questioning their sanity that it. employing some consonance to banter about the Newberry Nuts and so on…Before the hospital rebranded Newberry as the home of nuts, the town had been a whistle stop lumber town in the inland forest between the great inland coasts south and north. Superior was the closer of the two lakes and was straight north. You passed the Taquamenon falls on the way there and Dean’s Bear ranch and Pine Stump, and Wolf Inn where we darnk pop and ate French fried and played pinball and pool as kids with our country cousin. We were rural. They were country. The go to the military and then inexplicably go AWOL get dishonorably discharged, but keep your nose straight and get your contracting liscence only tp poos it and go to jail on fraud charges. And other court cases. Embezzelment. I don’t know anything about that my good sir.

West Michigan evening in August, muggy, but with fresh breath from the lake that big like a sea is big.

ALEX PARK AXLE KRAP

Passing the prison you can see the original hospital instead of the open ground structure which featured a community garden and the occasional stray visit of a patient to the adminstrators assigned home just off the hospital grounds.

Alex I have always appreciated the sequential solidarity’ of your four letter by four letter first and last name. ALEX PARK. This is a great combination of these letters. Much better I believe than AXLE KRAP. I’ve crunched the numbers (letters) and really there is not another better combination of those letters. If you life were a little more metal AXLE KRAP might be a splashier, more appressive choice but for my money I will take the nature balance of ALEX PARK. I’d say it was a successful coup and in the same way I appreciate the strong consonance of Nathan Nordlund. Well chosen Ted and Jeanie!

Okay, so on we ramble. Where am I going with this? I actually do not know… one of my stars that I wanted to connect into this constellation.

And so this is the complicated thing about budding middle-aged, I was despairing not because I regretted being a father or resented the necessity of being the bread winner of the family, but because I had no fucking idea of how I would be able to transition to a more meaningful, balanced, engaging carerr that would allow me to follow my bliss or at least do something that didn’t cut across my grain so explicitly, uncomfortably.

I buried my despair, frustration, or at least tried to bury it. A couple of sneaky commuter beers had made me a much brighter dinner companion for my family. A bit of late evening herb could conjure up some energy sources from parts unknown (energy debits to be repaid sometime, somewhere), gt my mouth rambling even after my mind felt like all my words were used up.

Throughout this period I continued to write. Sometimes a fair amount, occasionally a little drunk or stoned. Always feeling like I was digging down into some deeper ground me mre, always as if a more settled self lay beneath the burined frustrations and sealed up layers of stimulants and depressants. I wrote frustrated and fragmented. I wrote laden with a productive block. A block that allowed me to move and produce, but get no where, find no traction, find no overarching project that I could set my aesthetic in, sink my aesthetic and research in. Fitzgerald had a romantic vision of American longing and possibility. Hemingway was a profoundly inventive stylist with a dogged commitment to eschew sentimentality and ground yourself in the hard good, real aspects of life. Being open to the cold water in the cup. The liveliness of fish in a stream. The coronation of light that is all of our bequeathal. Kerouac embraced the subjective and the sensual, somehow tapping into the wild, untamed spirituality existing in this land and all lands within the ether that most people sleep through.

My block allowed me to more and produce but to get no where. To grow no large story or expanding world. No Narnia. No middle earth. No 1920s Spain. No Gatsby Long Island. Nowhere. Nothing. I haven’t researched the phenomenon, but I am sure I am not the only would be writer to experience a good long spell of unproductive productivity. A kinetic writer’s block without the simple binary solution of moving from a state of non-writing to writing.

I would write and write and write, but finshinn nothing, share nothing. I had this bubbling desire to write letters and just chat through space to friends I admired and appreciated. I wanted commitments in words. A neighborly hello, a sincere condolence. But despite my desire and my plan to make this kind of communication a life practice, my writing rarely came to much. Which I could rationalize as fine. It’s fine. I have a job, our savings is continuing to slowly grow. We are all insured. We are healthy. It’s fine. Why the fuck should I even try to write if I feel so conflicted about it? Why the fuck should I write because there are so many other things I want and should be doing? I could be building a canoe, or teaching my daughters Mandarin or volunteering at soup kitchen. Or calling my mother… Why would I subject myself to this when I am pretty sure if I could just purely focus on programming I could improve the single most vexing aspect of my life- working in an industry that I have ZERO abiding love for or personal connection to. Sorry ROLEX, don’t think me ungrateful. When I was in your employ I was very loyal. But you don’t pay my bills no more. So why the need to express and write and explore language and do language… I suppose at some point it is about accepting yourself. You proclivities. What is natural for you. What tasks you are willing to subject yourself too. How you manage. What you need. What you have the wherewithal for. What you are willing (consciously or subconsciously) to sacrifice. What through lines you see. What inspiration. What waste. What efficiencies.

