

Cloud Pieces

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This book is a work of nonfiction. It reflects my present recollections of experiences over time. Some names and characteristics have been changed, some events have been compressed, and some dialogue has been recreated. I have tried to be as truthful and accurate as possible, but I acknowledge that memory is subjective and imperfect, and that others may have different perspectives or interpretations of the same events. This book is not intended to be a comprehensive or definitive account of my life or anyone else's. It is also not intended to provide any professional, medical, or legal advice. Any opinions expressed in this book are solely my own and do not necessarily reflect those of any other person or organization. This book may contain content that some readers may find disturbing or offensive. Reader discretion is advised.

ThePhoenixDesertsong.com

For my wife, Emily, for whom without none of this
would've been possible.

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Foreword

As I sat down to pen this foreword, I wanted to write something that intertwines deeply with Amelia's literary path. "Cloud Pieces," her latest literary offering, is more than just a book; it represents a mosaic of her thoughts, experiences, and reflections, artfully captured in her essays.

It seems like only yesterday when Amelia's first book, the poetry collection "Take My Hand And Lead Me Through The Fire," graced the bookshelves. Her poetry is a blend of fiery passion and delicate introspection. So, I wanted it to touch many other hearts the way that it touched mine. We worked relentlessly to create a collection that would serve as more than a mere greatest hits of her poems, but also offer a window into her soul. Now, with "Cloud Pieces," she invites us again into her written world, this time through a different lens.

This book is a precursor to something grander – her upcoming memoir series, "Life And Times." In "Cloud Pieces," you'll find the seeds of stories that will grow and continue to be explored in her autobiographical series. While she has opted to expand many of her existing essays into chapter-length features, these shorter essays, kept mostly as they were first written, offer a glimpse into the depths of her life's journey.

For those who have not yet followed her blog, ThePhoenixDesertsong.com, Amelia's voice will quickly become familiar yet refreshing. Her writing has always been a source of inspiration and comfort to many, myself included. Each essay in this book is a fragment of her soul that she has decided to bravely lay bare for the world to see.

Writing this preface for her landmark book is an honor and a responsibility I hold dear. As her wife, I have had the privilege of being by her side, witnessing the birth of many insightful sentences. I have seen her constantly wrestle with her thoughts, meticulously choosing the right words to convey her emotions properly and usefully. "Cloud Pieces" is a testament to her growth as a writer and as an individual since we met during the COVID Pandemic.

I invite you to join us on this introspective journey. We hope that you may find pieces of yourself in her stories, and that her words will resonate with your own experiences. Her very purpose for this book, as she's stated to me, is that she wants others to be inspired to explore the depths of your own life and times.

With love and admiration,
Emily Slatin (She/Her/Hers)

Introduction: Why I Wrote This Book

For three years now, I've been sorting out my writing archives to compile a book of essays. But because the topical umbrella of my written work is quite expansive, I wanted to start by publishing a few of my best short essays first. Rather than dump a complete collection of essays that I arbitrarily felt were worthy of being immortalized in print, I needed some sort of theme to tie together my first collection.

Just before the coming of spring in 2023, we had an unexpected snowfall here in Vermont. I said to my wife that "it's as if the clouds decided to shatter into billions of pieces without warning." That remark spawned a very short reflective piece titled *Cloud Pieces*, which I almost instantly latched onto for a book title.

It took me pretty much an entire year to actually come up with a list of essays deserving to be collected under such a moniker. Unlike my poetry collection, *Take My Hand and Lead Me Through the Fire*, I didn't want this to be an alphabetized list of a greatest hits from my archive. From the beginning I knew I wanted *Cloud Pieces* to showcase my shorter pieces, some not even reaching 500 words, while trying to cap inclusions at about 1200 words. Eventually I settled on about fifty pieces that fit this

criteria, but could also stand on their own as individual works.

Unfortunately, I struggled with how to actually organize these few dozen pieces in any logical way. Because they were never intended to serve any particular narrative, I didn't want to jam them together in some arbitrary fashion. Eventually I woke up early in the morning on a Monday and realized that the answer was quite simple. I needed to organize them by the four seasons. But, I wouldn't organize them purely on the season in which they occurred or were originally written — although these were factors in my final order. Rather I had to decide which pieces best fit thematically into winter, spring, summer, and autumn.

Cloud Pieces is meant as a precursor to my upcoming Life And Times series, essays put into an autobiographical context, many of which have been expanded into chapter-length features. So, these few dozen short essays were left relatively untouched, only edited for clarity, as each is a unique snowflake that I felt deserved to be recognized individually.

Collectively, I've mixed and matched them to tell a loose narrative of seasonal procession, following the seasons outside as well as inside. After all, even the hottest day of the year can be the coldest in your own heart and mind. Exploring the dissonance between the seasons of the internal and external

world was a major reason for me to compile this book in the first place. So, I hope that the fruits of this journey will be an enjoyable read for you as much as it was an eye-opening, soul-searching experience for me.

Some essays cover overlapping subjects, but approach them from wildly different angles. There are some bold statements contained in some of these works, and a few that I'm certain will offend some people. But there's no agenda here; these are simply things which I've thought about in depth and I'm just putting out there what weighs heavily on my mind. These are snapshots of my mental state across the past several years. It's a bit of a roller coaster, but that's what makes it interesting, especially when framed as a narrative reflecting a natural cycle of life, growth, death, and rebirth.

As such, I'll warn you that some of these pieces will be rough, some strong declarations of opinion and affirmations of self are peppered throughout. In many ways, this is meant as a cross-section of my own internal monologue. These were the pieces I was sure would fit nowhere else, and yet somehow found a home in a short collection of little essays that ultimately ended up as a motley crew of curiosities.

Enjoy, except where prohibited.

Winter

Cloud Pieces

It wasn't supposed to snow today at all. Yet here I stand in my living room in disbelief, watching shattered cloud pieces falling all around. The wintry winds, that were supposed to have warmed with the promise of spring, are scattering them randomly through the air, defying the forecast of a slightly above freezing cloudy day. They dance and twirl in a delicate, hypnotic ballet of white against the gray skies.

At times I can hear howling winds outside, whipping around the corners of my home and rattling the windows. It's as if Mother Nature decided to play a cruel joke on us all, teasing us with the promise of spring, only to pull the rug out from under us with sudden snowfall. It has been this way for the better part of two weeks now. Even well into March, the winter clearly has no plans to leave us just yet.

Sometimes the unexpected can be just as beautiful as anything we could have planned for, even if we don't at first realize it. Indeed, there's something beautiful about this consistent snowfall, something magical in the way the world transforms under its blanket of white.

The streets are hushed and peaceful, and the sounds of cars are muffled by the snow. The trees

and bushes, once bare and stark with the passage of winter, are now draped in delicate icicles, shimmering in whatever winter sunlight that breaks through the clouds.

Since the forecast hasn't predicted several straight days of flurries, I'm not sure how long this continued snowfall will last, or how much accumulation we'll see. Of course, there is nothing to be done but hang out here in the living room, watching the cloud pieces continue to fall all around me.

Breathing Through Corrupted Lungs

For two nights in a row, it became too chilly in the back bedroom for my damaged lungs to cope. As I lay in bed, I could feel the chill creeping in. At first, it was just a gentle caress of cool air against my skin. But as the night wore on, the cold grew stronger and more insistent, until it was impossible to ignore.

My damaged lungs were already struggling to keep up, and the cold only made things worse. Every breath felt like I was inhaling shards of ice, each one cutting deeper into my fragile respiratory system. I'm this way due to the cancer I suffered in my late twenties, which did a lot of damage; the necessary chemical treatments even moreso furthered the devastation. Damaged lungs were the worst of all the side effects; but, it was either suffer that fate or breathe no more.

