Chicago, Illinois August 28, 2021

12/14/2021

You are coming to Chicago and I am excited to talk song writing with you and catch up!

12/10/2021

Realized today that my letter writing has been both letter writing but also trying to write a novel. My process involves a hall of mirrors and the mirrors are my friends and I am the LORD of the LENS (in red when I look over at the makeshift shelf that I have propped on the bench which is also being used as a shelf to hoist up betsy’s sewing machine which she refuses to let me store anywhere else which leaves my work table space feeling cramped and claustrophobic, just like the rest of my life which I cloud even even closer with habitual cannabis use… something that has been going on for coming up on over 3 years now… wow… that’s a helluva admission. I need to shift out of this habitual use. I need to shift out of this ritual and into a new one. New rituals to replace the old.

… People need to explore their bodies he thought, just like we explore our minds and our motives and our psychology and our history and we try to get our stories straight. Our body is a big part of that he thought and looked down at the big kids book on the floor that had the large title EXPLORE human bodies.

Dear Annette,

Your songs are so lovely and it was so good to listen to them with my girls as they lay on the coach together and read.

I can’t believe you saw Wilco out in Napa. That must have been amazing. They are quietly one of my favorite bands, not that I pursue them, but one of my favorites when they come around. Like *Red, Red Wine* playing in the Radio. Or anything by the *Fine Young Cannibals*

10/16/2021

Holy shit this letter has been hard to write… please don’t take that personal. I really don’t think its you. I think my letter writing interface either never existed, or has completely collapsed after a better part of a decade spent trying to hack together a non-writing focused career and attempt to become a solid supportive father figure type-- repressing my own stuff (be it emotional or creative or whatever) in an attempt to provide for my wife, my girls.

This is an old story and while the cliché of it and the fucking soul crushing difficulty of it some how has connected me to other people in a deeper and more humble and optimistic and sympathetic way. And that is all I could ask for.

Unfortunately, like any life altering change there has been an incredible amount of headwind and inertia that I have been pushing against to find my footing with writing a simple letter.

The key to a simple, sane letter is that it informs and delights and leaves some positive sense and affirmation in the reader. Thus, you report the positive things. You acknowledge the challenges, but you emphasize the positive things, the inspirational, the interesting, the funny. The letter is an anarchronistic form-- one that mist of us do not have the time to read or write these days it seems. We are in the ear of the tweet. When our words need to be concrete or just outrageous, but concrete and outrageous in a way the connects to something visceral in us-- shock, humor, sexual titillation and entertainment.

In our present culture the longform letter is a limping relic-- something reserved for legal proceedings (the definite, the set in stone, something demanding action immediately), or something super emotionally charged-- a confession, a suicide note, a last will and testament, break up letters.

In our present culture the literature of socialization are mostly images. They are worth 1,000 words, no? And we can all make up our minds about what is going on. We can see the image. Just show us the image and we will like it or we will not. Letters are often heavy shit. And have a lot of baggage for being such a simple, low-tech way to put a few thoughts down-- gather a few thoughts if you will-- the inertia in this gathering can be pretty tricky to deal with as well…which is why with regular language- talking we allow one another to talk so much shit… to repeat ourselves. Shit in writing is less forgiveable. Whoa! You wrote that down! That must be really important, or you think that is really important. You wrote it down and then you mailed it to be, through the postal system. This must contain your deepest convictions, your sharpest take on reality, etc. That is terrifying. I’m not ready to carve anything into granite just yet I realize. I suppose at some level I am truly afraid. Caught in a lurching swirl of study and creative exploration and emotional deep diving. Trying to mine down under my midlife crisis being informed by my sudden joblessness (a state that was both freeing and also terrifying), the political/pandemic tension boiling up to distance me from my parents and siblings at a time when I did not have the emotional wherewithal or energy to invest into the relationship. We are the some total of our investments. We shouldn’t judge other people’s investments. We should try to be kind to them. And we should also try to limit our hubris when our investments pay off.

I ultimately believe in my investments very strongly and believe that wholistically they are the best places for my time and my money at this juncture.

Cut, clarity, caret, color, cost, style, caliber, power reserve, warranty, general mechanical operation of an automatic timepiece. History, firsts, the culture of high end brands. Fendi, flower bomb, Cannilo, WWE, UFC, Cartier, Louis Voutin, Loubaton, Loro Piana, Armani, Hermes, Gucci, Prada, Patek Philipe, Tom Ford,

To attempt to outrun this fear I have attempted to use writing at a creative and emotional ballast as I have attempted to gorge myself on html, css, javascript, http/https, irb, erb, ajax, yaml, haml, dsl, ood, tdd, bdd, agile, scrum, ruby, rails, Sinatra, rack, rake, sql, data structes, algortims etc, etc, Sinatra, Rails, React, routing, databases, testing, MOOCs, Youtube, documetaion, website after web site after web site.

I have tried to use the experience and discipline of just dropping into a handwritten English flow as a way to bring me back and settle me after venturing far out into the digital sea.

Chord progression breakthrough begins to inform writing. Poetry reapproached as songwriting.

What I like about my poems is that I know them. That I have spent enough time with them and they have wormed there way into my subconscious and they can bubble up at will. I did not memorize they mechanically, but rather emotively. Memorizing things emotively. Internalizing information or images or ideas to the point that they are simply known, felt, not a book to reference on the self, but a wave of humanity moving effortlessly through you. The past conversing with the present, smoothly, fluidly, settled, not dislocated. Concrete, not scattered. An order that sticks. An order that follows you around and can be there to settle back to your root when the multiplicity and busyness of the day has you feeling scattered, pulled far from baseline, stretched out of your comfort zone with effort or newness or uncertainly. An other that follow one around.

After a lot of slogging through the muck I feel like my working processes are finally settling in and coming better under my control.

Practically-- my typing has improved a lot. Musically I have had some guitar/song writing breakthroughs, tech wise my know-how is lightyears beyond where it was even 6 months ago. I am in such a better place than I was 6 months ago both writing and tech wise. Additionally, since August I have had a new focus with fitness having begun to “barefoot” run. There has been so great synergy here because my “barefoot running” is really more about increasing my body awareness and stride awareness-- making the experience of jogging a much more wholistic experience than simply trying to be faster. Going super fast at anything always required a certain amount of recovery. I don’t really have the energy to be recovering from my exercising all the time. I am also now stretching much more than I run, which at 42 is feeling like a great move. The limit running and the quasi-religious stretching has kept me out of the “office box” gotten my weight down to a manageable and predictable level and I believe this increased fitness level has also informed my eating habits which has put me in a virtuous cycle with regard to nutrition and calorie intact.