But why? Really? Oh, you’re an artist. That’s nice, but the last time I checked you weren’t an artist. You were a watch and jewelry salesman. And your wife, who is actually an artist, objectively talented at the tactile and aural arts and who moves easily from the visual arts to instruments to solid, attractive, inspired prose, all things she hasn’t been doing much of because I am the artist and I am holed up in the study writing thousands of pages of notes and longfrom writing on yellow legal pads and typing away at my double computer screen set up trying to synthesize the 1500 pages of computer programming notes. All up against an inchoate resource expending timeline at the end of which I will either be comfortably and happily transitioned into a new career or I will be broke and over 40 and unclear about what is next. But my point here is that life feeds on death. Betsy’s commitment to our home and our girls and all of the work she puts in to keeping things moving ahead and moving smoothly and sanely all free time up for me to code and write and come at the sacrifice of her projects, her violin, her having time and space to simply be and explore the openness of EXPRESSION and the openness to DO. This obviously raises the stakes and grounds me in the stakes. Grounds me in the actual costs and expenditures involved in this expedition. And I am so fucking grateful.

She has embraced her role as mother of our children. Embraced it, but that is not to say she doesn’t get beat up by it and ground down by it. Embrace your role, motherfucker. Be a team player. Eat bitterness. The world does not need your art or your words or your sentiments.

It does though… the world needs my art. Our art. Our effort. Our kindness. Our optimism. Our enthusiasms. Bliss. Long thoughts. Grounded insights, delicately held at sunrise with seasons turning and a cool wind kicking up the pigeons flying in unconscious formations over Irving and Lincoln and Damen ourside my window with the US flag and the Chicago desolutery waving their collective 54 stars and manifold stripes, and Abrahams stern visage on the parking lot sign for the now defunct Lincoln restaurant.

I am the world. We are the world no? Hands across America? If the 80s taught us anything is was that we should “Just say no!” I don’t think I really got either of those messages until right now. Remember D.A.R.E. Our Dare officer was a Michigan State Trooper who kept a half-breed wolf on fenced in at his property. He once gave me a D.A.R.E mug, because I had answered, correctly, that it was Jesus Christ who had died on the cross for our sins, which was an easy one for me as a devout 6th grader, though I did feel a little weird about answer a Sunday School softball in the middle of a public school day. It’s a good thing he didn’t ask me an actual drug question. I don’t think I would have done very well.

I’m going to hold on declaring my mid-life crisis a complete success until it has born a bit more fruit and I can finally get myself through the process of processing the whole process which is still progressing… but for over a month now I have been in— what has felt like a remarkbale unraveling. Not form order to chaos, but from chaos to… well not order exactly… but … ummm… flow, I suppose.

How did I get here?

Well at the end of August, Nathan, Barbara and Phil Kuhl and I met up at a little lunch right around Nathan’s birthday. We met up at the outdoor biergarten for Martyrs’ and Mrs. Murphies on Lincoln. It was kind of kismet because Phil had texted me that day to see if I wanted to meet up for lunch. Betsy and the girls were out of town. I was home, presumably, pushing forward unencumbered with my tech study. I wasn’t. I had collapsed into day drinking and boozing watching the inevitable outcome of NBA finals slowly play out while I melted on the sunk into the couch like a drunken cherry.