I tried to ignore the discomfort, which I've felt so many times, to will myself to sleep; but these past couple of nights, it was no use to try. The chill was too intense and overwhelming. I pulled the blankets tighter around me, and even added my thermal blanket into the mix, but these covers offered little relief.

It wasn't just the temperature that was getting to me, though, but the darkness, too. The back bedroom where we sleep was shrouded in shadows. Without the white noise of my air purifier, beyond the occasional gust of a westerly wind, there would be a deafening silence. It was as if the entire world was holding its breath, waiting for something terrible to happen.

For two nights in a row, I would endure this icy purgatory. Each morning, I woke up exhausted, my lungs burning, and my body trembling with cold. It was a relief to leave that room, to step out into the warmth of the living room, the soft glow of my day-light lamp a welcome presence for my tired mind.

But as night fell again, I knew that I would have to face it once more. The chill was waiting for me, ready to pounce the moment I lay down. My damaged lungs were powerless to stop it.

As I lay shivering in my bed, struggling to catch my breath in the icy darkness, a line from a song floated through my mind. It was a song called "Youth" by Daughter. The line that kept repeating itself was this:

"And if you're still breathing, you're the lucky ones

'Cause most of us are heaving through corrupted lungs"

I'm particularly fond of this song, better known for the line "We are the reckless, we are the wild youth." It might seem like an odd association to make, given the context. After all, I was hardly feeling reckless or wild in that moment. But there was something about this song that resonated with me, something that captured the essence of what I was feeling.

There's a sense of vulnerability that comes with being young, a feeling that you're not quite sure of your place in the world, that you're not quite sure of yourself. That's exactly how I felt lying there in the cold, struggling to breathe. I felt small and helpless, at the mercy of forces beyond my control. But more importantly, I felt much too young to be suffering this way.

At the same time, the defiance of the song's lyrics helped me to power through the difficult night. It speaks of a willingness to embrace the unknown and to face whatever challenges lay ahead with a sense of fearlessness. This is the spirit I'd tap into as I lay there, battling the chill.

Through meditating over this song's lyrics, I felt like I was reclaiming some youthful energy, a sense of reckless abandon. Although my body was weak and vulnerable, my spirit was still strong. I wouldn't be

defeated by the cold and the darkness. I refused to give up.

As the night wore on, this song became a kind of mantra for me. It was a reminder that I'm still fairly young and still capable of facing the world with courage and determination. Even if my damaged lungs might hold me back at times, many of us, myself included, are still part of that wild youth. Until my dying breath, I'm still a part of that reckless collective consciousness that refuses to be tamed.

(Lyrics courtesy of Genius.)

ConvolutEd Dreamscapes

From the day I was born, I've been an avid dreamer. All through my childhood, I'd eagerly share my creative escapades with anyone who would listen. But, as time went on, I found myself retreating into a cocoon of silence, born out of the bitter disappointment and frustration of being misunderstood.

Dreams are deeply personal. They're a glimpse into the convoluted workings of our minds, offering a window into our innermost selves. Yet, I found every time I talked about my dreams, people would just laugh and make light of them. They'd dismiss them as frivolous, irrelevant, or downright weird. They clearly failed to grasp any significance from what I was saying, or worse, they didn't care to even try.

At first, I told myself they were just being playful, that they didn't mean anything by their apparent ignorance. But the more I shared my dreams, the more I realized that it wasn't just a passing jest. It was a pattern.

Eventually, I was encircled by a cycle of mockery and ignorance too unbearable that I simply retreated into the shadows. I was left to be isolated and alone in my uniqueness, refusing to conform to

anyone else's standards or expectations for who I should be and what I should do.

So, without even consciously realizing it, I stopped telling anyone about my dreams. I would share the intimate details of my subconscious only with my private journals and never with the world. The few times I did open up, it would end in a lost friendship. It was a lonely decision to become so private, but it was also a necessary one. My dreams are too precious to be treated with such callousness. They're a vital piece of my identity, and I couldn't bear to have them belittled any longer.

Yet, even in my silence, I'd still dream. Every night, my mind still spin intricate fables full of spontaneous thought, vivid color, and strong emotion. I would wake up feeling exhilarated, moved, and sometimes even shaken to my core by the convoluted dreamscapes I ventured through. But more often than not, they were nightmares.

Even when I had a relatively happy dream, as soon as I would awake, those positive feelings would melt away, replaced by despair. I couldn't share these experiences with anyone. I couldn't express the beauty and complexity of my dreams; although even some of the horrors could have their merits. Only I knew the way my dreams intertwined with my waking life, how they shaped my thoughts and actions

subconsciously, making me the person I was reluctantly becoming.

Over time, my choice to remain isolated from mockery and misunderstanding allowed me to discover a source of strength within myself. In my solitude, I developed resilience, borne out of the knowledge that I was living a life uniquely mine. My life would be governed by my dreams, hopes, fears, and passions, with my nightmares as warning signs for where I could end up if I failed to do so.

Even as the world closed in around me, weighing me down with negative reinforcement, I continued to dream. By night, I'd explore the labyrinth of my mind and plumb the depths of my subconscious to seek out hidden truths and insights. Even when I couldn't share these experiences with anyone, I knew that they were still the best part of me. These dreams were precious, unique, and meaningful, giving me a purpose by allowing me to have something to share.

One day, I knew I'd meet someone who would allow me to live the life of my dreams, one that was vibrant, complex, and deeply fulfilling. But even then, I knew that it would be someone just as lost as I was, and that our journey together may well be often lonely. This day did come for me, and here I am now. But, it was a difficult wait, waiting for someone to share my dreams with for every day forward.

Now, I finally get the chance to share them with you, dear readers. Knowing that I would get here some day, in the end, was enough to keep me going.

The Deepest Cuts of My Writing

The deepest cuts of my writing often emerge in the latest hours of the night. When they do, the inspiration slowly fades as dawn approaches. If this phase of inspired prose is left to wane without expression, it's lost forever. So, to force rest when there is none seemingly to be had is pointless, especially when images which defy explanation keep flashing before my eyes.

Many of these deep cuts are inevitably locked away in the myriad pages of my journal entries, often left to remain hidden from the world for years to come. Some of them contain great secrets, while others don't make sense just yet and perhaps never will. These deep cuts are where I lock away my most difficult memories and thoughts. I write about them just in the hopes they will leave me alone. Sometimes, the act of simply chronicling them does help my state of mind. Sometimes it just allows me to get sleep from the sheer exhaustion of relating such weighty remembrances.

After the writing of these deep cuts, I'm often rewarded by strange dreams full of bizarre twists and turns. I find myself wandering through labyrinths based on places I once roamed mixed with strange renderings of entirely imaginary settings. It's

reminiscent of a first-person shooter game with nonsensical level design. Rather than ascending the floors of massive castles or descending deeper into great winding dungeons or labyrinths, it's as if portals open and close at will into new areas, each entirely unrelated to the last.

In these dreams, my self-image is often distorted whenever I come across a reflective surface, and changes when I shift about, trying to see the subtle changes from different angles. At times, things seem much more compressed. But, at other times, they're stretched out, as if dimensions seem to be at odds with one another, just to keep my senses off balance.

The levels are more numerous than in any game I've ever played. There are dozens of concurrent stories to explore, each with new obstacles and foes at every turn. Over the course of decades, these dreams start to take on lives of their own, sometimes even becoming reflected in the fiction I'll occasionally write.