My digital know-how is now beginning to circle back and support my writing endeavors. My heart sort of flutters with joy when I allow myself to fantasize about being over this “career hump” and into a settled tech role-- a solid, consistent vocation that provides me with a healthy work/life balance and an engaging field of continued vocational growth and achievement. I believe the steadiness of a reward, expertise building career will free up my writing to be whatever it will be-- journaling, letter writing, notes, poems, songs, a novel, penmenship exercises.

The flow of the river is my primary concern-- the evolution of the process-- so important, but watched from your peripheral vision-- only way to see it without going blind-- look too hard at the process and it can block your way completely, dissolve into the deadening habit of the work, distance yourself form yourself, the people around you…

Our bodies scavenge for the floating calories that will keep us socially afloat.

Seeking clarity for mucky things. How does a person hold the whole thing of anything in their mind? How does one hold the whole thing in their mind?

I suppose we figure out tricks. And we discover tools. And we learn when to lie and obfuscate and remain silent. And to seek. And to question. And to accept.

The tools we use become our worldview. The medium of communication informs and to some extent determines its content. Talent is a sort of capacity. What do we have the wherewithal for? What do we have the capacity for? That kid could do anything! That kid accomplish anything if they just put their mind to it!

I have had some deep pain that I have been working through in my art. How do you process through that pain to the point that it becomes attractive, nourishing? It is like sausage is it not? You spill your guts and then you try to use rhythm and tone to make it way more palatable and maybe even delicious depending on the tastes of the audience. Is your sausage spicy? Is it salty?

How do you do true art and nourishing art that doesn’t ruin you. That doesn’t completely wipe you out emotionally, or send you into some sort of distant, manic relationship smashing journey where the necessary particulars to facilitate a successful personal journey are the same things that are distancing you from your friends and family. Like a lot of people, I think, I have found it difficult to find the bottom of this pain, because the pain is gnarled, tangled, a web of influences and reactions, over bearing behavior and neglect, realities, banalities, cliches, just-the-way-it-is-es. The complexity has slowly, slowly been replaced by a simplicity which I do not expect to sustain me forever, but for the moment serves my purposs of reorientation quite nicely. Vertigo can be an effective way to shake off your last set of settling coordinates.

Making some peace with time.

Making some peace with work.

Making some peace with family.

Making some peace with the inevitable messiness of it all. The messiness means its real sounds like scripture. Sounds like an abstraction. Depend on abstractions, not concretions.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Major minor minor major minor minor major7

And so I roil away in my pressure cooker, boiling away in my wild fit of inspiration, hamstrung by my osciallating concentration and my addictive dependency on alcohol and THC.

But the shit of it all… is that it is working… here I sit hacking away over the last 16 months on a letter for you. This process is working, I am feeling more and more like myself.

So anyways, that’s the plan. Have felt extremely cocooned up and cloistered away and have battled alienation that was super tough because it was real and without the wherewithal to hold the world together I have felt at times like I was completely collapsing-- the fact that this happened right during COVID while everyone seemed to be in crisis both gave me some cover to completely implode and tree to reassess and also exacerbated the anxiety, tension, stakes and inertia. The best of times… the worst of times…

I have lost most of my appetite for routine entertainment. Have had to let sports mostly drift off, reading, films.

This is partially me being pragmatic and trying to clear time and space and it is also partially because I have found that my focus mode has a lot of cross over with my depressed mode. Previouisly exciting and engaging things sliding away… a late of enthusiasm or wherewithal allows the activity, the text to drift off and away.

I realize how deeply out of it I am. A blitz of new films and albums arrives that I would have previously been super into making time for are just more deadweight in my inbox-- in good company with all the classics that I do not have time for. I think my peak cultural engagement was around the time I was 19

The summer I turned 21 I worked at Covenant Point and my body Noah and I met up with you and went to your cabin in the Huron Mountains. We drove the two rut road to the lake Superior shore line and smoked some weed and the wind blew a transluscent wave of sand over the still smooth beach at the mouth of the river .

We had a great time and then poor timing in the morning. Hungover, smoking cigaretttess like bandits, blwoing ash out the window, racing down logging roads. And I think of that tall handsome kid from Munising who could dunk and who was pretty quiet and had married a local real estate agent and then he was killed coming back from down state when he collided with a semi-truck on a long straight section of US-2. His dog was in the truck with him too and dies with him on US-2.

The obituary section of the Economist. Nick Cave’s *Red Hand Files* new letter.

Dear Annette,

9/4/2021

A bit about how I don’t really do this, but wouldn’t it be weird and strange if I did-- keep a list of possible song ideas for you and cover ideas and then actually songs and then a full musical with you as the lead and singing most of the parts via puppets like some kind of demented *Land of Make Believe*. And is this a dream. Could it be an amalgam of our childhood. *The Last Unicorn*, taxes are bad, Prince and Princesses in the forest behind your house. Janie wearing the wig over her face and transforming into the beast girl.

I have felt some kind of a creative block my whole life and I am still trying to come to terms with it. Interest in video just fizzled out, computers have always been right there, but up until a few years ago I hadn’t taken much of an interest.

Writing was my thing and over the years I have continued to write in an extremely scattershot sort of way. Sometimes well, sometimes creatively and productively, but often not well and not productively and I often find myself caught in these very unproductive loops where I question whether the unproductive writing is a natural part of the slog of my development, or is it proof my being unwell. I suppose the fact that I am clothed and fed and with money in the back and family back beyond that that I am not on skid-row. I am not completely destitute, but I am also at this super sensitive crossroads, I feel like you have some sense of this, what is it, time has finally caught up to us. Time has finally claimed us as her own, I don’t know, Annette, maybe it’s true nobody gets out of her alive. I suppose we’ll just have to find out. SO like I was saying. Is the unproductive writing just part of the slog. Part of my apprenticeship in words. A rougher aspect of my *doing* of language.

I really want my typing to get even better. This keyboard is less familiar to me, but I think over time I have gotten better at it. I think getting really precise with typing would improve the efficiency of my both my writing and coding a whole bunch.

9/3/2021

While I do not go on Facebook much I went on today and saw your post connecting ladies to the resources that have really helped you though your journey. It was so good to read your words. They sounded wise and hard won and emotional, but strong. I was very proud of you and loved you in a way that I never knew I could love -- feeling bad for, resepcting, recognizing the humanity, the perfection and the imperfection, the cross to bear, to effort expended.

Shattered identity, which I could abstract into kind of an art problem if not for the little necessity of earning an honest living for my family. A question that I would really like to just have answered and to be done with it. Luxury Retail floated us along, saw us through the family founding years and then just when I was looking to transition to a more 9 to 5 Monday to Friday workaday existence the whole world was turned upside down.

