09/11/2021

20 year anniversary of 9/11…

Time of crisis-- pandemic, civil unrest, economic uncertainty, joblessness, small children, casual culturally tolerated addictions.

You parents. Same as they ever wre. Kind. Your father rambling. He had a stroke. Over came it. Tracy strange and in Texas. Mary-- same negativity, pretty face, mother belly weight signing her age.

An Olympic marathon trial in Atlanta. A Democratic Primary in South Carolina. Neighborhood liquor stores without Lindeman’s Lambic, arriving at a party empty handed, empty headed. Coming straight from the 1st every Razny Jewelers Leap Year Sales Extravagana. The old jewerly family had dug out every dusty trinket and cognac coloured diamond from their vaults and charged us with taking a break from our regularly scheduled commitments of representing two exclusive luxury watch brands to sling trinkets and do our best Department store Jewerly counter dog-and-pony show. Our downtown location being a tree story affair with a back and front stairs and an interminably slow elevator. By the time I had arrived at your party I was beat-- having hustled up and down the stairs all day, playing jewelry man-- claning diamonds upstairs in the watch servicing lab where the ramshackle looking custom steam machine was. My mouth and my ears competing

The work is whatever. Taken in itself, occasionally neutral, but stretching out into the future. Melding into my sense of identity. Shaping it. Demanding that I bow and break beneath its self-shaping weight.

06/14/2021

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

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

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

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

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

I also now realize that our children are in essence sociopaths that we have been charged with by fate to reform as penance for our own past, if not present, sociopathic behavior. Which is certainly not to say don’t have children, but just, you know, brace yourself… for love.

Best,

So here is the letter I meant to send to you on the event of your 40th birthday. I didn’t make it.

It has been a hard year since the leap year sale.

Joe Biden’s cleaned up in South Carolina. Olympic Marathon qualifier. Razny Jewelers 1st ever Leap Year Sale. This represented a sort of nadir in my retail sales experience. Having mostly worked for well-branded and organized product lines I had been saved some of the chaos and grubbiness of retail (which I was able to attack with an enthusiastic get her down mentality a few years ago when it fell on me to make sure that the JEAN and Sweater closet at the Burberry Flagship store stayed accessible. Gems, random gems, ugly ones, ones with whose values were super subjective. I had a price tag, but I was also approved to offer up to 50% of on some of this stuff. Obviously begging the question of its actual worth and what I could talk someone into paying for it. Gems. Mike Todd. Elizabeth Taylor. Grave robbers. Small time mob guys.

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.

**07/30/2014**

And so summer rounds the corner into August.  Three floors up I hear the grind of street dis/construction.  The light of the sun is on the full green leaves outside the front room window and the ambient light is in the room, on the floor.  Damien Jurado doing his winningest Neil Young is on the radio (sourse: Grooveshark).We are moved again moved.  From Huron/Wood where you knew me to Augusta/Damen for a six month hiatus and now to Schubert/Western where we can imagine years spent tucked in behind X-sport Fitness’s parking garage with 90/94 close enough to keep us companion at nights.

Here we have light.  Light and closets.  A bathroom the size of a Manhattan sitting room.  The vintage of the building, the barn like qualities of the back walkup, and the nearly farflungness of its locale triangulate the rent just right (but shhhhh, we are nowhere, and yet close to everything.)

betsy’s belly grows, betsy’s belly grows and grows and our days are made by flutters.  Let’s call it the majesty of the mundane.  I look around and all these rambling people have been flutters too at one time or another.  Super common, and yet here we are with our own personal miracle.  It does feel good doesn’t it.

You desire to unwire is absolutely understandable.  I continue to struggle with how to be with the black hole attraction of digital dimension ever present in my pocket.  My latest ploy is “Hoy”.  Everyday on my wayhome commute I grab a Spanish language newspaper from a streetside stash.  I run my eyes over the words and purse my lips trying to channel a Latin panache.  My Spanish is still ridiculously limited, but something about the print and the jangling exchange between the content and my brain sends me traveling.  I am Hemingway at a Pamplona cafe, I am myself expat-ing for a month in Xela, Guatemala.  I am traveling.

