Branding vs. Culture sometimes parallel, often not. What’s the brand? What’s the culture?

Beowolf, nearly lost to time before it was elevated to the very heart of the English canon. All the scripture references are Old Testement. So precarious. All the hands and hearts and minds and happenstance to ensure that those words nearly consume by tongues of fire have endured through time and curriculums and on book shelfs where they have informed, or mocked, or projected certain messages about education or ambition or partental concern.

It really comes back to culture. The more intentional the culture is the less authentic. It takes two to tango. You have all of these things. These possibilities. These disparate interests and preferences and we have to take them into account as we create and foster our families culture.

I am not an evangelist, but I can say with pride and bubbling joy that my family’s culture is my most rewarding, delight inspiring, natural, nourishing, centering, settling, challenging, convicting mirror of my reality. I am grateful for it. I am humbled by it. It is why I get up every morning.

There are a lot of similaries between apps and cultures.

In object oriented programmed you describe Objects that represent types that possess certain abilities and behaviors, that can store information (the some total of all the information they contain determines their state), their state determines how they interact with and engage the other objects in the system. It is a system of messages and behaviors.

Obviously, there are a lot of different places to collect messages and behavior. I have appreciated the added check on this. The added self-consciousness that parenting brings to these two elements. I think at times I have responded maturely and have worked hard to improve my messages and behavior or at least be mindful of them. To at least try to make an attempt to think about my intentions for saying things or doing things and really trying to be honest with myself about how these messages and behaviors will be interpreted by others. I have tried to give my INTERFACES some attention. What are my interfaces (means of communication, topics, the medium is the message)? Which ones do I like, need? Are certain interfaces better for engaging with certain people and certain topics than others? Is my opting out of most social media a social capitulation, an act of self-preservation, a good-faith effort to marshal as much free time as possible to enter into a sustainable, mature, sustainable vocational practice aka a career.

Abroad. Never thought about money. Thought very little about family. Politics (Dems, Reps), etc. It truly did give me a sense of freedom and anonymity and aloneness. It was scary and depressing. I responded to it in a variety of ways, so of which I am proud of, so of which I have tried to learn from and move past. This settling. This calming understanding of what your personal and professional responsibilities are.

I have been in an extended process of trying to unwind all of this and get to the bottom of it. I think I used to think of life as this act of ascension, now I am conceiving of it more as this act of settling. This circumspect act of grounding, camp making, provision collecting, curiosity pursuing, cultivating, growing, supporting, observing, warming, encouraging, romancing, partaking, learning and learning on and on like the forever child you are.

And I state this not as a wholesale rejection of my communities culture and my city’s culture and my extended family’s culture, but all …

One thing that has gutted my certainty about this word is my lack of trust of my parents. What a shitty realization. I really don’t think they have the ability to hear me anymore. Understanding me as a liberal non-Catholic I get the feeling that they project all sorts of ideas about what I think about them on to me. What I think about their values or their lifestyle? Can I say with certainty and openness and vulnerability that I accept their religious and political beliefs as being good and proof of our function system. And yet, I just know to my mother, framing it that way totally diminishes the message for her. Feels like a capitulation. Or maybe not. During this year as I have been writing and thinking about these things. Processing them, trying to figure out how they can be integrated int our culture, how they can the challenges and even paradoxes co-exist with our healthy, flourishing family culture. How do you deal with otherness.

Politics excels at leveraging otherness. I certainly fall into this. I mean strip any particularly moral argument I want to make about the liberal platform, I think I could make a pretty solid political career being against the other side. And that is easier isn’t it? Being against someone is way easier than trying to connect with them and bring them on to your side. It is easy to bully. It is easy to fuck with people- because we are bored, or insecure, or want to exert of power or muscular personality.

Having never had a personality that particularly craves being the center of attention, there have been aspects of fatherhood that have been super therapeutic, cathartic, maturing, milestone making, aspects that have helped me take a few more steps towards that concretely definitely, but vaguely achieved milestone of “getting over one’s self”.

Those beautiful nourishing aspects of family when messages and behaviors cease being conscious and simply become culture.

Kindness to people. Kindness in political messaging.

My family is now lives in a city and does not attend a church. Obviously, this has led to some distance with my family both physically, as they mostly reside in Michigan and ideologically as they have been following the nativist drift of their change ruing compatriots. My father within the context of complaining about college sports reference the film *The Way We Were* as a touchstone on how he feels about things. Then he described how he went to a Corvette museum that had a bunch really neat stuff from the past like player pianos and gramophones, and a machine that could play a violin. This is the sort of change nostalgia seekers enjoy. Why did change used to be so quaint and unaggressive? See, back in the day change was gentler. It made more sense. It was more necessary. But something has changed.

