***When the company goes public, you’ll have to learn to love what you own.***

***Time present and time past/ Are both perhaps present in time future/***

***And time future contained in time past./ If all time is eternally present/ All time is unredeemable.***

Dear Alex,

All right, here we go, the *finalish* draft of this so as to allow me to present this scrappy collection of unity stabbing to you in person instead of cowardlyly minimizing and obscuring myself in its presentation behind a 55 cent postage stamp.

Let me begin by suggesting that words are important. That they matter. That they affect the way we see the world and the messages we send to it.

Case-in-point:

*You encouraged him to kill himself hundreds, perhaps, thousands of times, telling him to “go die”. Thus, this court finds that You is responsible for this death.*

Backstory:

You’s boyfriend committed suicide after being text-abused by her over an 18-month-period. They were college students. Smart kids. Full of all the things that we are all full of. Especially messages.

So why are people so horrible to one another? Why so many corrosive messages I ask you and You! Having asked myself pretty seriously and repeatedly why writing is important to me and why I feel compelled to write to people, often framed tiredly as like- *what would possibly motivate me to shove my weekend warrior hobby in other people’s faces— demonstrate my golf-ball-club technique or regale a tepidly interested acquaintance about my latest foray into deep-rough whacking and fairway meandering*. Why would I do that to people? Why would I do that to myself? What is this message sending impulse? Spoiler alert— I ultimately don’t really know. My hope though hope is that it is something, or could become something, that is nourishing. An engagement with language and other people through language that nourishes me and maybe even them. But how?

First, a little housekeeping. Let’s call this whole thing a work in progress, shall we? Wait, no. As it is your birthday, let’s call this a birthday letter. I mean, we can say that, can’t we? *They* say all sorts of things. And in fact, *they* talk a lot of shit, so why can’t we say something that is true if not exclusively so?I mean, come on, *they* say so many things, and in no particular order, or with any particularly clear ranking of importance and/or urgency. Everything ending in exclamation points!!!!! *Everything coming at you in italics.* Or weird gimmicky fonts subtly or not so subtly referencing a situational comedy set on the northside of Chicago in the 1970s. *They* send many, many messages. *They* are profligate message senders really. A nuclear meltdown of messages— some cast, some let slip, some blasted out of cannons, megaphones. Others muttered. Many of these damn messages are merely inferred. We infer things constantly. We are completely helpless to not just gobble up any straggling inferential message that happens to wriggle into our field-of-consciousness. Not to mention all the even bigger and broader world creating inferential confetti constellations, bird nets cast to contain our thoughts in flight, wave upon wave of unsystematic-systems of association all grape-shot through with people’s very own personal and super special needs and wants, insecurities and aggressions. Messages all just pouring in and out of *us, them, whomever.* The naturalness, the inevitability, of this high-noon, highwater message flooding is impressive, impressing. ***IN/OUT***. ***OUT/IN***. At times, though, I must admit, I am overwhelmed.

But so, yes, let’s call this a birthday letter. That should work just fine. Well, come on in. I have invited you and I am hopeful that you have accepted with all the attentive eagerness of a famished vampire. Cross the threshold. Enter my anti-tweet. My anachronistic sitting room. Now to start, to really get into it, to fully *enter* if you will, let us consider the Chinese word for *entrance*.

**入口/rùkǒu/entrance**

This common word, often observed out at large in the Chinese public and commercial worlds, directing throngs to flow into and out of the various places that people are want to pack themselves into and out of. It is a word composed of two characters: 入 (rù) meaning “enter” and 口(kǒu) meaning “entrance” or “door” or like a generalized term for an “orifice”. Be sure not to confuse 入 (rù) with 人 (rén- person or people) or 八(bā- the number 8) though they are all essentially just sort some variation of a turkey wishbone dug out of its carcass.