And so I attempt to crawl my way back from a deconstructed self. A striped down self. An isolated self. Attempting to redefine and settle relationships on all sides and not really feeling the wherewithal for any of it.

The woman on television sleeping. Crisis makes those other things fade away. We add more and more… opportunities are crisis…

The larger the project, the more apparent the flaws. This is an obvious issue, with my low maintenance writing system I have been working on the past few years. The low-maintenance meaning that it is an essentially structureless system that can lead to longer pieces of writing created piecemeal over time while also generating lots of module pieces of writing which can in themselves be seed crystals of other projects, or parts to plug into other projects or personal letters and what not. I will likely cut all of this boring explanatory stuff out, but perhaps worth noting is that a big part of this project has been about just thinking about someone, reflecting on our memories together and thinking about things that I would like to ask them now or be curious to know about their life now, or to just offer a word of encouragement or connection or whatever. Obviously the personal letter is way out at the moment, which is totally understandable on one level, though I could see it making a comeback perhaps. It has for me, at least in some form. Obviously, we’ll see how long it sticks around, but my current stab at the practice has yielded quite a bit of writing. I am still waiting for the process to dissoleve just a bit mre, allowing myself to just write. Allowing myself to feel completely free to write, but within bounds. Like anything needs to have bounds. There are proper times to do many things and there are improper times to do things. Let’s do things at their proper time. Let’s Interface with things in their correct way. Let’s be high value about who we write to and who we connect with. Is all of this shit just going to read like stone rambling. I don’t have the wherewithal to do shit because I am stoned as fuck and about to get just a little more stoned, thought it seems like it isn’t seven working any more, like we have topped off… but if the next 40 days can be my break at sobriety I could tie a little tale into it and make her my sponsor and talk about how Ritual is right by us. And how Laural dropped the candle, maybe it was a prayer candle. I don’t know it is it was, I hope it was, but I won’t know if it was for sure, but the colors of those candles are so wonderful. Lively. Festive. Creating a temple wherever they are lit.. shattered.. piece went in her eye.. like that glass that fell on our table that Orlando dropped and it just totally imploded. Impressively small, “shardproof” little bits. I am not sure if that meant that it was expensive glass, or just incredibly cheap glass. Like the glass in China on the tall green bottles of beer and the one brand that was a little fancier, though usually slightly less expensive that had gold foil around the neck and over the bottle cap. You were wise to get that gold foil off of there before attempting to open the cap of the bottle because if you didn’t, jus the resistance of the foil was sometimes enough to cause the whole top of the bottle to crumble, making the tantalizingly sweating bottle of beer, completely undrinkable. Another time, following correct foil procedure, I removed the foil and promptly had the top three quarter of the neck pop off. This time it was an incredible clean break. A really consistent pressure fracture or something. That time I drank the beer. Then this week Helena at a glass marble. Luckily a few days later she passed it. Then unluckily, after giving it a good washing and going over pretty clearly about how one shouldn’t eat things like glass and after she rather maturely expressed her contrition and made her apologies, when given the chance, somehow getting her hands on the exact same marble she popped it in her moutha dn swallowed it for the second time. Luckily this second round of digestion went well as well and the girl is now completely marble free, as far as we know. I suppose I can’t judge her too hard considering I swalled my mom’s wedding ring at 3 and then a shiny bi-centienal quarter when I was six or maybe even seven…whoops! Does this mean that we still have 4-5 years of having to watch Helena to make sure she isn’t just cramming randomn things down her throat… yikes….

Chicago, Illinois February 5th, 2020

Oh, the wonderous alchemy of fire and flesh, grapes and time; Thinking back to that visit in 2013? Should look to see if I wrote anything about that trip.

I feel the need to apologize. Perhaps it is the nascent Catholic in me. Forced to admit my inadequacy even before the self-criticisism is demanded of me. Beat them to the punch. I’ll show them who’s the fool.

San Francisco:

1. 18 years old traveling there for MJP.
2. Road trip in college with 3 good friends and an ounce of marijuana and a 1982 Buick with lights and ashtrays in all the doors, with a broken speedometer. Stoned and trying to calculate the average speed per mile.
3. Omega Timepieces- train the trainer experience/competition (visited Annette, visited Stephen)- my team won
4. Annette’s Wedding.
5. Dave and Alexandra’s Wedding.

Why write. Nourish. What do people need? What about all of their dietary restrictions? Are things so complicated or am I overthinking all of this.

I want you to know that I hope you are well. That I hope. That you are very special to me and have been very special to me for a long tima nd that I hope that you are well.

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.

Dear Annette,

I have lest than a month to get this letter off to you and have it take an entire year to get to you. Think of it as a collage. A fruit of a practice I have finally gone a few levels deeper.

Your music video with commentary by Esme…

I keep thinking I’m there, but I’m not there, I’m not there, I am moving further and further along, but I am not getting any closer at all.

Do you think you can be productively depressed?

Can Depression be productive and not just counter productive. These shifting, slowly slowly continents of attention.

Pangea… and slowly everything has been drifting apart…

Dear Annette,

Wow have I been blocked. So blocked. Painfully so. Devestatingly painfully. Trapped right across the river from my best self- my creating self, my curious self, my fun-loving self. I am happy to report that while I was deeply block and depressed, my baseline drive and dedication to my family really pulled through. I emotionally strong armed these seven years. I compressed myself into a box. And put a bow on it and the commission checks were consistent enough to dry my tears. I realize now in my own experience, and also what I am witnessing in my wife, that as people, organic matter that we are, need to growing, need to be creating and exploring, opening and learning, yearning. Something we literally were born to do.

There are ways and then there ways. Balance is certainly a thing. I’ve felt its presence. Its absence. Order too, seems real enough. Disorder has a gravitational weight, and an aide-de-camp in entropy. But disorder isn’t the enemy. Nature isn’t completely unpredictable. We use on average about 30% of our lung capacity and yet we are more or less breathing longer and longer these days. Modern medicine is a wonder. I have a couple of mesh patches holding in my innards. When they start offering the robot limbs, count me in.

What has broken me through… what after

Snow in Australia, Tornados in the upper Midwest, fires in California, hurricanes in the gulf, shit storms in the belt way, and across the country, a global pandemic, historic job loses. Raging right-wing kin making me feel alienated from my own clan.

See that guy back there. Laying on the side of the Road. He’s Dead. Don’t tell anybody, but I shot him. Be at ease, be at ease. Don’t worry, I had but one bullet and Senor Ego’s name was caste right in the cartridge. He comes back from time to time, but it always ends like this. Gratefully, right around the time he shows up, I always come across a bullet. I just find it. Or somebody hands it to me. Think about this. Consider this. Maybe it’s a billboard. And then my chamber is loaded once more.