How do you really LOVE people without just TOLERATING them or staying open and close and vulnerable without getting roughed up by a family member/friend who hasn’t signed on to the same rules of engagement.

Can we agree on the rules of engagement? How can we build a safe, secure, flexibly able to change and evolve and develop interface(s). Obviously Jan. 6th is problematic.

September 3rd, 2020

Confronting the objective.

Confronting the subjective.

Confronting the Nationally objective, the Internationally objective, the Personally Objective.

All of this complexity underscores my appreciate for kindness.

Girl dad— parent, husband, neighbor, employee, servant, friend. All of this complexity, other than how much it informs my social flexibility and panache (that quote from Emerson about manners leading to pure energy)

Japan, Lixil, Piscataway, BainCapital, Mitt Romney, Booed by Republicans, George Bush, John McCain… losers… Rush Limbaugh, Tucker Carlson, Bill O’Reilly, Paul Ryan making an address at the Ronald Reagan library in blank-blank, CA—warning the country about the dangers of hitching the Republican Party to the cult of one man. The party is suddenly totally, thoroughly purged. That is pretty wild and pretty unnerving and either creates new splinters and surprising new coalitions, or we simply have a very entrenched self-wounded opposition. Their rancor and complaint will be the horrific natural resource that will fuel the political achievements yet to come.

Heuristic (hyoo’ristik) enabling a person to discover or learn something for themselves.

Nathan, that you for teaching. Thank you for finding your place. You and your family are an inspiration. Goodness. Solidness. Resonableness. The grounded world of the 21st ventury that makes sense to me. Not the stirred pot political and apocolytic rage stage that my father has imagined into existence. We can’t raise kids alone, we need help! Good people with energy and ideas and kindness and support. When I taught I walked a line between carry a lot- which was stressful and pulled a lot of energy from me in terms of focus and empathy and classroom management and planning. Exhasuting if you are doing it right, right? But at the same time keeping a reserve back. FKeeping something for myself, a buffer to keep the struggles of the lcass in perspective. It is all very involved and personal, but you just can’t take anything too personal. There are so many other influences and factors affecting any given interaction and outcome. You can judege your own effort. You can judge your read of the situation, but that is all. You have to work with the cards that you are dealt. It certainly helps to have a sympathetic dealer. Preferably one that is not put off by the way you look or your sex or whatever.

You need that reserve! You’ve got to have it and got to keep it. Go into this whole hearted, but keep that perspective. Keep that Gestalt in mind. Be clear about your intentions. For example I am writing to ground myself and ground others in a way. That would be the thing. If I can find a way to ground myself through writing, perhaps I can be a ground for others. Ground yourself and get ready for the lightening. We journey out and journey in…

How do you saw things to people without insulting their intelligence? Without being too pedantic? Without rambling? Boring? Losing interest. Do you have a teaching persona? I certainly had a sales persona, or if nota persona a fixed cypher through which to send all messages through. Will this move the proess forward to take it back? Where to? My intention was clearly defined. In teaching my intention was clearly defined. Engage the students for set amount of time. Its nice to be able to plan ahead for those things. Often when I interact with other people, I have no idea what my attention is. I should be paying attention though. That is my intention. Paying attention. And yes, of course, finding morsals to feed my art- words, phrases, images, sounds, colors, impressions, jokes. My attention is freed up to focus on these things when I have all of my ducks in a row.

Quote from Emerson about Conservatives and democrats.

“The two parties which divide the state, the party of Conservatism and that of Innovation, are very old, and have disputed the possession of the world ever since it was made. This quarrel is the subject of civil history. The conservative party established the reverend hierarchies and monarchies of the most ancient world. The battle of patrician and plebeian, of parent state and colony, of old usage and accommodation to new facts, of the rich and the poor, reappears in all countries and times. The war rages not only in battle-fields, in national councils, and ecclesiastical synods, but agitates every man's bosom with opposing advantages every hour. On rolls the old world meantime, and now one, now the other gets the day, and still the fight renews itself as if for the first time, under new names and hot personalities.”

* Ralph Waldo Emerson December 9, 1841

Innovation

Radical

But not to sound defeatist. Not to sound dismissive. Why is that as we age we have to more and more hold to opposite meanings in our mind and hold them both true. We are dealing with realities- our instance of which can end abruptly. An end that will affect other beings, but will not in and of itself have a systematic ripple. Trumps death would. That is significant. That probably really feeds his sense of self- worth and importance. How do you get to that point and keep your decision making clear. Look at me- I have zero position in this world and my decision making is arch-as-hell, personal, biased, self-centered, obfuscating, winding, I too am slave to a desperate incomplete animal who drives me to the end of the earth in search of