All right, now that we are *in*, let’s start with a fact. Today is Saturday, July 17, 2021. Saturday. The day of Saturn! Let him be praised! The Chinese name for Saturday is markedly less mythopoetic. 星期六 (xīngqīliù) directly translates to “weekday 6”, falling in line with Monday et al in a predictable pattern of combining “week” with a cardinal number:

**星期** + **一**，**二**，**三**，**四**，**五**… ( xīngqī + yī, èr, sān, sì, wǔ…)

Sunday is different though… special, one might say. Instead of the predictable “weekday seven” they take a hard turn from order and abstraction back into the fold the mythologic, allowing us to reasonably translate this last day of the week, this day of rest as “Sky Day”--- 星期天 （xīngqītián）.

天(tián)meaning “sky” or “the heavens” shows up in the word for spiritual/Olympian/after-life heaven (天堂 tiántáng) and emperor（天帝 tiándì） and “Oh, God! or like “Oh, Heavens!”（天啊！tián a!）Though I should note that the tone of 天啊! is really light. Much more “Oh, my” or “Oh, bless” than “goddamn” or like a disparaging or utterly disgusted “*Oh, God*!”

**天 / tián / Sky**

**November 2020: This Dad Gig**

My goodness, this “dad gig” is not an easy one: a long haul, certainly not a sprint. Monday morning, gray and chilly, quiet, but for the occasional retinue of emergency vehicles and their sirens. Our morning routine has just wrapped up— the girls awake and up, Esme dressed and logged into Kindergarten on her I-Pad, the kitchen reset, dishwasher unloaded then loaded, dishrack emptied then filled, coffee made, breakfast warmed, eaten. . . now I pour another cup of coffee and shuffle into the workroom to begin digging back into my “digital Lego” study— focusing in, trying to find some momentum on this sleepy, gray day.

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

The balm for this festering, occasionally flaring, sore spot has been the innumerable other times when our current work/life configuration has had me around and available to be with the girls when otherwise I wouldn’t have been (I’ve been saving 10 hours a week just on commuting time since things switched up!)— being around to read to or hold Helena before nap time, or when she is waking up, having lunch with the girls every day, taking walks, doing projects with Esme at the kitchen table when I’m on a study break and on and on. Life remains very real and while each day is full of tears and complaints, moments of someone being overtired, or over-hungry, I wouldn’t trade this closeness and extra time together for anything, it has been an absolute gift.

Helena’s screaming subsides, betsy and I step back from our TTBPs, the gift’s absoluteness becomes clear once more.

In my six years of *faking-it-until-I-make-it* as a parent, I have learned that so much of parenting work is done behind the scenes, setting up structures, making plans/connections, maintaining. This work is never ending, sometimes exhausting, sometimes full of conflicts and conflicted feelings, it ain’t easy, it’s a long, tough course, but the BEAUTY—

**June 2021: Gardening**

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

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

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

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

Years ago, before I had kids, I was once at a brunch get-together at Phil’s, and I observed Nathan Nordlund being a little short with one of his girls over some issue with a cup of orange juice or something. At the time I remember feeling kind of surprised at how impatient or even almost unkindly he was addressing his angelic little Tomte of a child. *Maybe, he’s having a particularly stressful day,* I had thought at the time. Now I realize he definitely was having at least a partially stressful day because, you know, he had children and he was likely NOT being mean to his child at all, but was, in fact, exerting incredible, if not saintlike patience, artfully teasing out, expanding just a bit further the 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 plied and pulled and stretched as thin as a gossamer shroud though still somehow holding— together and true through some miraculous act of superhuman effort. Love?

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

**January 2021: Speaking of sociopaths[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**\* \* \* \***

And now … politics. Let us begin with a quote from the esteemed American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson circa December 9, 1841:

“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*.”

And now, please enjoy a few entries from *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase &* Fable (Harper & Brothers Publishers: New York, 1973)

***Trump*:** The word in such phrases as a *trumped up affair*, *trumpery*, etc., is the same words as *trumpet*; from Fr. *trompe*, a trumpet, whence *tromper* which, originally meaning “to play on a trumpet,” came to mean to beguile, deceive, impose upon.

***The last trump*:**The final end of all things earthly; the Day of Judgement.

*We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump. – 1 Cor. Xv, 51,52.*

***To play one’s last trump*:**To be reduced to one’s last expedient: a phrase from cardplaying.

***Trumpet*:***See* Trump *above*.

***To blow one’s own trumpet*:** To publish one’s own praises, good deeds, etc. The allusion is to heralds, who used to announce with a flourish of trumpets the knights who entered a list. Similarly, *your trumpeter* *is dead* means that you ---are obliged to sound your own praised because no one will do it for you.