Sometimes I awake from these bizarre adventures in a cold sweat or with a panic attack, keeping me up at night for hours at a time. But if I write things down that are bothering me at the time, related to my nightmares or not, I do finally find my way back to a semi-restful state once again.

Upon waking, I almost never enjoy a true sense of calm or contentment that feels like it's going to stay beyond a fleeting moment. I wish that some day these nightmares will calm down and become more palatable, perhaps even to the point of entertaining. Perhaps simply trying to wish away these nightmares is unproductive. My mind has a lot to process, so without these overdramatized dream-states, I may instead awake with significantly less sanity each day.

At least now when I wake from these nightmares in a crazed state, I quickly realize that I'm safe. It certainly helps that I've finally found a place to forever call home. For much of my adult life, the idea of home seemed to be a mirage more often than not. But now, living on a vast property by the woods, I can go out on the back porch, look outside, and ground myself again.

Whenever I've had a bad night, it helps for me to hear the river run, because I know there are many little breaths who depend on the lifeblood it brings. As soon as I collect my wits, I typically set myself to writing down whatever comes to mind right away. I often catch my juiciest morsels as my mind is still awakening from my often tumultuous slumber.

While I certainly could keep most of it to myself, over time I came to realize that it made more sense to share at least a few of my more cogent cuts

with the world. Perhaps my words can bring a few drops of inspiration to some thirsty tongues to quench their thirst for curiosity. But, this for me is both wonderful and disheartening, as I know too many more souls remain dry and wanting for something fresh.

So, while my dreams in the night may often be beyond my control, my waking dream is to quench the thirst of all the souls that I can. It's quite possible that the deepest cuts of my writing will remain locked away until after my passing. Perhaps this is for the best, but that doesn't make them any less meaningful. After all, without digging through the pain and unlocking certain doors, who knows what wonders I may miss out on sharing?

Dry Mouth Musings

My muses were once models of perfection I could never hope to attain. But, of course, they were only as I wished to perceive them, and not truly as they were. They weren't so much objects of my own romantic desire, but rather various aspects of the object of desire I myself longed to be.

It pains me now that so many muses that I once considered to be important influences on my artistry turned out to be horribly flawed in some way. Often, it was due to possessing a certain kind of single-mindedness that spawned both creative genius and a sort of twisted morality simultaneously; now, it's practically impossible to reconcile one from the other. Others were geniuses of what seemed to be the innocent sort. That is, until you recognized that the colorful parts you enjoyed were but a veil to hide twisted desires. Those delightful parts were but distractions from the reality of the tortured and sick creature that created them, like some sort of camouflage to conceal acts of pure conceited evil.

I've stared Evil directly in the face more often than I'd care to share. Indeed, the line between Evil and Genius is much thinner and far less straight than people care to admit. Now, the muses I choose are a collection of tortured souls, for which I try to concoct

soothing remedies, if not hopeful for eventual cures of some degree.

This all sounds unhappy, but in the end, these sorts of muses are more alike than they first appear. Of course, appearances often deceive us. But, that's because we're often looking from the incorrect perspective. After all, it's our own perspective that makes each of us unique, and often frustratingly so misleads us if we're not careful.

For too long, I've been given notes both bitter and sweet with which to compose my life's soundtrack. The melodies and lyrics alike which have blossomed from them have grown more discordant with time. Once I was considered a budding poet, but I rapidly devolved into a brooding one. Then, I reemerged with a mixed bag of verses, many of which sounded more hopeful, but others that fell completely flat.

The reality is likely more positive than I'd admit, but the more I reflect on my verses, and much of my own writing in general, the more I don't like what I see in them. Perhaps that is why I have abandoned so many of my writings. It's not what they are, but rather what they represent: my own discontent with many aspects of myself. Perhaps, this is the constant truth of being a serious artist; it's a curse to remain ever unsatisfied with one's own work and contributions, especially

when beholden to a society that rarely has a true appreciation for your art.

Too often, I awake in the middle of the night or too early in the morning. I'll have a dry mouth and a muddled mixture of fragmented memories, faded dream-states, disjointed song lyrics and melodies, and more regrets than I care to count. Perhaps this is my version of what many artists of the written word refer to as the "writer's brain." My particular breed is immensely frustrating to me, but it's what I have to work with nonetheless.

Forgotten Homes And Untold Stories

In our time together, Emily and I have embarked upon several journeys along U.S. state highways. What we end up seeing along these often neglected byways leaves us feeling sorrowful and longing for the comfort and familiarity of home. These trips often unveil the remnants of bygone eras, countless abandoned houses standing as eerie witnesses to lives once lived.

As we whizz past them at highway speeds, my overactive and curious mind can't help but ponder about the people who once inhabited these forsaken homes. My imagination struggles to guess at the stories that have now been lost to the sands of time. These dilapidated structures are reminiscent of an untold history, hidden behind the peeling paint and crumbling walls, waiting for someone to listen.

Abandoned houses are enigmatic structures. Whether they're overgrown with foliage or still barely standing upright on their foundations, they draw in our wonderment with an inexplicable magnetism. The eerie silence they exude captures our imagination, sparking a curious desire to know more about the lives that once thrived within those walls.

These abandoned homes serve as a reminder of our own mortality, old testaments to the fragility of life itself. They are bleak reminders that everything we hold dear, everything we build, and everything we love, will one day be forgotten in time. They remind us to cherish the moments we have with our loved ones, to hold tightly onto our memories, and to make the most of the time we have.

Sadly, most passersby overlook these abandoned homes, especially when they've been vacant for many years. This is in spite of the fact that clearly these houses were once homes to families and individuals within thriving communities, each with their own unique experiences and memories. Who knows now what events caused these homes to be abandoned and forgotten? These are stories that may never be told, and I have to learn to live with this sad truth.

Perhaps, one day, civic or domestic historians will attempt to craft a narrative of the people who lived in these rotting shells of residences, reimagining their dreams, struggles, and aspirations. What conversations took place around their dinner tables? What secrets were whispered in their bedrooms? What joys and sorrows were experienced within these walls? Of course, most of these stories, at least in their truest forms, will likely remain untold, buried beneath the weight of Nature's reclamation.

As the years pass, the memories of those who once lived in these abandoned homes fade away, like the paint that chips off their walls. Once vibrant and bustling abodes are now reduced to crumbling, desolate husks. The laughter, tears, and intimate moments that once filled the air are now replaced by eerie silence, echoing the forgotten history of the people who once lived there.

The reasons that drive people to abandon their homes are as varied as the lives they leave behind. Some may have left in search of greener pastures or better opportunities. Sadly, many others could have been forced to flee due to natural disasters or economic hardships. Most tragically, it could've been the death of a loved one that made the house too difficult to stay in, because of the memories constantly being relived.

Within every story that remains hidden, there's a rich reservoir of human experience that could teach us invaluable lessons about resilience, hope, and the fleeting nature of our existence. Whatever the reason may be for their abandonment, it's clear that these houses once held a significant place in someone's life. So, it took something substantial to leave them in this state.

As the stories of these forgotten homes remain untold, they become part of an ever-growing repository of obscure history. The longer these stories

remain buried, the more difficult it becomes to uncover the truth behind the lives that once filled those empty rooms. While many of these stories may be forever lost to time, it's essential to appreciate their existence nonetheless. This is why Emily and I photograph them, so we can honor the past and the memories of those who came before us, ensuring that their stories aren't entirely forgotten.

Of Past Lives I Ponder

I've often pondered about past lives, wondering if my more fantastic dream states are based in some distant truth. Are they some sort of flashbacks from a life my soul lived thousands of years ago? We all live many lives through our dreams, whether they are merely constructs which our unconscious creates for dreamers to explore, or distant reflections of actual possibilities. I daresay some are even meant to remind us of past lives. These are echoes of the stardust that makes up each of us, but what it makes up now was a part of another being at one very distant time.