Thank you for reminding me that I should be reading. Reading has really become a sore spot the last few years. I don’t think I have found my parent equilibrium. Is that a thing? Do you ever stop from feeling sort of shattered and diminished? Broken and scarred. Scared and stuttering. But I need it! I need input. With my tech study, I think I have been putting such mental effort into it during the day that in the evenings I feel completely wiped out. What am I looking for? What are people out for? Let’s just have a real good time. We need that input. I looked up Phylys Shlafly. I really need to ask my mom about her. I am super curious. My mom is such a strange case to me. High School graduate 1974, was one of the first female cross county runners in the state of Michigan as title IX had just passed in ?????. She goes on to be a physician and mother of six (grandmother of 19) and but yet still is a total Phlys Shlafly… I want to read more about her, if for no other reason than to understand my ol’ M.O.M just a little bit more.

She brain washed my dad years ago.

1974- abortion… Chinese abortions… when do most abortions occur? How many of those abortions would likely be (statistically) miscarriages.

What have you been watching- news(BBC,DW,FOX,NPR, PBS, CBS, NBC, ABC, Studio Ghibli films, lots of basketball (NBA), Chinese drama called the “Bad Kids” in which the first scene of the first episode involves a ‘good’ Chinese boy pushing his parents off a cliff. Yikes!

Nathan you seemed so solid and stead and honest and real and engaged and talented and unpretentious and earnest. Not looking to impress anyone, but just to pursue interests, laugh, be entertained, hear mustic!

And maybe its just art, you, know something sacred, or maybe it’s just walking, which is pretty mundane, but also pretty goddamned sacred. I love walking. I have been walking less these days. I have been writing more, because I need to, because I do not the choice to not write and still live a happy, contented life. My intuition knew what I couldn’t quite dream, that I needed all this walking to get to where I need to be.

*The Brother’s Karamazov*, *The Brother’s K*, the different between Religion and Church.

I think you guys have obviously wrestled with these questions? How do you accept other people’s beliefs. How can you rail at ideology in the most aggressive and damning and dehumanizing tone, but then turn around to claim that you have loving your neighbor at junction one in your interactive process.

And yes, it all comes down to us all being Hippocrates. I am not trying to be right here. I am not even trying to win or be the best, or get one up or score points, or brandish my intellectual acumen, or impress with my learned and sensitive analysis.

*The Brother’s K*, *The Brother’s Karamazov*, *Lost in the Cosmos*, *The Future of Nostalgia*, *Under the Sign of Saturn*, *The Rings of Saturn*, *Journey to the East*, *Journey to the West*

The Hill We Climb

When day comes we ask ourselves,  
where can we find light in this never-ending shade?  
The loss we carry,  
a sea we must wade.  
We've braved the belly of the beast,  
We've learned that quiet isn't always peace,  
and the norms and notions  
of what just is  
isn't always just-ice.  
And yet the dawn is ours  
before we knew it.  
Somehow we do it.  
Somehow we've weathered and witnessed  
a nation that isn't broken,  
but simply unfinished.  
We the successors of a country and a time  
where a skinny Black girl  
descended from slaves and raised by a single mother  
can dream of becoming president  
only to find herself reciting for one.  
And yes we are far from polished.  
Far from pristine.  
But that doesn't mean we are  
striving to form a union that is perfect.  
We are striving to forge a union with purpose,  
to compose a country committed to all cultures, colors, characters and  
conditions of man.  
And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us,  
but what stands before us.  
We close the divide because we know, to put our future first,  
we must first put our differences aside.  
We lay down our arms  
so we can reach out our arms  
to one another.  
We seek harm to none and harmony for all.  
Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true,  
that even as we grieved, we grew,  
that even as we hurt, we hoped,  
that even as we tired, we tried,  
that we'll forever be tied together, victorious.  
Not because we will never again know defeat,  
but because we will never again sow division.  
Scripture tells us to envision  
that everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree  
and no one shall make them afraid.  
If we're to live up to our own time,  
then victory won't lie in the blade.  
But in all the bridges we've made,  
that is the promise to glade,  
the hill we climb.  
If only we dare.  
It's because being American is more than a pride we inherit,  
it's the past we step into  
and how we repair it.  
We've seen a force that would shatter our nation  
rather than share it.  
Would destroy our country if it meant delaying democracy.  
And this effort very nearly succeeded.  
But while democracy can be periodically delayed,  
it can never be permanently defeated.  
In this truth,  
in this faith we trust.  
For while we have our eyes on the future,  
history has its eyes on us.  
This is the era of just redemption  
we feared at its inception.  
We did not feel prepared to be the heirs  
of such a terrifying hour  
but within it we found the power  
to author a new chapter.  
To offer hope and laughter to ourselves.  
So while once we asked,  
how could we possibly prevail over catastrophe?  
Now we assert,  
How could catastrophe possibly prevail over us?  
We will not march back to what was,  
but move to what shall be.  
A country that is bruised but whole,  
benevolent but bold,  
fierce and free.  
We will not be turned around  
or interrupted by intimidation,  
because we know our inaction and inertia  
will be the inheritance of the next generation.  
Our blunders become their burdens.  
But one thing is certain,  
If we merge mercy with might,  
and might with right,  
then love becomes our legacy,  
and change our children's birthright.  
So let us leave behind a country  
better than the one we were left with.  
Every breath from my bronze-pounded chest,  
we will raise this wounded world into a wondrous one.  
We will rise from the gold-limbed hills of the west.  
We will rise from the windswept northeast,  
where our forefathers first realized revolution.  
We will rise from the lake-rimmed cities of the midwestern states.  
We will rise from the sunbaked south.  
We will rebuild, reconcile and recover.  
And every known nook of our nation and  
every corner called our country,  
our people diverse and beautiful will emerge,  
battered and beautiful.  
When day comes we step out of the shade,  
aflame and unafraid,  
the new dawn blooms as we free it.  
For there is always light,  
if only we're brave enough to see it.  
If only we're brave enough to be it.