Somehow the politics (and I say somehow with an eyeroll cause it always fucking does and will until the goddman Catholic Calaphate is established. And then all we’ll hear about is how the bishops keep fucking up the church. Just like their critique of the Pope right now. Her updated 21st century Trumpian rightwing eschatological conception of hell as mapped over the progressive opposition is a work in progress in which cancel culture is working to fully imprision each and everyone of us in our own personal hell. Or if hell is too loaded of a world, let’s just call it their “own little world.” My response to that is okay, I think we are all there and its called consciousness, though this consciousness has been with us for all times and is our very own personal responsibility to manage. I will be the first to admit that I have not always managed my consciousness well. But I understand that now. I’m having kind of a woke moment and I think what jarred it was Trump. I believe Mr. Trump has set me free. Breaking from your family’s religious and political traditions ain’t easy, but seemingly the egregious of Mr. Trump and my family’s complete lack of critical engagement with his shortcomings, just snaps the fiber on the moral hold their worldview had on me. The mirror I was raised to regard and began to not like. And I mean all of it. Cause its not just Catholicism or some shit like that. I am really fine with their Catholicism until they start passing judgement on our choice to plan our family rather than turn betsy into a fucking farm animal. But for me it’s their embrace of Trumpism, so deeply to the point that they honestly seem to hold him in higher regard than their own pope! It is frankly disturbing.

We have not really been able to engage. They occasionally will try to get into it about one issue or another, but it is hard because I think we each think the other has been I don’t know sort brainwashed! I suppose it is good to be engaged with people who see the world so radically different than you. The difference is actually fine, the seething rage, mean spirited broadsides, and general endtimes sort of angst and frustrations are fucking insufferable. I think I may have at last (or at least for another election cycle) staved off another round of my mother’s passive aggressive theological-political inquisitions/false alternative sales pitches. The big difference at this exact moment is I feel such a relief. In the most direct way today at 41 I told my mother that yes I am “self-selecting” out of her world area (and really have been for a very long time… did she forget? It has really surprised me how freeing this whole process has been.

Beyond that politics are not really that huge of a thing to me. I generally take a long view and don’t really see a harm in the country taking back and forth between right and left, rewarding and punishing the parties for their effectiveness in approving our countries. The details of how all of that works itself out, I realize I generally don’t really care as long as people have the right to hold their own view points and express them without any mean-spirited retaliation. I am certainly a consensus guy which makes me a bit anathema to my family, morally weak I am sure. But you know what, I am absolutely fine with that. The power my MOTHER carries over me can never be escaped, and its not even desirable to throw off that power, but I did need some kind of deep psychological retrenchment to restructure my mother’s place in my personal mythology. I believe the changes in my will allow me to love her more openly, freely, less guarded, while at the same time, in my new found maturity, I will have a much greater emotional wherewithal to deal with future religious of political issues in the future. Big sigh of relief. I am still processing through everything that this means, but the feeling is incredible. I am drinking less. I have lost 20 pounds and I am stretching and meditating everyday. Not to mention writing like a mother fucker, learning coding and keeping up and continuing to build up my Mandarin Chinese skills. Losing my job has certainly been a challenging, scary, uncertain, disorienting, reorienting, redrawing, resetting, consolidating, growing, tumbling experience. Lordy, Lordy, what else is in store for 40….

I try to check my ego at the door,

I place my guns upon the table.

But I keep this knife within my boot,

Because you are unaware and I am able.

But first, but first,

For mirth and thirst

Let’s drink our senselessness well-thought.

Let’s sell what can’t be bought.

Having listened to your twice-told tales,

Hear tell three times of mine.

Let’s annoit ourselves in rhyme,

Flesh away our mortal days.

Seek the company of sorcerers and whores.

Besmirch the name of Christ to all who’ll hear.

Defile the cross, wear women’s lingerie.

Fornicate with strangers

And masturbate out in the hay.

Consume a sea of drugs,

And slash a score of throats,

Then raise a stout-walled castle,

Encircled by a blood-filled moat.

But do not worry, we’ll stay in touch,

Look out for dispatches from my cell,

As I while away eternity in my precious hell.

The process of writing this letter has been kind of ridiculous, but also tracks and elucidates the writing journey I have been on this past year. I am writing you because I wanted to share this with you and connect with you as an artist. I have been raw. I have been unfinished. I have been wounded and wandering around foolish. Afraid of being unloved by my mother. I no longer fear this. Donald Trump has freed me. You have debased yourself with politics. Your moral authority is but one buoy in a sea. You have a good truth and it has good company. And you have followed that truth into wonderful communities. But if the price of admission to your community is CANT. Sorry I can’t.

This is such a wonderful development. My level of feeling conflicted has just really gone down. I am being lazy about the pot thing, but that seems way less existential now. Everything seems less existential now. I wonder if that will take the strive out of my quill. The starch from my will. The pop from my pill. The view from my hill. Honesty, I would be totally fine with that. If I could put these terrible loops of judgement behind me,9

Tonight Chicago sleeps in white. The airplanes above are just lights obscured by the low, heavy cloud cover. 26 degrees and bracing. Just before dinner tonight, after it had already gone dark I slipped out of warm third floor walk-up for a jog along our neighborhood streets. The two- and three- story buildings arranged in a grid of quiet dusted in flurries. Snow in February and quiet and me masked and shuffling along, getting in my miles before heading home to a cozy dinner table with my three girls.

Not to be too anachronistic, but greetings! Via a letter! How are you? How has 2020 landed for you? My goodness, I had/have so much hope for this cycle around the sun. And yet, what a first month- a global pandemic, an impeachment, a helicopter crash in Calabasas. One down, eleven more to go. I am still feeling hopeful. I am still feeling good about the shaking sediment of 2019 off my skin and moving on.

What a year! Dickensian- the best of times, the worst, etc., etc. etc. Helena’s birth, now nearly a year ago, was the fulcrum of the year. The bang that left us joyously stumbling, wearily working, future dreaming with so much to pull for and yet so little room to maneuver. Locked in domestically- 2019 progressed in a steady hum of commuter train installments, sale cycle angst and settling, sleep and waking, few dreams, but much wonder, as waking there was always suddenly this blonde beast rustling in our bedroom.

December 2019 was a particular grind- let’s be honest holiday retail is the worst! Especially when the expectation at my current gig is a six-day-a-week extended hour “all hands on deck sort of situation. A grind, I tell you. The only silver lining here is that my post holiday five-day-a-week schedule feels so much better in comparison. I just may even start exercising again.