I believe our worldly bodies to exist simply as vessels for our eternal souls. My own spiritual journeys have proven this to be true, whether our or not our souls truly begin their journey in this world as we know it to be. I feel that many dreams are messages from the collective unconscious of the greater universe attempting to teach us what we need when we one day shed our mortal coil. Of course, the life we know now may be one of many in an endless series of coils which we must gain, toil with, then shed.

Perhaps, this thing we know as humanity is but one link in an infinitely long never-ending progression. At this point, we are so far along that to be able to look

back far enough is an impossibility for most of us. This may all sound like utter nonsense to those who are strictly tied to a particular religion or belief system. Still, I believe it's worth exploring these impressions that I've gained over my decades wandering through this often beautiful, yet sometimes terrifying world.

Does a grand plan exist, or are we merely slaves to fate? I've always believed in the foundation of one's own choices. We must understand, however, that even the smallest choices can have ripple effects we can't possibly comprehend, nor predict with utter certainty when we make them. The general advice is to look before you leap.

However, I have spent far too much time looking, while concurrently letting potential adventures pass me by, as the hesitation leaves me feeling sad and unfulfilled. Perhaps my very recollection of my more spectacular dream states means I need to do a bit more leaping than mere looking.

At this point in my life, I'm ready to leap forward, especially when it comes to sharing my deepest and innermost desires and reflections. I've held back for far too long, partly in fear of the judgment of others or backlash from those who are ignorant or selfish enough to try and tear me down for their own amusement. Most often, the calls for my destruction are out of some duty to their deity or system of beliefs.

Human beings have a tendency to worship something, whether they believe it or not, even if that is their own selves. I'd much rather worship what I believe to be the greater good, the positive forces that may not always be obvious, but are always at work nonetheless. Whether you call that Force God or whatnot, there is something out there greater than ourselves. We must work to aid those who do good works and spread the freedom to express our true selves without fear of judgment or retaliation.

These ideas could be wrong, or worse yet, the insignificant ramblings of a manic lunatic, or just an innocent product of wishful thinking. The words stand as but symbols that best define this observer's perspective. All we truly know is what we have before us today, but that doesn't mean we should discount the possibilities of past lives that informed our very existence today.

The Lost Lamb of the Middle Class

Once I wandered down a crooked path in the twilight of mediocrity, as I tired of sauntering along the gilded seams of that hallowed chasm between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. For much of my life I found myself a disgruntled denizen of the land of suburban purgatory: the Middle Class.

I led a phantasmal existence as the Lost Lamb of this societal pasture. My journey through this convoluted realm was a veritable mixed bag of wonders, pitfalls, and revelations that left me suspended in a perpetual state of insignificance.

As an enigmatic Lamb, I traversed the verdant lawns of manicured estates, each one a carbon copy of its neighbor, as if stamped from the assembly line of the American Dream itself. I witnessed the afternoon parades of minivans and crossovers transporting their precious cargo of well-adjusted children to soccer games and piano recitals, exuding an air of genteel conformity.

In the temples of capitalism we call shopping centers, I marveled at the cacophony of consumerism. Laughter, sobs, and the rustle of shopping bags permeated the atmosphere, while the scent of soft pretzels and the bitter perfume of credit card debt

mingled in an intoxicating concoction. There amid the gleaming altars to the Free Market economy, for just a fleeting moment, I tasted the sweet ambrosia of material satisfaction, only for it to vanish like a sugar-spun dream.

At time-honored gatherings of the Middle Class, I felt like a complete stranger. I stood bewildered in the corner, as I viewed social butterflies dancing beneath shimmering streamers and twinkling fairy lights. As the evenings unfolded, dirty little secrets were spilled and inhibitions shed like the leaves of an autumnal tree, further emboldened by the sweet nectar of boxed wine.

Eventually, last call came and designated drivers ushered their inebriated peers to their rides home. Some continued to ramble on, mostly unaware of how foolish they would look and sound. Yet, many more were suddenly hushed by the somber realization that Monday morning's harsh sunlight would pierce their revelry, banishing us back to the drudgery of our daily lives.

During my pilgrimage as the Lost Lamb, I sought solace in the sepulchral embrace of the office cubicle. In this confining cage of ambition, I was lulled into complacency by the siren song of mediocrity. The days bled into weeks, months, years, their passage marked only by the gentle crescendo of the retirement account and the changing of the seasons.

Still, amid the banality, there existed moments of transcendent beauty. I found solace in the beauty of an evening sunset's fiery hues, the whispered secrets shared between kindred spirits, and the amusements of my youth fermenting into a comfortable elixir of nostalgia. Like a lone star in the ebony expanse of the cosmos, these fleeting moments guided me through the murky waters of uncertainty, leading me ever closer to the elusive shores of self-discovery.

Alas, I was the Lost Lamb of the Middle Class, a creature of paradox, both entranced and repelled by the trappings of a life teetering precariously between comfort and tedium. But today, inspired by a line from Allen Ginsberg's "Footnote to Howl," I found the phrase to best describe my role in that long stretch of wandering years.

So, dear reader, as you wander through your own Life's maze, know that you are not alone, for there is always a Lost Lamb who walks beside you.

Reflecting On A Bitter Vermont Winter

As the land of maple syrup, Bernie Sanders, and picturesque fall foliage, Vermont has always been a feast for the senses. But come winter, this idyllic haven undergoes a frosty metamorphosis, transforming into a white wasteland where even the bravest souls are tested. During this icy exile, an armchair philosopher like myself can't help but be drawn inward, to ruminate on the deeper questions of existence and the meaning of life.

With its frigid winds and blankets of snow, the bitter Vermont winter brings a sense of gloom and foreboding. The sky is often leaden and heavy, as if reflecting the weight of one's thoughts and emotions. Under such conditions, I get a sort of existential frostbite.

At first, the sight of snowflakes gently descending from the sky reminds me of the transience of all things. The gentle snowfall invokes the innocence of childhood memories: snowball fights, sledding down hills, and the sweet aroma of hot cocoa. But, the pristine blanket that covers the earth is soon to be trampled and muddied, a symbol of the fleeting nature of our time here on earth.

By the time January staggers in, and the snow resembles gray porridge more than a winter wonderland, one begins to feel like the protagonist in

a Dostoevsky novel, trapped in a bleak narrative with no end in sight. Yet, amidst the bleakness of the winter, there's a stark beauty that can't be ignored. The crisp crunch of snow underfoot, the delicate frost on windows, the play of light and shadow on the drifts — all these sensory experiences serve to stir our souls.

Still, as I stare out my windows at this bleak landscape while I write, I find my mind is free to wander and consider the mysteries of existence. What is the purpose of our lives? What happens to us after we leave this world? These are questions that have plagued philosophers and sages since the beginning of time. Of course, they are no less relevant today, especially as career paths and finding purpose in one's life becomes ever more complicated and baffling.

I've always found it curious how frigid temperatures and towering snowbanks can turn even the most jovial of us into contemplative philosophers. Perhaps it's the confinement, the perpetual darkness, or the way your breath seems to freeze in mid-air. In any case, Vermont's winter makes Sartre's "No Exit" feel like a sunny day in the park.

As I trudge through the snow, battling against the icy winds to get out to my truck, it's easy for me to feel small and insignificant. But, perhaps it's in these moments of despair that we each are most able to grasp the truth of life. In the face of such overwhelming forces, I'm forced to confront my own mortality and fragility. It's then that we can begin to understand the importance of living each moment to

the fullest, cherishing the people and experiences that bring us joy.