Finding your purchase. Finding your line. Finding your angle. Finding your way into a sale. One thing I did particularly enjoy about sales is that the roles are clearly defined. Sometimes the definitions of those roles bite, but the clarity is comforting and makes communication smooth, outcome focused. Frankly, objective and likely with a clearly demarcated next step. All very efficient. Not a lot of room to wonder— what is my role here? This is helpful to my ego. Because a lot of my most embarrassing “egocentric” social annoyances (annoying myself, possibly other people) comes out of this urge to fill space, be exciting, put people at ease, paper over other people’s awkwardness or malaprops. I can remember being a tween and really trying to get over not being embarrassed for my day. He is kind of goofy socially. He is on the shorter side and his talent and charisma is all tied up in action. He is a terrible public speaker and often casually offensive. Proud of being a politically conservative Catholic who feels the need to causually bring up the hoax of climate change just about every time we are around each other, like some strange melody that floats up into his head and he feels compelled to whistle out into the wind. Is it me? Does my perceived liberalness pull these hackneyed strands of ideological cant from him, weaving them into the tone and fabric of his triumphant, but ultimately patchwork and ramshackle worldview. How do you dismantle the blockades? How do you deconstruct the defenses.

As long as you are not obsessed with it. I have an active analytic imagination. I want o run something down and develop it even before I have collected all the information that was available to me. There is typically never a time that a paragraph of my information is worth more than an open ended question.

It is nice to be here with you guys. Chatting. Now I want to be clear. There is no expectation of reciprocality here. Please not that I have been working on my ability to get a letter of this length written for literally decades. I have over time tried to make writing a culture thing for me. Social media has not been good for my writing. Too much pressure. Too scattered and variable of an audience.

But again, what is the intention? Bliss? A lighter load? Joy? Excitement? Humor? Yes, it is all of these things, and sometimes it can be those things on purpose and sometimes it can be those things on accident.

But what about these other things that are so knotted up and conflicted and warped and ambiguous and multifaceted.

A lot of my political kvetching has turned into bemoaning the two party system. It is kind of an impotent moan as it is not backed by an overwhelming conviction that a multi-party system would solve all our problems. Political systems all seem to excel at solving some problems and perpetuating others (inequality- opportunity, justice, health, safety). I does seem helpful to hot partisans on all of our sides that splitting the universe into two sides, while analytically attractive and quite clean and convenient, it is ultimately a pretty blunt abstraction to condense our political state FATE vote into a simple “A” or “B”. The convenience of this is wonderful. And I do feel, despite feeling like a little bit of a copout, if I don’t have the wherewithal to get into it on line or in person with my fellow citizen, ultimately, to keep up my end of the bargain, I just have to vote. I don’t have to write a letter to the editor or a post on Facebook. I don’t even have to call my mom and scream at her that her tone is too aggressive.

My kindness barometer has become more sensitive. Respect. Kindness. Curiosity. Not patronizing, but interested. It is hard to get over yourself. It is hard to get over your “normal”, your “sane”, your “nature”, your “automatic”, your “necessary”.

One thing that catches me up about writing is the need to be either accurate, passionate, or interesting. I would like writing to be a nourishing process. Both for the reader and the writer. Substantial enough that some new ideaas or new perspectives or new framings or phrasings arise from a meandered into place. I enjoy meandering into places slyly that I perhaps could not enter directly.

Books are an interface for literally any topic. They give us words that we can use to articulate our thoughts. Make new ones. Make jokes. Write instructions. They help us build context for processing new and ever more disparate information.