Here is a short poem about career:  Work you jerk, you fucking selfish jerk. Fuck you.

Actually since my G(eneral)M(anager) and D(istrict)M(anager) both resigned within a day of each other, it hasn’t been too bad.  There has been some stress associated with preparing for the Level 2 B(asic)P(roduct)K(nowledge) test since as the B(outique)T(rainer)it is on me to coordinate with the R(egional)T(rainer) to get every buddy up to snuff on such throbbingly important subjects as the color of a Rattrapante calibre’s column wheel and the year in which OMEGA produced the world’s very first Chronometer certified automatic Chronograph.  The answers are blue and 1973 if you did not know already.  This preparation culminates in a call out of the blue from the RT who then administers the 40-45 minute test orally.  This Kafaesque inquisition is a stress placed upon the good staff of the Chicago OMEGA boutique in addition to pushing to meet at least 80% of our P(ersonal)G(oal), beaing L(ast)Y(ear) as a boutique and achieving our B(outique)P(lan)- a number apparantly pulled from the air by an aged and greedy Swiss Watchmaker who has spent too many years in proximity to powerful synthetic adhesives.  As I mentioned though with the departure of the GM and DM things have definitely improved as we are freer to do our real job (ride the macroeconomic trends of the moneyed elite) freed (mostly) from the passive/aggressive crackerjack management techniques of our pervious superiors.

Relatively content I am currently only half-heartedly looking for other work.

My Interview this past week was with New York Jewelers.  There is a lot to say about NYJ.  Where to start... they are located on Wabash between Washington and Madison on the infamous Chicago strip know as Jewelers row.  The EL creaks and screaches street side right above them.  They are neighbors with the Twisted Kilt.  Four brothers run the joint which in addition to offering a wide selection of timepieces is also the largest wholesaler of diamonds in the midwest, as well (at least according to what I learned during the interviewing process) one of the main places where the Chicagoland Roma come to pawn their jewels.  The interview process involved a carosel of conversations with Jim and Sam and Steve and Phil and Mike all of whom I only have a tenuous understanding of their position at the store.  Jim was super tired, Sam told me about getting his business degree despite drinking and smoking his brains out and then goading me into using the words “Fuck” and “Shit” (I think it was a sort of test to see if I could hang in a pawn shop cum largest midwestern diamond distributor environment). Steve told me about the gypsies, Phil and I talked about the UP and Mike gave me the history of the store and a general outline of how it runs.

Every part of me except the wannabe writer (who is like there is certainly a novel or at the very least a sitcom in this experience) says that this is not a good place for me to work... that said it is also a Salary position... when in retail could be pretty nice (depending of course on what that magic number is).  The other hook is that they claim they get busloads of Chinese watch shoppers dropped off at their door.  I think the magic number they give will support of belie the veracity of that statement.

The one dark cloud over this week has been losing one of our cats.  In the midst of my Mike and Steve and Phil carosel I got a text from betsy and in this whirling moment where I was late for work trying to wrap up this nutty interview process and get back to my wife in crisis I found out that Kasimir had intestinal blockage, which was most likely cancer, as well as second stage kidney failure. With that revelation all the symptoms which we had been desperately ascribing to the stress of our most recent move and the notorious finiky palate of Siamese cats made since (Kaz had been losing weight for weeks, not eating, and drinking tons of water).  During his decline we had been taking him to a Vet who did tests, gave us bills, and the reassurance that our cat was totally fine and just stressed out.  Kaz at 5 lbs, down from his full 10 lbs. weight seemed way more than stressed and so betsy took him to a cat specialist to get a second opinion.

Facing the choice of essential hospice car, aggressive surgery and chemo, or saying goodbye that day.  We made the choice to sad goodbye.

We waited for the vet in the room who was in surgery.  We waited with out cat on our laps, burying his head into our arms, so skinny and weak and calm.  At one point he rested his head on betsy’s belly.  He was dying, the Peach was growing to live.  I thought of my sister Beth and the twins she lost in the 35th week of pregnancy.  A lost that at the time had been painful to me too, but also very abstract since I had been in China during the whole of her pregnancy and had not had very close contact with her through out.  And I myself had not been an expectant parent with an expectant wife.  And I had not experienced the connection you can have to growth and flutters.  The lose of Kaz pulled in a lot of different loses in my life.  Pulled them together close and they pulsated with pain and longing and somberness.