I think back to when I was a child with two of my friends in the front yard, trying to distract myself from the encroaching existential dread by building a snowman. But, as I rolled its morose body and placed coal eyes upon its drooping face, it seemed to whisper to me: "Remember on the next sunny day I'll slowly and painfully melt away."

Vermont's winters have a sneaky way of turning everyday tasks into deep philosophical inquiries. Shoveling snow from the driveway isn't just a chore; it's a real-life enactment of the Sisyphean myth. Each morning, you clear the path, then by evening, nature undoes your work, leaving you to start afresh the next day. Is it a cruel joke played upon us Vermonters by the universe, or rather meant to be a lesson in persistence? Who's to say?

The ceaseless cold makes my bones ache, but it's my mind that most feels the chill. Each frosted window pane seems like a gateway into the void of the unknown, making me question if anything I do matters in the grand scheme of things. Should I continue to trudge through the snow or simply surrender to the whims of the winter winds?

But then, just when it seems that the weight of the world (and the snow) will crush my spirit, a glimmer of hope pierces through the gloom. When the winter solstice arrives, days begin to lengthen, and the sun starts to peek out from behind the clouds. Eventually, as the sun rises a bit earlier every

morning, I become aware once again that the world will awaken from its slumber; spring is on the horizon.

Suddenly, amidst the melting icicles and budding flowers, the meaning of it all becomes clear: Vermont's bitter winter, with all its introspection and existential angst, is but a phase. It's a necessary contrast that allows us to truly appreciate the warmth and beauty of life.

So, as I bid adieu to another Vermont winter, I'm grateful for the lessons each new bitter year-end season imparts. While I'll never have all the answers I seek, I gain a new appreciation for the questions I have.

I let the bitter Vermont winter serve as a reminder that it's only in the face of adversity that we find the inner strength to carry on. Only in the midst of darkness do we find the light of hope and meaning. After all, without the bitterness, how would we ever savor the sweetness of the days to come?

Thank You, Darkness, My Old Friend

For many years, the darkness truly was my best friend. In the light, I was often judged unfairly. But, in the late hours obscured by darkness, I felt much more free. With many sleepless nights powered on little more than junk food, I made the most of my insomnia. I used this time to figure out who I really was and who I could be if given the chance.

I often read about how many successful people rarely even sleep. I figure it's much for the same reason I couldn't get rest most nights during my adolescent years and young adulthood: my mind never stopped going, even when I desperately wanted it to. Most of my serious writing was done in the dark, the things that really mattered.

In the darkness, I found cover to hone my creative skills. I came to better understand my limitations and how many of them were self-imposed. I was years in the making crafting the self-image that you see me beginning to realize just now.

For me, the darkness became like my cocoon. While I feel as if I've emerged more of a drab yet functional moth than a stunning and colorful butterfly,

perhaps I'm more akin to an ugly duckling destined to morph into a lovely swan.

It's possible that I could yet become exactly what I intended, yet never see it for myself through my distorted self-perspective. It doesn't help that I've been plagued by years of self-doubt. Every time I tried to make my own way, I was tormented by decades of slander and verbal & emotional abuse from people I thought had my best interests in mind. Still, the darkness always gave me an opportunity to patch myself up, however sloppy those patches may have been.

There are many internal scars that continue to be sore spots for me. These were cut so deep due to moments from my past that could have taken me from this world that I can't get out of my head some days. Yet, the darkness gave me just enough cover to learn how and train me to fight another day.

Thank you, darkness, my old friend. Perhaps now I can finally learn to live in the light. Thanks to meeting the love of my life, that is now truly possible.

When I Remember Too Much

At love, I've often been a failure. It's a cruel irony that perhaps the greatest gift of all is often the most rejected. Even more cruelly ironic is that Love is often used as the best excuse we have for doing evil deeds. Love is often what leads us to lie, to cheat, to deceive, and to suffer.

I'm not innocent. I'm quite guilty of stoking false fires and telling petty lies just to get a little comfort for myself in a trying time. At one point in my young adult life, I felt I'd be fibbing away forever for the rest of my days. True happiness seemed just a concept I'd never realize, floating away into the aether.

The use of lies as a bonding agent is all too common, and it's sometimes even considered socially permissible, if the reward seems good enough to justify them. Some people seem to have golden tongues, speaking just the right words, false as they may be. But, when said to the right people, they have a hypnotizing effect, leading to nights we'll never forget, as much as we wish we could.

Even when we do fall in love, with the passage of Time, we sometimes forget what it was all about. It's much too late when we end up remembering too

much how we got to the point where passion overcame thought, captured our convictions; then in too short a time, it would leave us out to dry, aching and thirsting for the bliss we thought would last indefinitely. It doesn't matter how or why things went wrong, because most often the answer is that they were never meant to be at all.

I've known more than a few lovers who have a golden touch. Sometimes that touch lasts for years at a time. It took me much too long to figure out that it wasn't me, it wasn't her, and for some of you, it may not be him. For me, there's no doubt that she once knew Love, but over time she became little more than Lust taking on an angelic shroud, corrupting and subverting the beauty of unbridled joy into little more than an animalistic drive for mating.

We, as reasonable beings, should be able to derive one another's unique place in the realm of humankind from this connection. We shouldn't just be seeking another way to derive some basic pleasure from the warmth and connection with another wandering soul.

In this world where we're each pressured to find our own little niche, we're always seeking out someone with a peculiar specialty, that special one who knows how to love us just right. When the dark falls, we fear of being alone, needing someone beside us to love us in the darkness, both outside and within.

It doesn't matter if the passion we share is really for one another; oftentimes what we mistake as Love is simply a sense of accomplishment that we managed to spend one more night without the bitter chill of lonely idleness, which too often joins our uncomfortable times of solitude.

My bite has never been a match for my bark; perhaps this is why I seemed to never make quite the right connection with those whom I was attracted to, as they clearly didn't share my interest. Many of them were quite unafraid to vocalize their disgust with my interest, and at times, very presence. While I would eventually find what we often think of as "The One," it took decades of my heart breaking into smaller, finer fragments that required some powerful bonding agents, not lies, but convictions, to make my vital organs functional again.

Even when I was first convinced I had found True Love, it took me the course of a couple calendar years to realize I was a victim of a well-played subterfuge. I would stay up all night asking myself how I could have been so foolish. I kept wondering where I failed, what I couldn't provide. As the one I thought I'd spent the rest of my life with strayed, for too long I stayed. But, I knew for sure we would never be level with one another again.

I will never forget that betrayal, and it took me the better part of two years to come to terms with strong feelings of abandonment, anger, hatred, and jealousy. More recently, the sum of these feelings transformed into a calm, but omnipresent bitterness towards almost every person I once cared for, thanks to being so thoughtlessly spurned.

While I will never forget the parting calls of those who claimed to care for me, I know now they were all lies. I'm most fortunate to have now found a true, loving, caring soul, but I know this is untrue for too many of you reading this. There's no salve for the wounds or crutches sturdy enough to keep me standing tall. I'll just keep on thinking and remembering too much, ad infinitum. Indeed, some lies become our truth, whether we like it or not.

Winter's Last Breath

With the coming of the vernal equinox, I stand on the precipice of change. Yet, even as we welcome the promises of springtime, I still find myself with one foot in the frosty embrace of winter, even as the other is poised to step into the budding cradle of spring.

A muted gray sky bears witness to the final hallowed hours of the season I've come to know so intimately. This morning, the sun is a shy, flickering ember, peeking out from behind the clouds. It's as if he's saying a timid farewell to the icy landscapes that have long awaited the kiss of a warmer breeze.