We have blinders. They keep us safe. They keep us sane. What happens if you try and open up your vision? “Going back to school” seems pretty mundane, but it is not. Brainwashing. Cleansing. Renewing. Expanding. Transforming. Vision. Building vision. How do you build Vision? How do you build Culture? How do you build a culture of vision in your family.

I hope I don’t sound like I know what I am talking about here. I really don’t. I am just talking and thinking and writing. And while I will likely edit this paragraph out, I think it mis important to try and touch on another aspect of writing that I love— how exploratory it is. How it survives on half truths and half former metaphors and hints at insights and connections and parallels and ultimately, even without a footnote on each fact the words conspire together to relay a truth and a half.

“We are a nation of miracles.” This has to be a truth and a half. It either means nothing to you and sounds mawkish and sentimental of callous, out-of-touch, and manipulative. We are hearing different things. “Thank God for great Americans like Tucker Carlson! Emoji!” My father is officially an idiot. And angry. And annoyed and free.

The violence of education. The consumer of time. The consumer of mind. We choose. We submit. We sign up. We get with the program. Efficiency and effectiveness without killing your spirit and becoming robotic and loosing your lust for life, your zest for life. Is this a religious thing? A political thing? A vocational thing? A family thing? An aging thing? A health thing?

All of these considerations? Where do they go?

Not to reveal all of my tricks, but a big part of what has felt like a substantial step forward in my practice of writing is that since September and actually just after we three met up with Phil at the Martyr’s/Mrs.Murphey’s out door patio, begun writing without deadlines. As a non-professional writer I have never had deadlines. That said, if I were inspired to write someone a lead, or lets not even overstate it as INSPIRATION but rather I had an inclination write someone a letter, I would almost instantly fell bad, or defeated or anxious, feeling a rush of certainty that the whole process was going to be a bit arduous and inertia filled and lacking a defacto strategy beyond just banging out an honest, sincere, spelling and grammatically correct text complete with maybe above average content and styling— this is a lot of pressure, and besides that, what makes me such a good write that I feel the need to showcase my talents with a slow, inertia plagued solo performance when I could instantly connect with anybody, anyway.

I have come to the realization that I am not really into instantly connecting, or rather the instanteousness of the social part does not sit well with the way I process things. I remember in college being in the habit of saying that it takes me about 6 months to process things. This came from the realization that growing up and experiencing a lot of new things and milestones and changes, you inevitably take a lot of it in stride, you have to, it’s like a road trip. You are driving and focused on the road. It makes the experience possible, you block out the scenery to some extent, or you block out particular aspects of the scenery and instead try to take it in as a whole— the weather, the visibility, the traffic patterns etc… But then when you arrive at the destination, you suddenly have more wherewithal to reflect on all that ground you covered. All the things you observed, but also all the things that you just blew by without a conscious thought of because you were mostly occupied with trying to keep your vehicle between the ditches.

This year has been a whole lot portaging. Or iron-ass long-hauling. All down highway 41 and back again. Hopefully, my reflecting and processing will catch up at some point.

How do you make good decisions with your anxiety? How do you help other people make good decisions with their anxiety?

Began reading *Lost in the Cosmos* this morning. It is fantastic. Both content-wise and stylistically it strikes me as exactly what I should be reading right now and will definitely add to the conversation I have going with *The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* as well as my New Left readings. Percy is also not hostile to Christianity, nor does he seem completely beholden to it. This idea of claiming language and fostering a culture of curiosity and accuracy with language. Reflecting on our intentions. Reflecting on our relationships. Reflecting on our levels of goals— SOCIETAL, PROFESSIONAL, PERSONAL, RELATIONAL, COMMUNITY…

Humor attempts to mine that which is awkward, wrong, strange, surprising, sudden, repeated, unobvious or obvious.

What is right for my intellectual and artistic development is not necessarily right for my financial security and peace-of-mind.

Take responsibility. Feel the discomfort. Feel the pain and limitations. Feel the tiredness. The distraction. The tension of having to say no two your two-year-old who just wants to be held, or comforted, or she extorts “Daddy, play me! Play me, Daddy!” And I want to be open to you child, but I am trying to expand myself, I am trying to press myself through this play-doh squeezer. Change my particulars. My shape. Find another way to fit in, get by, make-do, maybe even flourish.

I just want a healthy garden. It does not have to be a botanic garden or a hanging garden. The landscaping doesn’t even really have to be all that neat or intricately planned. I just want the fundamentals to be solid— good sun, nourishment, protected, controlled, possessed, able to be shared. A place to invite people into. If its such a good place for me, maybe other people will like it as well. Maybe my work in this garden will help me to understand and appreciate other people’s work. Feel impressed by it, feel respect and love and compassion and tenderness.