On the day I met up with the crew I had already had a beer or two and had smoked a little weed. I did not realize how deep I was into my process. How kind of stopped up I was. How I had sort of worked myself into this very neutral, passive, learning, absorbing frame of mind. But had com[lately blocked out other things like my ability to chat about tv shows and shit. I was not in a good frame of mind to roasily generalize my life. I lacked the wherewithal to abstract and spin. I just wanted to buzz and mumble and laugh. I was exhausted. After a few more drinks I was drunk. Pickled drunk. Medicated drunk. Stuck on the surface drunk. Had to stay there, because below, behind was a torrent, and in my effort to plow all of my energy into web development, the unprocessed torrent of creative and emotional impulses was seething and pulsating with a manic energy in desperate need of release.

My inability to descend into my more grounded place, a place I needed to get to to consolidate my current position technologically and artistically and to provide myself a stable grounding to continue my development. I don’t know where here is. My more grounded place, my deliberate place of long thoughts. That place where I left my hopes and dreams and ability to finish a book or even an article. To complete a letter to family or friends. TO climb up out of this well tht I had somehow fallen down.

My drink and smoking felt bad. They had turned on me. They were too heavy, they were too blunting. Not inspiring or invigorating, but leaching and slowing and stultifying. They felt more compulsive than ever before. Likfe a recoquisite of the day. Not something to look forward to, but just something to expect. They were not necessary things though. They were chocolate cake. I do love chocolate cake, it is enjoybale and celebratory and when it is arfully makde it is a truly a sensual delight, but I do not feel compelled to have two or three pieces of chocolate cake a night, or to stuff a few pieces in my face before heading out to meet up with friends. Not my jam.

And while my drinking wasn’t ruining my life and I was certainly living through a year where a whole lot of people were using drinking to make up for the many, many other ways in which we had lost control of our lives or we wer bored or caught in neutral. Always winter, but never Christmas… I began to wonder at some point though if I was not inadvertently numbing up my wisest organs. Here’s a theory— consciousness is not grounded in our brain, but in our organs. Now this at first struck me as some sort of medieval conception of the body. But then I thought about all our organs know and how they acquired that knowledge over thousands and thousands and thousands of years. We are literal sitting on milinna of wisdom. These ancient sages are in constant contact with our brain, communicating in some sort of universal language that while our BEING is perfectly fluent in, our conscious minds are wholly unable to participate in the conversation and remain wholly unaware of tone, texture, quantity, quality of the mise-en-scene of our existence. It’s clear that while my brain was silly and relaxed after a couple of drinks my other organs were growing lethargic and stultified by the frequency of their sousing. Drinking is not great for any of your organs, but the numbing up of my wise, wise organs, and the shutting them up, telling them that they do not need what they need, but they simply need what I provide for them. Too much greasy food, sugar, alcohol, THC, etc…What they fuck was I doing to my body in the name of managing my mind.

Let’s thnk of this less as a medical or psychological fact and just keep riding with the metaphor. And don’t worry, this whole thing isn’t going to wrap up with a hard sell on some elixir to roil your humors up. My obsidian stone. I found my metaphor in the image or idea of my Obsidian Stone. Its an image or an idea that just sort of bubbled up this fall. I’ve lost track of when exactly it showed up, but when it did, when it bubbled up, it FELT very right. It was one of those moments of knowing and understanding and literary kismet that keeps me coming back to this process. At the time I didn’t even know what it mean exactly, couldn’t quote remember what obsidian stone was— it was black in my mind though I realized it was blocking my way forward. I was standing in a field with potential paths forward stretching out in every direction. And I could move along those paths unemcumbered. I could run along those paths and I could write along those paths and drink along those paths and work along those paths and on and on, but what I realized was that these were not my paths. My path was straight ahead, straight through the Obsidian stone- which beyond its amorphous, monolithic, black, oily, shining, shifting form was understood as the compression of all my… well, everything. I could call it the compression of all my frustrations and shortcomings and unrealized dreams and so forth which maybe captures the ominous nature of it, but on closer inspection, as I began to talk to it and write to it and confront it, I discovered that despite its monolithic size and apparent mass and density, if I approached it and place my hand on it, against it, it moved. And if I grasped it and lifted it, it rose, and if I shook it, it shook as easily as if it were an appendage of my own body. And that’s when I realized what it was. I shook it again. With intention this time, while grounded in the organ attentive right silence. I shook it and I looked. I shook it and I listened. I shook it and 1000s of handwritten yellow legal pad pages begin to fill up with its contents. Draining the over-filled pus husk from dawn to dusk. Gold to rust. Enigmatic phrases and questions began to bubble up— what had been misinterpreted as my tombstone of existential dread had transformed int a piece of kitsch- the spectre of my being was really just a magic eight ball.