I venture forth in the outdoors, bundled in layers that have served as my loyal armor against the wintry onslaught. My breath is like a vaporous wraith, dancing upon the frigid air, twirling and spinning in a delicate duet with the last vestiges of the cold. The ground beneath me crunches and crackles, its way of mourning the impending departure of its frozen blanket.

I peer into the slumbering woods, seeing that the forest's denizens seem to sense the coming metamorphosis hovering on the horizon. Squirrels flick about their bushy tails with exuberance, chattering spiritedly in the branches above. A lone cardinal, resplendent in its fiery plumage, serenades

the landscape with its melodious trills, a valiant herald of the impending shift in tone and setting.

As the ever-faithful harbingers of change, the northerly winds soften their icy whispers into tender caresses, gently ruffling the furled buds that adorn the boughs of the trees. The rivers and streams surrounding our property, once forbidding chains of frozen beauty, begin to shed their icy shackles. The rushing waters, for months buried beneath layers of ice, now cascade with renewed vigor, as if eager to embrace the warmth of the world soon to be reborn.

Our world teeters on the edge of a grand transformation, and I hope that I'll be a part of this natural trend. These past few days, the final vestiges of winter's frost-kissed grip are being pried away, leaving only fond memories of snow-laden evenings and ice-cold mornings. Tomorrow morning, with the coming of a new season, I'll awaken in a world that has shed its wintry cloak, revealing the vibrant promises of a fresh season.

As the sun sets on the final day of winter, the air still tinged with a lingering chill, breathing a sigh of farewell. But, even the bitterest cold must yield to the promise of warmer days, an acknowledgment of Time's relentless march forward. As the twilight fades into the abyss of night, I know that when dawn breaks, we'll welcome the herald of new beginnings, embraced by the warm, breezy arms of spring.

Spring

The Cloud Walker

I've always wanted to fly high above the sky, despite my overwhelming fear of flying. I remember a childhood dream of being a "Cloud Walker," a being who could leap from literally cloud to cloud, then ride them wherever the winds took them. While I could never actually transform into such a being, it's certainly fun to dream about, and perhaps even more enjoyable to write about.

I do recall that in these skies reigned strange and wonderful equine-like beings known as the Equiis. They lived in epic sky palaces, obscured by cloud cover. In this dreamworld, it was the greatest honor ever to be invited to even see the exterior of these palaces. The Cloud Walker did indeed land upon the outskirts of one of these palaces only to have an army of pegasi swoop down upon the adventurous sprite. She managed to dodge their attacks, which came from many angles. Somehow, I can't remember how, she managed to catch one by the wing, and refused to let go.

After a terrifying and dizzying ordeal of the Pegasi sky soldier trying to shake her, the world went dark for the Cloud Walker. When she awoke, not only did she discover she hadn't free fallen to her death to the earth below, but that she was, in fact, inside one of those great sky palaces. I don't recall exactly what

happened after that, except that the Cloud Walker thereafter became a privileged ally of the Equiis. No longer would they be on guard for her as a potential threat. They would even assist the Cloud Walker in her exploration of the skies, both blue and black, calm and stormy, thick and thin.

Why I've never written about this dreamland experience before eludes me, although there are many dreams I've neglected to write about over time. The free spirit of the Cloud Walker impresses me, and I long have felt the deep desire to be much like her, wholly unafraid to take a leap that could lead to an endless free fall into the depths of hell reserved for the patently foolish. Yet, even when she did free-fall, something always broke her fall, in sometimes rather painful and awkward ways. But, the Cloud Walker lived to leap another day.

I must be more like the Cloud Walker, and rise above the common concerns, worries, and fears of the earthbound. This includes no longer giving into aimless rambling and fruitless competitions meant to distract and deceive us from pursuing useful things. We must all be more like this, as when things appear hopeless, any barriers we may perceive are but constructs meant to keep us tied to the limitations of our physical mortality. We are so much more. There is a part of each of us which is eternal, even if we don't want to believe it; too much I've seen, heard, and felt proves it to be true.

There's more out there beyond our tactile senses. Only our minds, our dedication to creativity and exploration of the unknown, can help us find out our true destinies, to break the shackles of ignorance and ascend to a greater level of understanding. It's there for all of us to pursue, and even soaking in a few rays of a greater light of inspiration could do wonders for each and every one of us.

Are you ready to make a leap forward? Perhaps, that isn't the right question. It's likely none of us are ever ready for what awaits us.

But, unless you pursue adventure for its own sake, to live boldly is far better than to live your life waiting for the right chance, which may never even come or you may not even recognize it when it does. So, if you see a chance to leap towards a great light, you shouldn't ever let fear or judgment hold you back. That's what the dream of the Cloud Walker says to me.

Creativity Comes From Within

Creativity is a journey requiring us to delve down into the very core of our soul. This quest doesn't begin in the outer world, but rather within the inner world of our own imaginations. Seeking creativity involves an inner exploration demanding courage, determination, the cultivating of spiritual depth, and an unwavering commitment to creating our best selves.

The human imagination remains a place steeped in mystery. It can lead us to unknown, uncharted territories of knowledge and self-discovery. Our imaginations are where we first encounter our deepest fears, explore our most profound desires, and reach for our greatest aspirations. Exploring the reaches of our imaginations isn't for the faint of heart; it requires that we face our own demons and confront parts of ourselves we'd rather keep hidden from the world.

For those who dare to embark on this journey, the rewards are boundless. Only within the inner world of our imagination can we unlock the full extent of our creative potential. It's from this internal wellspring that we open the door to a realm of limitless possibilities, where anything can be conceived of and brought to life. Here we can find the

freedom to wander among the wildflowers of our dreams, and to be filled with wonder and awe.

As we venture deeper into the inner world of our imagination, we start understanding that creativity isn't just a process, but a way of being. Harnessing our creative potential becomes a way of life, one which encourages us to embrace our own uniqueness and to celebrate the fact that we're all born with an innate capacity for creativity. Creativity isn't solely about making things, but about making meaning. Through this process of original creation, we give voice to our deepest fears and desires, and bring to life the stories that we were born to tell.

Unique as our individual creative journeys may be, every one is a perpetual inward voyage, where the source of our inspiration and power resides. Only in this way can we unearth the truth about who we are and discover what we're truly capable of achieving. By tapping into our innermost selves, we can find the courage to be authentic and share our individual gifts with the world.

So, if you're feeling lost and searching for meaning in your life, I invite you to step into the vast realm of your imagination. Allow yourself to be inspired by the boundless possibilities that lie within the depths of your mind. Perhaps you will discover the answers you seek.

Once you've discovered your creative calling, you must then reach out and share what you've learned. It may be through words, or art, or taking action to channel your efforts into tangible, practical outcomes. If you're feeling bored, tired, or frustrated, take part in creative pursuits with actionable goals that allow you both recreation and fulfillment.

Remember, while the creative journey begins from within, its impact can resonate far beyond the boundaries of our own lives. External influences and collaborative efforts should serve as catalysts, fanning the flames of your creativity. Don't let potential counterarguments or limitations set by others stifle you. Instead, use what others may see as obstacles as walls of a maze that you must navigate with patience and determination.

Whenever you feel yourself faltering, keep in mind that the creative spark itself originates from within each of us. Embrace the voyage, nurture your imagination, and unleash the creativity that awaits your call. Your unique voice, once unleashed, has the power to shape the world and inspire those around you.

Dreaming Of An Endless Space

There she sits, dreaming up names for her heroes and heroines, her villains, and her trusty steed, or car, or spaceship. She dreams of an endless space, full of wonders, delights, and dangers she can't yet fathom. The train that is her imagination has not yet departed for such reaches, frontiers, and fantastic outer spaces yet unknown.