My garden and the work I have done in it gives me compassion for my younger self. He had no idea what was coming. He was ill-prepared. He was undisciplined and naïve. He was hopeful and enthusiastic and rambling and the magic of the new had yet to stagnate and solidify into the weight of the new, the threat of the new.

My books began to taunt me. Volumes that I had not picked up in years started to pick fights with me. *You have no fucking idea what I am about. I bet you are never going to read me. You got that book in college 20 years ago, you didn’t read it then, and you don’t read it now, but there it is hanging out on your shelf, proof positive that you are somewhere in that little pea brain of yours still intellectually stuck back a few decades, continually to pile on all the hypothetical prerequisites that you still have to get through before you can claim knowing anything or having even been exposed to a reasonable cross-section of human knowledge*.

Ultimately we know so little. And much of our lynch pin, life facilitating judgement calls or instinctual conclusions, or just big fucking blacked out blindspot in our consciousness, what do we do with all the things that we do not know and that we do not understand.

On a practical level how do you engage an acquaintance in a conversation of their job as a saleperson of complicated derivative investment products without sounding like a no-it-all or a no-nothing. Do you trust yourself to be honest? Do you trust the person you are communicating with to believe and to receive your honest assertion in a receptive, open way?

Why do other people affect my ability to communicate so much. This cypher artist. Lost in the process. Willing to sacrifice intrinsic rightness or confidence boosting party affiliation.

I choose exile. I chose not getting rah-rah about all of it. Or if I do doing so with perspective.

Just because you are passionate about something doesn’t give you the right to be abusive or dismissive of other people who do not agree with you.

We seem to have this system of competition. Of rightness. Or knowledge. Or doing well. Of feeling secure or having good mental health, or being attractive or in shape or having good style or ability, or organization.

My mother radiates her anxieties like a Chernobyl Racoon.

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My garden and the work I have done in it gives me compassion for my younger self. He had no idea what was coming. He was ill-prepared. He was undisciplined and naïve. He was hopeful and enthusiastic and rambling and the magic of the new had yet to stagnate and solidify into the weight of the new, the threat of the new.

My books began to taunt me. Volumes that I had not picked up in years started to pick fights with me. *You have no fucking idea what I am about. I bet you are never going to read me. You got that book in college 20 years ago, you didn’t read it then, and you don’t read it now, but there it is hanging out on your shelf, proof positive that you are somewhere in that little pea brain of yours still intellectually stuck back a few decades, continually to pile on all the hypothetical prerequisites that you still have to get through before you can claim knowing anything or having even been exposed to a reasonable cross-section of human knowledge*.

Ultimately we know so little. And much of our lynch pin, life facilitating judgement calls or instinctual conclusions, or just big fucking blacked out blindspot in our consciousness, what do we do with all the things that we do not know and that we do not understand.

On a practical level how do you engage an acquaintance in a conversation of their job as a saleperson of complicated derivative investment products without sounding like a no-it-all or a no-nothing. Do you trust yourself to be honest? Do you trust the person you are communicating with to believe and to receive your honest assertion in a receptive, open way?

Why do other people affect my ability to communicate so much. This cypher artist. Lost in the process. Willing to sacrifice intrinsic rightness or confidence boosting party affiliation.

I choose exile. I chose not getting rah-rah about all of it. Or if I do doing so with perspective.

Just because you are passionate about something doesn’t give you the right to be abusive or dismissive of other people who do not agree with you.

We seem to have this system of competition. Of rightness. Or knowledge. Or doing well. Of feeling secure or having good mental health, or being attractive or in shape or having good style or ability, or organization.

My mother radiates her anxieties like a Chernobyl Racoon.

When I was working for the Institute of reading development I was taking a lot of notes and transferring a lot of my journals to my notebook and writing a great deal. And feeling very isolated. This was a hard summer. But a good one for me in that it did help me take a step forward with writing. It gave me experience to put in my Drinking regrets or at the very least eye brow raising.

Thinking back to this period of writing, I believe I was still too convinced of my personal ability to create. Now I accept that the act of creation is less about a personal moment of inspiration or genious, so chemically evoked cosmic insight that races out into a formed human artifact— be it commercial or artistic or personal. The goal is to develop a way of life. A way of seeing. A vision for the world and living. An understanding of one’s appetites. What you like. What you need.

I have now arrived at this point where I have more clarity than in the past about what is important to me and what modes of being I need or prefer or that which allow me to flourish.

The interesting thing about this whole process, or one of them is that I have now reached page 11 in the first draft of this letter and in some ways feel like I have said nothing of substance. I always feel like I am losing. Even when I win. Depressed after completing a test that I had just spent a long time preparing for. Where is the relief? Where is the processing? Where is the predictable progression of human emotions and motivations? And if I have such a tenuous grasp on all of this shit after 4 decades what can I possibly share with my children.