Here’s wishing you and Shawn all the best in 2020! And happy year of the Rat to boot! 鼠年快乐(shu nian kuai le)! Any U.P. return trips on this calendar’s horizon? We are heading to up north tomorrow. A long weekend over my mother’s birthday seems like a nice mid-winter trip. Haven’t been up there in a year and a half. We’re looking forward to it- the wood stove and the hot tub, the frozen lake and some snow forest hiking await us. I will definitely be stopping in Menominee for a Colonel K’s pasty. Tradition demands it.

My copy of “The Witcher” arrived today. Or at least one of the many books in the series. My enthusiasm for Netflix’s “Witcher” series as well as the excellent “Dark Crystal” has outed me with betsy as a fantasy fan. She seems surprised, but I feel like she just wasn’t paying attention. Maybe it all went dormant for a while, but its nice to be back into that space. “Game of Thrones” was a helpful conduit back. The extra hook with “The Witcher” is that the source material strikes me as sort of fantastic. The author Andrzej Sapkowski is Polish and while was huge in Europe, really wasn’t read much in the U.S. until the video games based on his books gained some popularity. I have not played the games. With the exception of mucking around “Breath of the Wind” for a half-an-hour on my coworkers Switch one time on my lunch break, I have yet to dive into the realm of gaming. I’m pretty happy about this. I am sure I would enjoy it, but there are so many other things… and time, man, time is not getting anymore abundant these days.

I thank ye for sticking with my ramblings thus far. I have been wanting to get back in the habit of writing letters for literally years, but somewhere in there this incredible inertia snuck in in front of me. Thus, I am making a concerted effort to just sit down, tee up, and chat my way through a couple of pages of text; send my thoughts to sea in a bottle, jot them on a scrap, let fly the wind off into the forever above, out across the plains and hills and mountains beyond, across the deserts and barren lands, the parking lots and strip malls. Out and out into the night. Into the dark whispering of now. And later dreams of now, but only now, now: the now of my apartment locked up for the evening. The girls settled down in their beds. And even outside, silent and calm. A true hush and not the usual traffic hum, because of the hour, because of the snow.

…

Chicago, Illinois July 24, 2020

Dear Annette,

So earlier this week we talked on the phone. It was good to talk to you!

Here’s hoping everything progresses towards October well.

Finally checked out your EP. Coding has given me a good excuse to spend more time with headphones on. Music time!

Chicago, Illinois July, 31st 2020

Dear Cousin,

It’s the last day of the month. We have continued on course. Studying throughout the days, taking an outing on Sundays. I am drinking too much and smoking too much weed… basically living like a college student. Oh, my god, this is my midlife crisis.

For the most part I think I am making the best of it though.

Sitting in my livingroom with the French doors to the side porch open. There’s a breeze and ceiling fans are moving the air around. The girls are out at a bit of woods not too far from here. They took a picnic lunch leaving me will an unusually long block at home. I am filling it will a scatter shot of letter writing, coding and various journaling projects. After working in the scrum of retail for so long it is so incredible just to have time to put a professional level of effort into other endeavors. And by professional I just mean a concerted amount of time.

Doing is learning for me for sure. Making mistakes is learning for me (for better or worse), but I do learn, there’s an aptitude there. A membrane that springs and sprangs, but can be broken through. I can understand. I can understand.

Got off the phone and thought of all the things I had wanted to tell ask you and tell you- your song writing process. What that looks like. What that looks like right now. Are you healthy? How are you doing it? The dry weekday seems like a pretty good idea. I should get on that train. I haven’t been a total lush, more of living like a dedicated grad student: putting in long study hours and then drifting surprisingly deep into a couple of beers.

My interest is piqued by this non-alcholic tequila. I am so sorry that you have not had children and that you live far away in California. And that your egg count is so damned low. And that my mother was right about these virtues things that keep our dreams intact. I ran a long way from home and I didn’t come back.

I had the idea to write an album and imbed it in the letter. That would be a helluva letter wouldn’t. I bet it would get tedious for the reader. I don’t want to be tedious to the reader. 4th draft bitches!! It is so lovely to have time.

* International POP overthrow
* Farve Day
* New Year’s Eve 2017?

Helena, at one, has her first stuffed animal. She’s had other plush toys around, but “Piggles” the small pink porcine is the first one she’s claimed, clung to, and called for. She loves cuddling with that thing. Seeing the need and desire to be comforted on such a young and instinctual level makes our own inchoate desires and needs somehow more understandable, so somehow makes me more accepting of them, or more sympathetic towards these kinds of feelings, or is the word I’m looking for here empathetic? That and it is just so damn cute the way she flaps her fingers in her go to “call for Piggles” gesture. And of course I’ll fetch you Piggles, especially if you wave your fingers so politely!

It is the week of the leap year and I am adding all kinds of significance of the 29th of February. There is an Olympic Marathon qualifying race that day, the Democratic Primary in South Carolina (proved to be a consequential day indeed). There is another day to sell shit and so Razny Jewelers is holding a one time “Leap Year” sale. Brenda Nutkins is celebrating her 10th birthday. And no wonder I was so tired that night- we had just had our Leap Year Sale and I had spent the day running up and down three flights of stairs!! I was exhausted and felt grimy in my suit and we couldn’t find a bottle of lambic on the way to the party, which was in an apartment that was not 5 minutes by foot from an apartment where betsy and I used to live, but on the other side of an overpass. And they are poor and in the city they say. And I hope they are well and I still haven’t written Brenda, though I have half a hope to do so.

太棒了

What the fuck does it mean to be an artist. Can’t I just be a regular person. I have such a hard time defining what I am and that is a problem I am realizing because I think to truly be a being has to define their intention. And sometimes that intention can fall out of focus, or our minds reset and give us an opportunity to define a new intention. If our old intention is still correct, a conclusion we reach by taking stock of where our previous intention has delivered us. If this trajectory remains auspicious, then by all means renew the intention and sally forth, otherwise take stock of how things have developed and develop a new intention. This is the truth of the ides. The opportunity of the ides.

What is my intention now?

Tom Petty comes on the radio- “yer so bad”. Crusing down Lakeshore Drive south towards downtown with the lake to my right and long green Lincoln Park to my left. The buildings rise up like Okies at a Trump rally, falling over themselves to be the first one into the sea. \

And rage on both sides in this Autumn of discontent. Our autumn of *Rage*.

And I might have had something to say about that once. I don’t want to talk about it now. I would like to talk about the underlying issues. Why do you think this happened? Why do you think this happened? How disenfranchised are these people that these types of protests happen.

Anti-government. Living in freedom. I’m wounded. Still growing after all these these. Staggering forward full of hope, hopefully a bit more skill, self-discipline. Vision. This has been something sorely lacking from my life. I don’t really know why. I think at some point I acquiescence to some sort of inchoate writerly dream and I traveled and I moved house and married and had children and then suddenly found myself at 41 working a job that I tolerated, though secretly, or perhaps not so secretly hated because it robbed me of the creative energy I felt like I needed to hear the fundamental.