And then my metaphor extended into starlight. A quick trip down the Wikipedia rabbit hole revaled that Obsidian is black volcanic glass that has been used for millennia as a survival tool— weapons in Meso-america, mirros, black polished mirros used by Aztec Shamans to conjure visions, prophesies, enrich understanding…

It was as if, leaning into one of my false narratives, that my liberal arts education which had set me up for failure in my 30s had returned to save me in my darkest hour. Holy shit! Teachers, friends, books, ancestors, professors, parents, they are all there and my grinchy heart expanded three sizes and my yellow notebooks began to fill with scattered, but coherent writing and coding notes. I have no idea where this stone is leading me— but I am following and after a 12 year cycle dominated by rickety coping mechanisms and a diminishing cache of vocational hope and my clung carried wounds, I honestly feel like I have been visted by the Rat ad received his message of renewal. I have found, at long last, my flow.

11/24/2020

Teaching is a noble profession. Could have happily taught ESL as a career. Funds and lack of insurance and the unappealing prospect of going into a decent amount of debt to get my teaching certificate.

10/27/2020

I could tell you the facts but then you’d only know what had happened. I could tell you what if left like— but the truth is it felt like little bit of everything, so that doesn’t seem elucidatory.

Maybe I should make something up. Or maybe I should just write if down all into a pot and simmer it down to a tangy viscous reduction.

The artist as a middleaged man. He had reached the inglorious impasse of 41 caught in a deadnend job (a cul-de-sac really, passable, bill-pay-able, decent cashflow keeping the prospect of building up a nest egg and then leveraging it to shift gears and shift careers. Three ladies to support and myself with city costs and city and city economics etc.

With the lyricism apologize for your self-centeredness.

Nathan I understand now why you sounded a bit short with your girls…they spend their days whining and gaslighting and opposing and mess making and conversation fragmenting, thought shattering, contingency exponetiating

Oh and how about that- this contradiction- feeling self-centered, but without a firm grip of self—

Empath articles are in my google feed, fed by AI that noticed something and Borderline Personaliter Disorder articles. Which is a nice, general label for people who have difficulty regulating their emotions, which sounds a lot like my family. Our whole clan exploded out of the necessity of taking care of a child. And he attached me- our ideological patriarch accepting the mantle while his wife workds and pumps our babies- sprawling, chaotic television kids glued to screens, Catholic man with a church van, 9 sets of catholic apparatuses and paraphanalia littering the tri-level. That dark fucking basement. Some kind of teen pregnancy horror show of shag carpet and an ever widening wall of entertainment. After his shit example with women and money— working out his bottled up rebellious and ungrounded self- cast your cares upon Jesus, just pray the payer, attend the meanings, drink the blood, the body, the ushers will now come around for your envelopes, solemn purpose, community, we’re all these people really giving 10% of their income to the church, that is astounding! The blower running constantly to keep the drafty newly expanded sanctuary cozy against the blistering cold outside.

Monster truck, girl, and Excaliber girls, and the tax attorney’s daughter? And was off having an abortion when he was making out with that French girl who taught us about good wine tickling the back of your throats. And my friend who had dated the daughter of that guy my parents went to high school with, that girl who had been our friend and then dated my best friend who did a summer internship in the Carolinsa and durning that summer my brother cheated o my brest friend with his firlfriend. My brother’s best men, both assholes whose marriage were doomed from the frrist also seemed to kind o despisemy brother on some level or at the ery least weren’t in the mood to extend him some sort of redemptive mythopoetic status as the bridegroom at his own wedding. No they knew he was an asshole and did not even try to conceal they’re hope that he would be as miserable as they were.