You can get a long way with an incomplete system. An imperfect system. A controversial system. The you hit middle age and you’ve done a few things. You’ve been an employ, maybe you have managed people, certainly you have had some run-ins with bureaucracy and such, maybe you have even been tasked with implementing a system, maintaining it, getting other people on board with it. Trying to get them to use it correctly, engage with it correctly, following both the letter and the spirit of the law. Respecting the system, despite its flaws. Believing that it is way more appealing to try and reform it than completely throw it out. You are invested. You are comfortable or you really want to be comfortable and you really need to get at least a little bit more comfortable, settled, focused, clear. Open up some wherewithal for enjoying it and moving ahead with a more settled, optimistic, resilient, magnanimous mindset and mode of being.

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 interestinly 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 embarraseed, 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.

02/06/2021

Seeking state of not feeling conflicted.

Seeking state of not feeling hurried.

Seeking state of not feeling worried.

Time spent should be time spent well.

Maintain infrastructure of support: financial, emotional…

How to prioritize needs?

How to prioritize wants?

Balancing the ideological position (approach) I am concocting with the potentially explosive / combustible mundane necessities of wrangling and raising and enjoying and celebrating a 1 year old and a 5 year old and a 40 year old in close quarters with much uncertainty ahead.

In order to get a better grip on his spindle he decided he would need to unravel almost completely. It would take some time. It might be messy, but it would be worth it wouldn’t it, wouldn’t it be worth it. Ultimately, he decided that it might be worth it and went ahead with the unwinding. He had some help along the way. Tarot cards. The Ides of March. A pandemic. A U-Haul truck driven through his workplace. The Tarot cards telling him repeatedly to stop drinking. A self-inflicted injury to his Achillies Heel contributed majorly to by his drinking. The IDES (Illinois Department of Employment Servies).

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?”

When I saw you back in September I was just barely keeping it together—this vulnerable state was not the end though. It was the beginning, the darkness—a feeling of exhaustion, fragmentedness, restless and frozen all at the same moment. This was not a purgatory, purgatory had been the last 8 years—a purgatory that was manageable because I had to expel so much effort just managing it and working and burying aspects of my personality and my ambitions and my beliefs and values. Lacking the wherewithal to establish a full articulated systematic standard—I was left to the dynamic of having my position/ belief worldview simply defined against my families—the worldview that I had been raised in and that had seemingly grown increasingly conservative over the years as my own sense of the multiplicity and diversity of the world had left me less in need of a solidified American orthodoxy—an easy narrative—pilgrims, religious freedom, pursuit of happiness, military success, manifest destiny, Heaven’s Mandate never ever leaving us. This Dynasty is now 245 odd years old. Younger than the Tang, Ming, and Qing, but older than the Yuan.

I hear the dog whistle so clearly now.

The fact that my “liberal leanings” have pitted me against white nationalists felt about right to me. My brother wants to know my heart. Purity test? Always looking for other believers. Like some fucking insecure out-of-town mason.

Yes, it is incumbent upon all of us to figure it out.

Yield to conversations.

Yield to multiplicity.

Yield to ambiguity.

My mother had not been supportive. What does that mean? Yield: Right of Way

Without the depth of conviction to turn my values into a rambunctious political project. And yet somehow these times have done that. I am being pushed into repeatedly declaring my unbelief. Having much of my interaction with the matriarch of our family be about theological questions that I refuse to engage in. My inability or unwillingness to engage in these forms of communication, these symbolic exchanges. If I am bold enough to question the intent of the symbolic exchange, simply trying to give you courtesy of honestly telling you how you made me feel when you wrote than to me and how I sense that there was some kind of hook in it. And there was and you confirmed it when we spoke on the phone? “What about water, Aaron? I just thought? You were really excited about that and what ever happened with water?” And so there it was. That it is what I sensed and that is what I was responding to. And maybe that’s why it being attached to a backhanded evangelistic stab it did feel tender. It felt tender in its implication that I do not have a spiritual life. That I am fully cut off from spiritual guidance and am simply wandering in darkness with Tech simply being my latest folly that I pursue in my attempt to tread water above the depth and despair of the void below. And maybe you are right, but does your insinuation also not have the logical conclusion that you wish me to fail. You wish be to be fully humbled and brought low so that I am left without a choice but to through my cares upon the feet of Jesus and embrace the Catholic Church as my once and future home as I prepare for eternity with the wonderous garden of children that God has bestowed upon our family here on this very earth.

I deeply, deeply appreciate the checks and balances of our government. I appreciate that we have two viable parties. I appreciate that the transition of power back and forth between the parties is traditionally extremely violence free. We have a strong, intact constitution. The American electorate shows a knack for swinging back and forth between the parties to ensure that the checks and balances keep doing their work. Every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Is that how politics should work. Vibrating back and forth. Progressive and Conservative. Marching forward. Shuffling our feet.