I’ve been in crisis. My apologies for being however I was when we spoke at 9:00 p.m. awhile back. I remembering feeling like I was rambling and boring the hell out of myself and feeling a little bad for you being subjected to my long day with the kids two beer tired head. And then somewhere in their I’m pretty sure I smoked some herb and began to subject you to my narrative trauma blow-by-blow of the wild, tragic capstone to the absolute turning point weekend in my life. That was the fucking Gyre.

I have been sleeping well. Like a baby. And my baby has been sleeping like a baby, though she has been trending earlier and earlier with her wakeups for some reason. Honestly, she’s probably hungry. The girl is a monster and growing by the day. She is a hilarious, though incredibly needy roommate. I think the girls have broken both of use. Buyt I think that’s a good thing. I think any commitment breaks you just a little bit. Snaps you off from certain cardinal directions, puts you on certain unplanned schedules, funnels you through mad labyrinths, not always of your own invention, and not always under your own free will. They have broken me. Made me a morning person. Made me more than willing to work jobs that in someways fundamentally cut against my grain.

We experienced a miscarriage in 2017 and it fit perfectly in the crisis that was November 2017. Fall of 2020 looks so much brighter. That’s an interesting perspective. We are living through a once in a century pandemic, unemployed, but 1000% would chose my current situation over any situational snapshot in the last three years. I think I did my whole writing and then writing while I am writing which has the overall effect of making my writing absolutely incomprehensible which is too bad, because shit, it feels fun to write and it feels fun to create, but I don’t like the feeling at the end of the day that I am not creating anything. And that, my dear cousin, which I will edit up and extrapolate on and clarify ofr you is the fgreat vision that I have at last inherited. If feels something like giving over to madness, though I don’t believe it is mad at all. I feel it is half-measure intuition and half-measure rational planning that has put me on this path (with a few back up plans and insurance polices, you know, just in case the whole thing goes to shit, but honestly, what is going to go to shit? You are merely accepting your destiny. Launching on your vocation. Finding a second chapter and at last a full-fledged, feet forward adult situation. You are engaged and full of the flame that your artistic vision is somehow blossoming along with your found love of coding. I thinka big part of this can be attributed to the freeing up of creative space not having to worry that any creative work would be taking away from time spent attempting to 1) vision 2) vocate ; Having the vision for coding/web development/database management/content management etc. 2) as well as having a plan to move steadily and with pace towards being gainfully employed has freed me to relax and take more stabs at being create. It is lovely. I ordered an electric guitar and have been planning it after 9:00 when the girls are down. Singing quietly to myself in my study (I’m trying to become a baritone. I feel like I am right there, but I just have not been singing enough

But finding it in the music, finding it in the work, in your family, in whatever!!! But just finding it. I thinking that this is especially challenging in our age with the furthered opening up of religious possibilities. I remember being a kid and having my mother throw away from “ying yang” keychain because it was a pagan symbol. We are tribes. It was totally okay in my family growing up to complain about getting jewed. My friends in high school would crack jokes about not minding black people, because they thought everyone should own one. And my cousin explaining to me the difference between black people and niggers. And that one time I pathologically felt uncomfortable saying the word black to describe a marker because one of the other teachers I was working with was black. It was a weird shameful moment. Was I drawing from some weird racist energy pervading the school. Shortly after the incident, which wasn’t an incident, I really don’t remember it being an incident, more of this internal panic of oh my god I just called something black in from of this black guy, like what fuck, that’s going to offend him? Do I feel weird when people talk about the white house, or like white sheet or something. I mean, it’s all in my head, right?

So much of any relationship is navigating that band of permission. That band of negotiated peace and harmony. And its tiring, no? It can be hard enough to balance out one party, much less two.

I think my relationship with my creative process be it Chinese learning, writing, or coding having free space and time is everything. Negotiating for that space and time. Working for that space and time and then when it is there taking it. Now that … that is an art. If I could find the key to just sustaining the creative process, I don’t think it would really matter what I created, though if I could sustain it I feel like I could create something pretty extraordinary, and that I am in the process of creating something extraordinary, something that for me is absolutely everything, it is an everything that can not personally be explained to anyone, though it is something that can be known by everyone.

That prime being. That you out of context. Unwrapped, spun down. Laid bare. That you at the bottom of the well, your well of being that you fill and fill with otherness in the shape of you, or you work so hard to hold them all in the shape of you, but none of it is you, though you are the shape.

After trying to hold the many disparate things together in some semblance of the shape of me for the better part of the decade, I, once more emptied out.

I bubbled up to the surface and spewed luxury timepieces out into the streets of Chicago. All those sales. All that tension, frustration, money flow. Could estimate could make up a number. Though I have a lot of it documented. I have a lot of it recorded, but what does it mean? Does it feed my ego, does it fulfil my dream? I think my point is that I worked hard, I worked my ass off for my family and gained the vision to sustain my creative pursuits and including coding into my person pantheon of studies- Chinese, Writing, Coding, I feel like I have added an all-star to my roster. A really point scorer! We needed somebody that could run the offense. Get some cash flow going. Drop some dimes to the other players by helping to bring their games into the 21st century. Its delightful really. I am really delighted! I am working harder than when I was employed and learning so much more. I have this worked out to just keep at this pace straight through to the end of the year before we figure out what’s going on after that. I am excited about where we will be then. I was really afraid for a while mostly worried that I would burn through a good chunk of our savings for this folly chase after tech skills which would always somehow be just out of reach of my aged 41-year-old mind. But I am defintitely gaining traction and feel confident that my resume will have a much different mien come 2021. And that is nothing to be ho-hum about. I felt strange putting my family’s crisis in quotes. I was downplaying it to show strength. To show that even though it was a tough situation, we had a plan and were thriving our way through.

World be cruel, world be wild, world be nothing but a lonely child.

World be meek, world be mild, world be nothing but a lonely child.

Lost in the roar of cities, the broil of politics , nature abides as an emblem of our human soul. Nature is our soul.

Nature overwhelms as the absolute metaphor for the mind of man.

Its not that this lingering schism was dragging me down everyday consciously, but combined with my lack of a job (financial), without affiliation to an organized religion, in a situation where I just really don’t see my family all that much, because sadly I don’t really want to. Family gatherings are chaotic and Hans’s kids can be pretty fucking annoying. And Esme who gets along with everyone super well hasn’t really connected with any of them. All right this is getting a wee bit gossipy, but so it goes. Thank you by the way for subjecting yourself to this long winding road.