The reality she lives in so often bores her hyperactive mind, causing her to drift through space and time as an observer of life's not-so-obvious nuances. Perhaps, though, those nuances are only in her mind. You could call her perspective fresh and unusual; yet, she feels anything she comes up with in trying to convey her observations is nothing but trite and pedestrian ramble.

But, rather than being caught in a never-ending cycle of frustration and disappointment, it becomes a much better option for her to dream of outer space. She sets off on an endless journey of discovery within the limitless confines of imagination. That vast frontier beyond the stars and planets has myriad possibilities. After all, our imaginations can carry us only so far on their silver trains to distant places we can barely comprehend.

Like many kids, my imagination was active. But mine, in particular, was on overdrive. I spent endless hours playing in my room, creating vivid and fantastical worlds out of everyday objects, like my blankets and stuffed animals. My imaginary worlds were at once exciting and terrifying; they provided me with a wealth of experiences I could never have in real life. As I grew, I realized the only way for me to share these adventures with others was to put them in writing.

But, for whatever reason, I struggled to put my vast imaginary universe in writing into any form I deem acceptable. Even if I don't become successful at becoming a world-renowned science fiction author, that doesn't mean my imagination will ever slow down. If anything, sometimes my imagination acts as a way to foresee possibilities by exploring other potential universes that could exist. This is a talent that has gotten me out of more than a few tight scrapes in my topsy-turvy life.

There's something magical and mysterious about getting to write your own universe from scratch. Yet, in trying to write my own space stories, they end up feeling derivative. Nowadays, I focus less on the exploration of endless imaginary spaces outside of our own world; instead, I try to bring my focus back to earth for just a bit. Still, it's possible I simply should let my imagination out of its cage a bit more. I need it to

let it roam free, creating strange new worlds like I did when I was young. The trouble was that while I myself started small, my worlds never did.

Where will this journey end? The short answer is no one knows. But, like all good journeys, it's only exciting if you don't know where you're going. So, ask yourself: Where do you want to go? What do you want to learn? How do you want to grow? Don't focus on your destination; after all, in space, there's both nothing and everything to see all at once.

Easternmost

In spring, with snow still on the Downeast Maine ground, I pay a visit to the easternmost city in the entire nation. To go any further would mean giving myself up to the ocean. So many memories revolve around this general area, as just a few dozen miles north is where my family spent many years straight on vacation. Only a dozen miles further north lies the border of our northern neighbors.

Why would I return after a dozen years to this place? Besides the obvious point of being easternmost in my own country, it's as if the Atlantic herself is beckoning me to cast my past doubts, fears, and regrets upon her vast expanse. Just a couple of years ago, I may have cast myself to her cares, too.

I know full well I'm not the same person I was when I last visited this part of Downeast Maine. At that time in my life, I was in between universities, unsure of the direction of not just my academic life, but that of my very existence. I am married now, happily, and my very nature is much more evolved. I now chose to stand upon the Eastport pier, just to get a bit of rarefied perspective.

From my vantage point at the pier's edge, I recognize the Atlantic is still as mighty as ever, perhaps even more so with the melting of the ice caps

several hundred miles north. I feel the emotions coming up my throat, as if I need to vomit the disgust I've stored up within myself. Much of the bile revolves around how so much of my life was wasted on those who I gave too many chances, many of whom likely didn't deserve my cares and attentions at all.

I peer upon the salty bay and ponder its very properties. Such is the beauty of water. It's both cleansing and destructive, reflective yet opaque. I know full well this is the sort of water that will not quench my thirst; it's the very uncaring expanse, the bleeding edge which slowly laps against the concrete wall atop on which I stand, that leaves me in awe of just how small my own concerns truly are. The machinations of my unconscious have brought me back here time and again, but only now do I truly comprehend the reasoning.

The easternmost edge of my own time on this magnificent blue marble creeps closer with each ticking second of my internal clock. The horizon grows nearer, ever so slowly. But certainly, yet even the most minutely tuned time lapse will not be sufficient to make any meaningful observations. I must remind myself of these inevitabilities, lest I forget my own mortality is precious and wonderful. So, I must strive to make the most of it.

My tears carry a bit of the salt within me back into the Atlantic's embrace as they drop into the bay.

Along with them comes at least some fraction of the pain I've bottled up over decades. As much as some would say these tears not cried harden our resolve, I find that they simply leave a bitter flavor behind, masking whatever shining lights may have visited me in yesteryear. The less salty, the less bitter I can make myself, the better.

So, I make the most of my short time here, and this scene will remain in my mind for years to come. It will remind me, for all that changes with the machinations of human society, the ocean will remain. It's a stark reminder that we are little more than fishes whose ancestors grew legs and took to the dry land seeking new adventures. I am but a single fish, cast aside from the school for not keeping in perfect formation. Fortunately for me, I finally found another lonely creature who proved herself deserving of my attention and cares.

It's a bittersweet reflection, standing where I hadn't for so many years, only to realize that part of me never left. Now I retrieve what little scraps were left behind, finally feeling just a little bit more complete, and a tiny bit wiser to my own condition.

Floating Away On A Melody

In the corner of my mind stands a grand piano. It's an elegant behemoth of polished wood and gleaming keys, beckoning me with a siren's call. It sits there, patiently waiting for me, its strings humming softly in anticipation of the music that's yet to come.

Sometimes, when the weight of the world becomes too much to bear, I will heed that call. I close my eyes and make my way to that corner of my mind. I'll imagine sitting down at the piano's bench. My fingers hover over the keys, my own hesitation making them shiver with anticipation.

Eventually, I move myself to playing simple pieces I learned in my youth. As the notes spill forth, something magical happens. The worries and stresses of my life begin to fade away, replaced by the simple joy of music. I then allow myself to float away on the melody.

I'm no virtuoso, and I would never pretend to be. But, these simple songs take me back to a time when my fingers were more nimble and my mind less cluttered. As I play them now, those old melodies take on new life, becoming something more than mere notes on a page. They emerge from muscle

memories, hidden deep within the recesses of my weary mind.

As I play, I feel myself lifted away on the wings of the music, soaring over mountains and valleys, through forests and fields. It's as if the piano is a portal to other worlds, distant realms where the cares of this world simply don't exist.

Yet, paradoxically, as I play, I'm also grounded. The piano's massive frame anchors me to the here and now, reminding me that while the music may transport me, I'm still firmly rooted in this world.

What is it about the piano, in particular, that has such a hold on me? Perhaps it's the sheer depth of its sound, the way it can evoke such a range of emotions with just a few well-placed notes. Perhaps it's the physicality of it, the way my fingers dance across the keys, and how my body sways with the rhythm of the music and makes it come alive.

Whatever the reasons, I'm grateful for this grand piano forever sitting in the corner of my mind. It patiently waits for me to come and play whenever I feel the urge. When I do, I'm transported to a world of beauty and joy, where the troubles of this world simply fade away.

Future Forms

When I was in high school, I was shackled by the fetters of preordained forms, what I've come to know as the tyranny of literary expectation. The realm of written expression is nebulous enough as it is. So, to force my personal thoughts to fit within simplistic cookie-cutter molds seemed a major disservice to both myself as the writer and to the reader.

By letting my words speak for themselves, I'm allowing my thoughts and emotions to transcend conventional structures. I want them to find their own forms through their marriage to the words. For me, the pen is no longer a mere instrument of communication; rather, with great practice and skill, it becomes a wand of transmutation. The craft of writing becomes more akin to alchemy, transmuting raw commonplace elements of thought and emotion into dazzling spectacles of literary gold.