Dear Barbara & Nathan,

It is a gorgeous blue sky and billowy white cloud day, Helena—now 2 and a robust toe-head— and I are out in the yard and she is ambling over inquisitively to inspect our small garden plot, bee-lining straight towards recently planted cluster of chard leaves.

“Do NOT pick my chard!” I preemptively scold, nearly adding “or I will spank your bottom,” though I ultimately do not say that last part out loud because I know how deadly serious I am, and as realize soon as I think it I realize how deeply uncomfortable I am threating a child with violence over a salad from the future.

Little backstory, recently she has been insisting on picking the leaves of all of our plants 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 perfectly sweating mason jar of chilled drinking water.

Years ago, Nathan, we were at a thing at Phil’s and you were being a little short with one of your girls over some issue with a cup of orange juice. At the time I remember feeling kid of surprised that you could be so impatient or even kind of mean sounding to such an angelic little Tomte. Maybe, he’d been having a stressful day or something I had thought at the time. Now I realize you definitely were having a stressful day because you had children and you were likely not being mean at all but exerting incredible, saintly patience, and that our children are in essence sociopaths that we have been charged by fate to reform as penance perhaps for our past, if not present, sociopathic behavior. Which is all just to say, I hope you are well and that you’re kids are well and that everyone is keeping the sociopathy to a loving minimum.

Chicago, Ill. 13 June 2021

Dear B & N,

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, Nathan, we were at a thing at Phil’s and you were being a little short with one of your 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 you definitely were having at least a partially stressful day because, you know, you had children and you were likely not being mean to your child at all, but were, 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 all just to say, I hope you both are well and that your kids are well and that everyone is keeping the sociopathy to a loving minimum.

07/15/2021

What is this. This obsessive chronicling. This recursive attempt to understand and order all of these longings and responsibilities.

Welcome back! I like the image of my note to you guys sneaking in there and hanging out with all of your other mail. I like home time insensitive it is. Sort of a deep, deep dive into COVID time. Embracing that which is not immediate. This is not to say I am making some kind of anti-digital position. It really has been more of a reboot. Strip down my digital communication to figure out what’s going on with my broken interfaces. My relationship with my nuclear family is distant and distorted. I feel alientated from them and misunderstand. I take on this lake of comprehension and wonder at my inchoateness, my lack of solidity, my shimmeringly insubstantial sense of self or artistry. I acknowledge this longing for an aesthetic, a way of being that nourishes my writing . Writing this interface that I somehow knew I needed long before I even knew what to do with it… I still don’t know what to do with it, but the difference is this qualitative value judgement. It is okay for me to waste time in this way.

That said, please, please, please do not feel the need to write back or even feel the need to feel like you should write back! I especially emphasize this point because writing letters for me has been a pretty tortuous process in a lot of ways, I don’t expect anyone to subject themselves to it. To get to the point where I felt like I could start writing letters the way I felt like I wanted to write them it essentially required a pandemic, a U-haul truck smashing through the façade of my place of business, some key physical injuries and various comprehensible though still cruel aging and stress pains that are the bounty of middle age, which taken as a gestalt or as parallel stimuli in my on-going midlife crisis / vocational reboot.

I have written pretty consistently for the last twenty years for various reasons and in various modes. Mostly personal letters and emails, but also reams of journals, story sketches, a few extremely unfinished novels, and veritable Beanie Baby glut of poems and difficult to categorize stabs at engaging prosody.

There have been a lot of times when I have wondered “what the hell am I doing spending this time writing!” This was an interesting self-recrimination, because its evil twin was always lurking just around the corner when I did get some glimmer of running flow—“Why aren’t you spending more time writing?”

I will admit that ultimately, like most things, the WHY NOTS were way easily to think up and hold in brain and repeat on psyche scrapping loops of cruelty than the WHYS which seemed to flit around like twinkling faeries, whose mystical motions and miens spoke eloquently of their hidden fantasy worlds.

I have to let my hypothetical fears go. I have to let go of my fears or other people’s fears which is often some sort of excess politeness at best, or at worst a socially accepted form of cowardice. Now mind you I don’t think anya of my content is particularly offense, I just feel the need to apologize for sort of opening and maintaining a new interface. I mean, who really needs another interface these days?

Suddenly my letter work and my writing work is squarely working to confront or at the very least chronicale something aboutn our times—the way we communicate. The way we get each other or do not. The way we connect and make relationships and cultivate these relationships. Tending to our memories (an orderly compost heap?), harvesting the day, dreaming and preparing for the seasons yet to come.)

Chicago, Ill. 13 June 2021

Dear B & N,

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.

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Best,

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 interestinly 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 embarraseed, 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.