I do want to apologize for blowing our one chance to really talk in the last decade or so. I’m sure you noticed I was a little touched on the call. A couple of beers a low day with the kids and an ill advised puff of marijuana may have sent me into never-neverland. I certainly felt in nevernever land emotionally. Which honestly there are a lot of reasons to feel in never never land emotionally. Life is hard, this has been a tough year. All measures of wha k good year looks like went out the window around the time Kobe’s heliocopter went down in the hills of LA.

I used to think it was easy to be sincere. To have the wherewithal of well wishes. Have never been this bogged down with my own shit. I think dependents put you in a tighter spot, less ability to maneuver or reinvent.

And you talking like you know shit… but you don’t know shit and I am a ball of insecurity and nerves loosened up by ethel alcohol and THC, through those tangled nerves up on a screen with a magic lantern.

Would like to exist in this world without feeling so goddamn conflicted, which doesn’t really seem like an option unless I just want to turn off that very human part of me that reacts to threats, things that aren’t right, etc …

It took some doing for me to reorientate my life to make a career work to the extent that I could earn money and provide for my family. This was all organic of course. My plan came together one steeping stone at a time. I accepted the necessity of work and then I started to work on manuevering to get the most financial reward as possible to build up a nest egg to facilitate a major career change. This major career change eventually attached itself to coding. Thus I have added to my personal curricumlum of Poet, songwriter, linguist, father, husband, human, computer programmer. The fact that I had no formal training in this field is a hinderance I’ll admit, but I committed to this process with a long arching vision, that like a lot of visions might seem a bit mad at the beginning (my age, limited resources time/money, etc.)

What I have deduced here is all risks are equal in a way. In as much as they are larger life altering efforts, which can be major and sudden or can be subtle and gradual. Stretching/ yoga has been a good instructor in this route. It has taken me on a gradual, building journey which at moments has felt very quick and effective and at others like I have plateaued, or lost my vision.

My family’s health is paramount.

Much is in my power to promote this health.

* Diet, exercise, habits
* MUSIC is going to heal the rift in our family, we will come together musically. We shall enter song together. Because this is how we can enter the word. We can find the vibrations that settle us all. We are constantly putting out these different vibes. What is our objective? This seems like a very simple conclusion, but it is having a profound affect on my life. Music may not save the whole world, but it saved my world and gave me a new avenue and grounding in this world.

You get into it because you have good taste.

And then you turn your good taste on yourself and you get either rip yourself to shreds, or your overcome yourself and get to some sort of productive point.

Separate songwriting and practice.

Songwriting and performance needs to come from an uncritical, protean place.

Practice needs to come from a methodical, critical, conforming, systematic place.

12/19/2020

Cutting back on alcohol has made a huge difference to my creative output. But also, just kind of dropping out of my half-assed associated cultures to simply work and write and think and draft and reflect and learn and simultaneously get over myself even while I’m trying to figure myself out. Something about a walk with Helena around the block. We look in the Ritual window.

01/05/2021

Magnetism passed along receptive substance.

Madness mixed, muddled all through

our fine cultures and their divinities.

02/08/2021

Oh, wow, I have been , in theory working on this letter for my than a year, which sounds like it could be spun into a statement of dedication and hard work instead of the fragmentated, dragging process that it has been. I think it is this unintentional intention that I have sought. I have wanted to express something to you, connect with you, reflect on the wildness of time, its richness, its fullness, the delicate nature of relationships, how much love and pain and dedication go into these icons of our existence. The unbearable lightness of the being. The simplicity. Supporting other people’s hopes and dreams. This gets so goddmaned complicated. I am not looking to preach. I am not looking to sell. I am not looking to prove. I am not looking to defend. I am not looking to impress. I am not looking to confess. I am not looking to diregree. I am seeking the campfire. The hearth. The burninfg settled core of home, of love, of felt truth, perhaps unknowable, perhaps unobtainable, but I have known more order than less. More chaos than order. Yellow Railroad, something that he saw and that burned itself on his memory. Not random at all. Carefully collected in life. In living a certain way. Not living better than others. Or more enlightened than others. But always seeking something better for yourself and those you love. At least giving your best effort to settle into yourself and the life that suits you.

05/03/2021

Have you eve hit a point in your life when you just stopped thinking you were funny. Or you tried to keep being funny, you tried to allow your persona to keep doing its thing, but you were so tired of his schtick. You were just burnout on the old hammy, predictable routine. Absolutely disgusted with it.

This is probably just a way to describe depression. A term that has always struck me as aggressively obscure and indirect. Something in the way it declares: Yes! Something is amiss, but exactly what and what reason and what exactly is the severity (how does one dissect the pie chart of one’s mental health, a cohesive, productive, integrated, settled gestalt, maturely having adapted patterns and stratagems to overcome the assaults on integration from growing, aging, changing, creating, working, being tired, remaining emotional vulnerable to loved ones wrestling with their own challenges, receiving abuse and absorbing it, overcoming it, avoiding it, over coming decades of your own self-criticism.

Baader Meinhof Syndrome- perceiving meaningful connections. Tarot. Interpretation. Intuition. Hearing. Listening. Acting. Reading. Life as a text. Talent. Pracetice. Peace. Quiet. Nourishment. Excitement. I often hear and read the same word at the same time or write and hear the same word at the same time in a song or on the radio. One time I met a guy from Burkina Faso and I was kind of embarrassed that I had absolutely no idea where his country was nor had ever even heard of it. Within 24 hours I heard it reference in a radio news show, I read it in a print article and I noticed in on the world map shower curtain we had in our bathroom at the time. 1:11, 11:11, 3:33, 4:44, 5:55, 12:12, 9:11

Hearing same on radio and either spoken around me, or read by me. Taking about diagnosising Covid via a cough listening app. Helena is coughing…

11/23/2020

A ridiculous year, a memorable year, but memorable for what was happening in the world at large, or in your own little world. Mitigating spheres of stress. How do you engage with the larger world which is expecting a certain stress response and the domestic world which expects a different sort of stress response.

My hope, prayer, meditation is that you have had some silver linings, growth, extension, creative spark, new perspective, some radioactive bullshit that you now have some new insight into spinning into gold.

I think a lot of this decade in the wilderness has been about SUCCESS. My amorphous conception of what I was shooting for has been a challenge to me. My flexibility, rolling with it, trying to figure out how I can keep pursuing the things that I want to pursue at the pace that I want to pursue them. And then the rat race which for all sorts of reason make setting and maintaining your own pace extremely difficult. I have completely failed to achieve this for much of the last decade and it has bled the creative spark from my days. I was a worked. I became that being that I thought that I would be able to play at being. You cannot play at being. You cannot obtain objectively. You cannot fully protect, or insolate yourself from much about what is hard about this life.