And lastly, if you would be so kind as to indulge the reading of exactly two poems. The first will be entitled— *A Nutcracker Came to Town* – and the second— *Salad Dressing*.

***A Nutcracker Came to Town***

A nutcracker came to town,

in a burlap cloak and a foil crown—

gilded-spanner in his well-clung grip:

trumpets to blare,

pigeons to seed,

juris doctors to dispatch

to the queen: 4-2C.

And she way out on her balcony—

sniffling and swaying

a babe’s crib-cage,

bellowing below

to the hounds of late day,

who lull and lick thick grasses

grown over graves

dug deep down with the peanuts

in the blood-red clay.

While an eye in a mien

regards all with calm—

a Georgia peach in each palm,

a Georgia peach in each palm.

***Salad Dressing***

Was awoken

by a snarling visage—

would be remiss

not to admit

that I don’t miss him.

But if you do

just happen to

run into

you know who…

Take a kiss for me,

or more explicitly—

my ass.

In fact,

don’t ask—

just grab hold of his genitals.

Then! Dive right in all lecherously fumbling.

Shove your old Gene Simmons

directly down his gullet!

Savor the moment in full,

then blissfully, drooly let go.

Thank him for his service,

his oh-so-precious time,

for whipping up a miracle—

salad dressing from ancestral wine.

11/4/2020

Your enthusiasm and encouragement is truly a blessing of light. Yous end some major energy out and warmth and hospitality. Its that openness that I always admired. It is charismatic, community building effervescent.

12/23/2020

Thank you for mentioning travel on the last zoom call that we did—it resonated with hope—not that I am not hopeful about the future, but it does feel kind of on hold, far off, with much to be done before we can leisurely stroll its fair green lawns.

01/12/2021

Sault. Untitled Black is.

Encouraging me to check out Tahnesi Coates as we wait in line for the strip club in San Francisco, my throat so dry after a harried day of travel and lateness and then smoking weed on the street corner outside of Fox’s pickup truck. San Francisco, the slopping streets of north beach.

Anxiousness, indecisions, shame, embarrasses, guilt, sadness, regret, awkwardness, too much thought, time-wasting loops, coping habits that lubricate the loops instead of interrupting them.

Octavia Butler, James Baldwin, language has liberated me. English has liberated me. Thought has liberated me. History has liberated me. Hope has liberated me.

Your infectious enthusiasms and good will. You visions of travel and getting past this thing. Your engagement with life and friends and your students. You concern for your parents. Your father’s mental health during the isolation of lockdown and curtailed movements, routines, possibilities.

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

02/12/2021

There’s something satisfying about seeing wet cement that you once walked on somewhere overseas and far away. And you could have stayed there, but you chose to come back and be here. And so you are here. And it is good to be here. It was good to be far away there and stand on the wet cement. And it is good to be here now.

4/21/2021

My computer’s desktop background has been looping through images of the summer of 2018. Forest Park trek through such a hot smoky day, but the forest was cool way down below the very tall trees. And I swear the woman said 加油. Crossing the St. John’s bridge in a haze of smoke, sun away behind smoke screen.

Walked into St. Johns and had a vegetarian Rueben sandwich and a bottle of Gigantic IPA.

Low carb diet apparent works. Have lost 30 lbs in the last year and am now back to what I weighed in high school. This change was mostly prompted by changing the eating and drinking habits that had supported my 8 year run of active retailing. Now that I was stationary most of the day, no stamina testing commute or athletic workaday rhythm, since last summer have not even been running regularly. Something shifted, something settled. The middle of digging in, sucking it up, getting it down, eating and drinking and smoking whatever popped up before me, my omnivorous nature has been a lynch pin in my flexibility. My drift-ability. And also, a curse perhaps? All framed strengths could be framed liability. Strengths or abilities that seem to be working get worked at the expense of developing other, perhaps more wholistically healthy and sustainable ways of being. Mostly vegetarian, low carbs, stretching. Perhaps not Yoga exactly— I have done some research, so videos, etc, but have largely just tried to follow my pain, follow my tightness. My family, my genetically most similar people and the earliest influences on my would be life patterns conscious and unconscious, are not particularly flexible people. Running and good health and moderation are a big thing, but stretching and limberness, while it comes and goes in the familial trends, has reached sidekick status at best among the pan-Whitmer consciousness, despite the fact that among our ranks we have a trained Physician (in Osteopathy no less), a Physician’s assistant, a Registered Nurse who did his undergrad in Kinesthesiology, as well as my sister who did half a program in Physical Therapy until her first difficult pregnancy forced her to abandon her studies.