What is the fucking problem here? and one request on the family feed with us and the Brits—

Educated, calm, very organized, accomplished. People who seeme to live their lives and were unabashedly invested in the traditions and institutions of their country and seemed up for “Doing their Part” with all this pandemic inconvenience and what not. Rather than simply twitching from stimulous to simulous a gnarled ball of frayed nerves and indignation, hooked like candy on pain kills, lungs all fucking full of cancer. And then I am screaming I am screaming at my mother on the telephone.

IT’S YOUR TONE. I inform her in all capital letters. My ddep political dig- primarllay attempting to salm together an honest emotional response to the vertigo of the morning. My mother diffing deeo int her quiver for arroaws to end the argument straight through my heart. Rabidly going for the throat.Arguing rightness and ultimatium, ultimate truth, something beyond th e flimsy, shallow arguments of mere preference. I have tried to keep the conversation about preference because I don’t want an ultimate truth showdown with my mother. I have been there many times in the past and I am so tired of it. I am over it. And she gets indignate and I feel hrut and we both get defensive and it posions the good aspects of our relationship the potentialities of our relationship.

So you only care about your children in as much as they are an extension of yourself, You are in the pcress of creating your own hell and all the liberals embracing canel culture . She snarls about Black Lives Matter and those that would throw bricks through windows and I hear is Nigger, nigger, nigger.

She just wants the truth. She wants liberation form Governor Nazi and those holier than thou milleenials who give looks and make comments when you show up to a farmers markert with a gaggle of unmasked, ebullient grandchildren in the middle of a pandemic.

And I sense she was embarrassed, but now the masks are compared to the Nazi salute— proof of conformity, conforming to the nefarious state. She rages and rages and I receive more insight into what has made these last four years possibly than I have ever wanted— but if I have insight, I still, lack understanding. What are you ultimately so mad about? Is rage the only way? Is that desperation. Sensing that the economics is with the liberals. Feeling like you are inevitably losing ground. Corporations pulled away from politicians after the insurrection. That money will likely be the true arbiter of power. Trump was able to tap into a ton of money. Was that his genius. He saw it as a brand building act of speculation. And it was. And it worked. And it worked well. Until it didn’t.

Where is all this rage coming from. My mother is objectively killing the game. She is retiring at 65 from a very successful and appreciated small town medical career. She is both financially and physical in great health and she has 6 grown children and 19 grown grandchildren. Her spouse is in great shape- at 65 can run competively and with gusto. Her house was paid for. She’d done her good work. She cold pursue a second act. Write a book. Speak at conferences. But she is mad as hell. And she loves Trump. And she feels Pope Francis is too liberal…She follows an increasingly toxic facebook feed full of secret reports from the President of Ghana and the like with important messages about the international coronavirus conspiracy? Do you know how vehemently our dear lead opposes pediphealia? He does. Bigly.

They get old and biter and cling to their guns or religion or antipathy towards people who aren’t like them.

We’re the homophobes. We’re the racists, sexist, pigs, we’re the you-name-its. We’re the rednecks, white trash, basket of deplorables.

No more bulllets, but I want to understand— I want to understand this divide— this untethering of reality from plotical discourse.

06/03/2021

One of Esme’s classmate’s mother’s was on the television show *Jeopardy* a few years back. After leading through the first round she falter on the daily double and could never recover finishing a disappointing third place. She pop quizzes us the *Daily Double* question that had whacked her off track. I answer as casually as possible, “What is the Swiss Guard.”

Some sort of existential moment when you are on the spot having to answer a question. Your pupils dialate. The skin stretching over your skull tightens. You are really thinking now. You are concentrating. You are digging deep into the unordered synapsis of your mind.

How do we remember things? How do you get better at Trivia? Are people that are good at trivia smart? Trivia masters who can’t build a career in “the real world”… everything is “the real world” isn’t it?

01/2022

***Chicago, Illinois: Winter 2021***

It is February 2021, I’m in the workroom attempting to focus. Just then Esme comes in in need of construction paper, and she needs it immediately! She’s in class on an I-pad in the next room and is now anxiously falling behind because she doesn’t have the right kind of paper. I get her set up and she turns to walk out of the study and walks smack into the door with her forehead. She is now sobbing with big tears, she smacked it so hard. And looks so pathetic as her left eye is still a little swollen from her out of the blue Cellulitis infection that ballooned her left eyelid up to cartoonish, alien proportions all without causing her any more discomfort than not being able to open her left eye for a good part of the day.