Dedicated to making money so betsy doesn’t have to work so she can stay at home with the girls and be a creative force— both in the cultivation of your girls and our home, beautifying it with his economical, tasteful, home settling touch. Her health, wholesome vegetarian meals that combined with a new, more passive (less performative) approach to exercise has my weight down 25 lbs. from pre-COVID. Stretching has somehow become completely synonymous with writing. This strange, difficult to explain connection has become the deepest thing I have learned in the last decade. And I don’t mean deepest in that it is so WISE or something, but deep in the way I know it, apprehend it, apply the understanding to my life. It has been quite mysterious and I still do not completely understand it, but I suppose that is why there is such a fertile field there for further explanation. A inviting plan of extending the self through time and space extending out to the horizon line.

There are practical things to consider. Quantities to tally. But there are also feelings, instincts, creative and destructive impulses to notice, be washed over by, overcome. Bled out. Thrown over. Muzzled.

So inhibited. So closed in. Wild. Intuitive. Messy, quick, chaotic, uncareful. Completely stress free. Honestly not carrying if they reached their destination. I don’t explain this because I think it was such a brilliant or creatively inspired action, but that it was interesting how necessary it felt and how freeing it was to engage with the project in such a forgiving, unconcerned manner. It’s like I was attempting to overcome all the conflicted feelings of anxiety and stress that lowkey attaches itself to all forms of communication to me. The second guessing. The weighing of the sensitive and irking aspects of the relationship you are speaking to. Feeling compelled to be sensitive. Feeling compelled to feel bad and blocked by those things which divide us and which suddenly so saliently divide us. We are on different sides of a myth and now I understand that stories are everything. How we tell our stories to other people. How we expect other people to respond to our stories. How we shape and tweak our stories so that they will be more acceptable, interesting, appropriate, understandable, we simplify, we clarify, we contextualize, we obfuscate, we choose a perspective. How we define things becomes everything at some point.

Image tracking every INPUT someone received and then tracking every OUTPUT they produced. I feel like your could come up with some very interesting studies here. The amount of FOX news messaging that is run through my parents is remarkable. And I am not even trying to shit on the content. I am just saying that say things that I have never heard and in ways that I have never heard and with a certain tone that seems clear that they didn’t receive this input from a priest

11/03/2020

“ She was a part of my heart, but now she’s just a line on my face.” – Tom Petty

That alchemy of raising the lower to the higher. The personal to the universal… the universal to the personal. The specific to the general… the general to the specific. The abstract to the concrete. The concrete to the abstract.

I have had a hard time talking about these things because I haven’t know where the flow is. I haven’t know what I am trying to defend. I am trying to defend inchoateness and vague freedoms and possibility and acceptance and compassion.

05/22/2021

Back last August you confided in me that when they harvest yours eggs they had gotten there just in time as there were only 5 left. I had not known what to say to this or how to field your birght enthusiastic tone that was wrapped around this face. Wow. Whoa. That isn’t very many. Did I think this now or did this occur to me later that despite being a year older than her I still possessed the ability to produce millions of potential new lives every day. She was down to 5. Males— a surfeit of potency and a dearth of parental drive.

Emotional abuse from my mother.

She slapped me across the face in the Curtis lake house, something that she had never done before. The fact that she did it there, in front of family, to me so unnecessarily and out o the blue. I had called for a timeout Zach Morris style to something she had acussed me of and was attempting to clarify the misunderstanding and she hauled up and slapped me right across the face. The rage I felt in that moment was incredible. I think you lost me then. I felt so betrayed. Embarrassed. Crestfallen. 4th of July cousins bliss to seering rage and physical pain. I walked out of the cabin and found some pines to cry in.

Oxford England. Evensong at the big Christ Church. A pint at the Hobgoblin serving pint across the street. Before Branden’s car accident and Heidi’s suicide. Before Laura and Peter joined William and became Catholic and William disappeared into his video games and regular masses, keeping the Covenant Headquarters running in their plot by the O’Hare across the parking lot from a Hooters. And evensong was worth making it to, the choir sang the mass and it was the most meditative, uplifting, settling, religious experience of my life. Combine that with the easy, relaxed camaraderie and pints with my fellow attendees, and long, slow walks back to our basement, north from the city center up Woodstock Road. And we did not go every day, or even every week, by while we were studying there that was Church for me and that was the last time I regularly attended church and was excited and interested in attending church.

When my father and mother came to visit at the Christmas break when my program had ended when spent some time in London, Oxford and Wales. This would prove ironic since years later my younger sister Emily would a young Brit on-line from Oxford with Welsh roots. She married him and settled in Chalbury, the town in the Cotswolds my friends and I had taken our overnight trip. I remember it being a tiny town. It’s train stop and hostile and pub and open throughway filed networks were enough of a draw for us. We had a really nice time just wandering fields and having dinner at the Pub and going to bed at a wildly reasonable time for a group of college kids cause it was now so dark in the town and so quiet.

Mother had perhaps been going through menopause which I do not want to come off as partronizing, but I do want to raise extenuating factors when it comes to her stormy behavior on the visit. For the most part I think she did have a good time and we have a fine time, but there were a couple of episodes that were disturbing—she freaked out about dad questioning her about the price of a CD and ranted about how she went from her father’s house to her husband’s house and how she earns the money and she can spend it if she wanted to, etc. This all seemed very reasonable, it was just the rage, the outburst, why was she bottling this up? But then some where in her fowl mood she turned on the church and said something about wanting to go to a *real* church. A church that is warm and where people come and greet you and talk to you and ask you where you are from or something? I am not completely sure, but that is the sense I got. The Anglican church was too similar to the stodginess of your Catholic roots and it put you off? All I know is that at this point of being farthest from the religious experience of my youth but then having the sense that even this was not acceptable, authentic to my mother, this kind of broke me. I saw my parents as people. I loved them fully and deeper. I no longer felt obligated to continue reading the same books as them or attend the same meetings as them.

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

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

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

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

Years ago, before I had kids, I was once at a brunch get-together where I observed one of my friends, who was already the father of three, being a little short with one of his girls over some issue with a cup of orange juice or something. At the time I remember feeling kind of surprised at how impatient or even almost unkindly you were addressing your angelic little Tomte. Maybe, he’s having a particularly stressful day I had thought at the time. Now I realize he definitely was having at least a partially stressful day because, you know, he had children and he was likely not being mean to his child at all, but was, in fact, exerting incredible, if not saintlike-level patience, artfully teasing out and expanding just a bit more his 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 children are in essence sociopaths that adults have been charged with by fate to reform as penance for their own past, if not present, sociopathic behavior. Which is certainly not to say I would discourage people from having children, but just that if they did, they should, you know, brace themselves… for love.

Best,