We appreciate performance, but my father and my brother desire to “test themselves against the health of other men in their age group” which I have decided is a powerful, self-deluded survey of temporary immortality, a sense of which I am learning becomes trickier and trickier to maintain as you age and begin the necessary downward trajectory of understanding and acceptance of limitations that the arch break point of age introduces.

I hope things are going better for your dad, you mentioned briefly that the lockdowns have not been good for your him. I hope that has gotten better. Just an unexpected challenge.

My own father likes to minimize the whole thing. Rush Limbaugh has his hand up Tucker Carlson’s ass who apparently has his hand up my dad’s ass and is using him as a puppet to say inarticulate things that he had heard on Fox news. D

The freshest eggs and steak available in the country, shipped directly from farms in refrigerated train cars. Pan-size wheat cakes staked six high, quarter wedges of hot apple pie, and cup after cup of the best damn coffee these cowboys had ever tasted in their lives.

* The challenge of the second child… my brother and his 7 children. At some point they just start taking care of themselves.
* The crisis at hand is always the biggest concern.

06/01/2021

Three days before Tian An Men. Silence is all it takes. An umbrella on a clear day. An Umbrella to embrace the BBC. Nothing to see here. That clean cut couple for Virginia. Is anything going to happen today they ask as they approach? Virgina? Is that some kind of CIA code or are they really as ah shucks as they seem. The Austraian guy is trying to pose with guards and being kind of atheletic and jumpy and they don’t seem to like anything that gets in their way of bored lounging with their unfurled umbrellas. We tell the Virgina couple who have no discernable Virginian accent that we don’t know. We live here. Were just passing through.

And the good meals—Big Pan Chicken and infinite tall green bottles of beer. Beer and cigarettes were our coal shovelers delight. Keep the WORD flowing. The Lingua Franca. The tongue of the people. A luxury object. A deemed important. A concession. A negotiation of meaning. A conversation whose flow and tenor and breadth and width and narrowness and focus will be dictated by someone, something, context, intent, what? And the bad meals. The current pork haunches with maggots happily breeding in its outer layer and the fermented swamp moss and the tiny fish lousy with impossible to extricate bones. A meal that takes tacitile agility and breadth and depth of taste. We did our best. Certainly not the comfort food taste fest like a shiny orange plate of sweet and sour pork or glistening Gong bao Chicken!

06/14/2021

Best,

06/17/2021

And you know that other people have done this before. Walked this path. Faked it until they have made it. But when you are first on that road and as you carry along that road, plunging in the valley of despair before your slow hard slog up the other side, towards competency, towards in many cases OKness, pass-ability, 还可以，过得去，马马虎虎，mas o menos, 差不多。

Even in our sincerity we fall short and don’t get each other and can’t always communicate quite right and can’t quite get our interfaces right, debugged. Are we trying to disbelieve each other? Is this truly a values thing? How can every issue have a positive and a negative, a pro and a con, a left and a right.

6/20/2021

Thank you for the “Fake it till you make it…”

Thank you for your enthusiasm for travel. For getting out and having fun. My family’s ability to suck the fun out of things. Insecutity, inflexibility, rigidness. Tetchiness, earnestness. Mawkishness. Conservative mindset of types and categories and families that are a certain way or have certain talents. Local families that become archetypes for certain activities and those archetypes are shared by the members of the community--- Doc Dehlin.

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.

1. Definitions as found in ***Brewer’s Book of Phrase and Fable IV addition published London: 1973*** [↑](#footnote-ref-1)