It’s getting so much better now-- after going to the doctors and starting on antibiotics from CVS that the pharmacist had whipped up in a small plastic bottle from a powder that he’d added some water to-- “Keep it refrigerated,” he’d said after coming back from the back room where he’d been almost shouting at a co-worker, potentially someone he was charged with managing, he had been yelling about NOT having said anything about another co-worker’s physical appearance and that he did NOT appreciate people saying he said things that he had NOT said. His co-worker did not give any ground though, and testily replied that she’d heard what she’d heard. The people in the line forming at the pharmacy counter had shifted leg to leg and exchanged eyebrow raises as the contentious conversation suddenly ended and the pharmacist had appeared at the counter with a gracious but tired expression on his face. And then mixed the medicine and told us to keep it in the fridge.

Esme has stopped crying and taken her construction paper back to her virtual classroom at the kitchen table. Now betsy comes into the workroom and asks for word ideas for a birthday greeting for a friend’s 40th-- *Enthusiastic, Contagious, Charismatic, music maker, music appreciator, seed crystal, catalyst, mensch.* Helena brings up the rear eager to contribute. “Two!” she says. “Two!” And just like that “Two!” takes over for “One!” as her next go to catch phrase.

***Nashville, Tennessee: End of 2020, Beginning of 2021***

Train cars on tracks, brown beyond the rows of white headstones in the Nashville National Cemetery where the Wilburn Brothers-- Teddy and Virgil-- are both buried and where some say you can sometimes hear “Brown Eyes Sparkling” being whistled low and airy on humid summer nights.

Painted on clouds. Swallows like black leaves clung to trees. A puddle in the swing rut in the morning after the rain. Fading auburn light like the hues of a desiccated peach. Church steeple through winter thinned trees. 17 busy turkeys free ranging willy-nilly across the surveyor’s good work

The *Cocoa Light Tour*- wee and away we go! All around Inglewood and assorted environs. Thanks to Golden tickets and whizzing away over undulating roads, The illuminated Craftsmen with their trees flush against glass front doors-- a pine come up the walkway to greet you, candy cane and cocoa extended, big icy bear hug on offer. Sequenced lights, rolling sheets of color , Pink Flamingos under dayglo palms. Igor, Snoopy, the Grinch, Santa, Jesus, Wisemen, Shepherds, Mary, Joseph, Tweety, the Abominable Snowman, Jack the Pumpkin King, Angels, dripping icicle lights, simple white lights, black lights, all red lights hinting at a holiday punch deeply dyed and spiked with red rum.

But no snow, though found later upon returning to Chicago after grey Louisville and Breana Taylor’s ghost and lifelessness in Old Town with the Cardinals all scattered and the wobbly stadium strikingly dumb.

Wednesday night at the Richtergarten. *I do think you are Freaky and I do like you a lot.* Double Banh-mi. The reassuring smell in the Asian grocery store that all Asian grocery stores have that I used to find kind of nauseating and foreign, but now sort of relish, yet another proof that the world is large and various.

Music, together, so wonderful! Snuck in between fits and messes and other demands on our minds. And but yet still-- The cello! The tenor guitar! The violin! The classical guitar-- all together, unpracticed, distracted, but suddenly making good sounds, strings vibrating round the living room, before the hearth, before the girls pass out in beds and we loll In *Baskets* until sleep. All of us tired like overwrought iron.

Wounded animals making remarkable recoveries all! Porch swing and brick and soothing green painted cement. Reading couches. Birds and squirrels. Sudden predatory shadows flashing over the road as we drive. Birdsong. Swallow mob action. The church spire through the skeleton bones of the empty leaf homes. Turkeys rioting through yards. Pampered dogs in baby carriages. Rainbow flags in a red state. News reports of an RV broadcasting *Downtown* just before it explodes. And just days before the storming of the capital.

Confetti in the living room and a tossed Trump mug into the abandoned yard nextdoor. A floor to stretch on, a raging hearth to warm beside. 70 degree weather received like a gift. Travel altering exposure to warmth from above. Once again we turn the corner and begin another trek around the sun.

All the best,

**Current**