The next day there was a post on facebook by Sarah (Doyle) about the death of her cat, Oscar, I vaguely remember this cat.  I wasn’t really into cats when I would have met him, but there he was on facebook in pictures with Sarah, and Heidi.  How old was this cat.  This cat loved by Sarah, loved by Heidi.  Oh, Kaz, such a gentle easy going cat.  The cat I could throw over my shoulders like a lamb.  The cat who would wear a leash and go for walks in the park with betsy.  The cat that always seemed way older than his years, especially when confronted with our younger cat Hugo who just wanted to play and who would tackle Kaz Calvin and Hobbs style and who could always best Kaz unless Kaz was feeling a little peppier and then would put this incredible hex on Hugo by staring at his and raising one paw which would slowly, slowly, intensely send Hugo, who outweighed Kaz by at least 6 pounds.  And my sister, my sister with her heart shaped uterus which has made all of her pregnancies tenuous and tense.  Her three girls now that should have been five.

2/25/2021

We all had the same piano teacher. Mrs. Marfet, pug faced, scrappy, chain smoking, brusque, shuffling, depression era clapboard at the edge of town. Lake view out past the low wetland flood plain at the edge of the bay.

We all pitched in once to white wash her house. She seemed to appreciate this. Mrs. Nutkins led the charge as they were also the youth leaders. Wednesday nights, trips, youth rallies, kind, patient, eye-rolling disapproval. Intelligent, hardworking, sober-minded middle-class folks who also loved Rush Limbaugh and had zero patience for liberals and people that didn’t get how into Jesus they were. When I talk to Curt he mentions very little about his faith except that theya re attending a massive mega church in the Detroit area— they had left the Covenant Church under strange circumstances, following a man name Jonathon and his large family, after Jonathon apparently tried to take control of the church, despite having zero training in the denomination and maybe not even a legit divinity degree. The church and the denomination took a hard pass on this populist alternative, so the Nutkins left. Had my parents left already—I don’t think they had… My parents ultimately left the chuch a few years later inspired by a 12 disc DVD collection of some former Evangelical Pastor (Catholic Convert)lays out his take on Pope John Paul the 2nd’s thoughts on sex.

A celibate man rhapsodizing in archaic idiom about copulation seems like the least likely lube to smooth my way from one great religion to another, but, you know, different strokes for different folks.

Seeing the Nutkins was confirming that like all of us they ultimately have had zero fixed plan and have just basically, like all of us, just rolling with the punches—employment situations, medical issues, grandkids, charismatic religious personalities, bombastic political demagogues, mega churches that serve decent espresso, mother-in-laws who move slower and slower and who appreciate you more and more as they begin to depend on you like family for the first time.

Our strength makes us available, our weakness pulls us together.

04/10/2021

Brenda Nutkins.. the Nutkins on Leap Year day, I’d come from the big sale, running up and down the stairs, showing watches, seeling diamond studs. Up and down the stwaris to steam them and box them up and ring them up and watch the door and be ready for the clients and be excited about another day to sell, sell, sell. Brenda’s birthday, youth leaders, rock and roll is from the devil, tried to buy a lambi, stopped at two places no one had it.

Evanescent Raspberries-- summer and piquant green fruit kiss upon you palatte.

A few days later attend a concert in Pilsen. Thalia Hall emptying out into the sulphor street light on 18th, the tour van parked out front, people spilling on to the corner to linger, to spread out, to call Ubers, say good-bye, make next plans, smoke a cigarette, take a picture, feel the mildness of the early March evening the Crimson tide rising from just off stage where we’d seen Eleanor Friedburger do her best Mick Jagger sing and strut, jazzing up some of Destroyers more sanquine numbers, you know the ones that sounds like they should be sung by an aging diva in a ballroom somewhere high up with city lights a glow below. Some sort of sentimental jazzy stab at journalism. A wide eyed assessment of my own blindness.