Our world requires a renaissance of the soul and an emancipation of our creative spirit to realize a revolution in the way we perceive the written word. Too many writers remain confined to the limits of established forms, when the possibilities truly stretch out into the infinite when we allow our language to be unbound. Good writing is that which can ride the thermals of change and uncertainty, free to explore the vast expanse of possibility.

Free to pursue a brand new chapter in my life in my mid-thirties, a spiritual metamorphosis has set me adrift on a voyage towards uncharted territories. I'm charting new lands where the tempestuous winds of inspiration blow with wild abandon. Yet, even given opportunities beyond my wildest dreams of free expression and exploration of my imagination, it took me the better part of three years to recognize what I was missing all along in the practice of my art.

No longer do I fret about the future shapes that my writing might take, nor do I adhere to the rigid boundaries set by literary norms. Now as I navigate the swirling eddies of the creative ether, I find myself in a state of blissful communion with the muses, the enigmatic entities that whisper the secrets of artistic expression into the receptive ears of the willing. My newfound freedom has opened the door to a symphony of ideas, accompanied by a chorus of voices that echo through the chambers of my mind, imploring me to give them life on the page.

Recently, my writing has taken on a life of its own, each new essay an ever-evolving entity writhing with the vitality of a living organism. Each word, each phrase, and each sentence, coalesces into an organic whole. As I continue my odyssey of literary creation, it's the process of discovery, surrendering to the ineffable beauty of the unknown, that truly sets my spirit free.

So, in every day that follows, with each stroke of my pen, I celebrate the art of writing. Rather than remain concerned with the future forms it might take, I instead embrace the sublime mystery of creation itself. In the act of writing I find my truest expression, my most authentic self, and my ultimate liberation. After all, in the boundless cosmos of creativity, where the ink of imagination swirls and dances in celestial splendor, I myself am but a humble voyager.

I Awoke With My Purpose Renewed

One night, I retired to bed an unbalanced person. For weeks, a reinvigorated personality was emerging, along with a renewed purpose of being. Thoughts raced and conflicting streams of consciousness tried to ruin the narrative of the transformation of a once broken and lost human being. But, as is the case when one truly puts mind over matter in a last ditch effort to find one's true self, the wait, the struggle, and the raging battles within are simply stepping stones. On the other side of the roaring rapids is the rewards of a glorious transition into a freer, truer self.

For years, a little girl's voice within me was screaming. On the outside, to eyes untrained in the honest truth, I was a confused young person. No one could comprehend the endless conflict between the two spirits at war in my prepubescent mind. The body, mind, and spirit, though, for one brief moment at the tender and formative age of eleven, saw a glimpse into the distant future and saw the face of a goddess. Little did this sweet, young effeminate child know she was not to fully reveal herself for over two decades. A corrupt, evil world had different plans for her.

For weeks during the Covid pandemic, I'd battled endlessly to force a transformation from a suicidal, heartbroken, pathetic facade of a former wage earner into the true Phoenix that my Creator intended me to be. From the split second my soul was conceived from stardust, my purpose was clear in the Divine Mind, but it would be obscured from me for decades. No longer would I be the rambling fool my family and friends had come to know. After all, I was never truly a fool, but rather one without a clear purpose who did foolish things in trying to find renewal and belonging.

But, one August day, well before the sunrise, I awoke with my life's purpose renewed. In the wee hours of that mid-August Friday morning, the last vestiges of the lie I'd lived as a firstborn child who lived only to fulfill misguided and limiting expectations had finally melted away. Never before had I felt my mind, body, and spirit finally working in harmony towards a timeless goal, to see the true face of the woman who I was meant to be.

By that, I do not mean the face that others see when they behold my awkward body, ravaged by both a six-month long battle with cancer and chemotherapy, as well as a terrible hormonal imbalance. I mean the true face of the being of Light our mortal shells contain. Our bodies are but vessels that serve us through this indeterminate campaign

that we human beings know as what could be our only existence, what we call the days of our lives.

When you come face-to-face with your own mortality, if you don't find renewed purpose in the struggle for your very continued existence, you instead drift for an indeterminate time. For the past five years, I worked to build a new life, complete with the family and responsibilities I felt were to be my anchor. Instead, I found nothing but hardship and misery. All that I learned was that the life I travelled thousands of miles away to lead was yet another lie borne of the misguided hopes and expectations of others.

Even with this renewed purpose to my being, the shell containing this beautiful mind and infinite resolve would appear nearly identical to the one who retired to her room the night before. Those closest to me still would see the broken person they thought they knew so well. In reality, that wonderful soul who shared their dwelling and lives for the better part of three decades was now reborn, forged in the fire and flames of the trials of our cruel and disassociated world.

But, why is it I became so misunderstood and miscast in the first place? As it happens, genetic glitches caused me to be born with a nonbinary nature. My very being was long seen as something quirky I would outgrow at some point. Yet, I embraced

embodying both genders as a child. I saw my nature as a gift that no one should take away from me. Unfortunately, a horrible trial known as puberty resolved to force me into a box. It was a prison sentence worse than most cisgender people can hardly imagine.

My mind and spirit were that of a woman about to blossom into a goddess. Yet, my body forced me to live over two decades as an awkward and flamboyantly queer individual trying her best to play the role society forced her to play. My life's purpose was being defined by those who didn't truly understand the individual I was born to be and was still in the process of becoming.

In the end, after an intense forty plus days on a journey of self discovery, my true spirit would emerge victorious. Once thought of as a mere invention of a lonely only child, little Amelia, blessed by Grace at age four and set to trials of ice and fire at age eleven, would finally be realized. After all, she was the one serving an undeserved sentence, one the corrupted physical world had tried so hard to shackle her with, entirely without mercy.

No longer a lost lamb, clarity finally appeared before the lovely starving artist. It shone as a beacon of hope long awaited, bringing peace long overdue. For once, my true voice would finally speak, unimpeded by the abuse, brainwashing, and

condescension my enemies had used to impair me to my wit's end. While these evils nearly lead me to end my life in a spectacular and tragic failure, I was just brave and stubborn enough to survive.

In this moment of newfound strength, I faced my demons head-on and through sheer willpower silenced them. In the wake of overcoming them, I heard the angels sing. As much as sin and evil plague this world, I resolved with renewed vigor to be the Lightbringer my Creator intended me to be. My renewed purpose was now clear.

Now, for the first time in thirty three years, three months, six days, and a few odd hours, the true Child would finally speak her True Name. I am Amelia Phoenix Desertsong. It is far past due time to be free. Alongside the greatest love of my life, I must rise from the ashes of a shattered and decimated life so I can share the stories of my trials with the world.

Bless you all, so long, and thanks for all the fish!

P.S. Thanks to Douglas Adams for that outro bit!

The Master Of My Sea

Within my own boundaries, the comfort zones of the safe harbors of imagination, I am the master of my sea. But, once I cross into the channel between where I am now and where I'd like to be, it's easy to be quickly overtaken by the powerful whims of the open ocean. Tossed about to and fro, I finally find calmer seas, but often in a place completely foreign to me. Sometimes, it's hard to find my bearings, and this is when I must turn entirely to my imagination for guidance, my trusted inner conscience and compass.

Yet, the river runs on just the same, always flowing in the same direction, energized by the forces of gravity. There are times in our corporate-centric world in which we must fight tooth and nail versus often intangible forces of apathy and ignorance that stand in opposition to our sense of individuality and purpose. All the same, these powerful waves of negative energy can cause us to drift off course enough that we may even find ourselves reversing direction. Sometimes, we get turned topsy-turvy enough to find it difficult to return to a main waterway.

Setting sail in the sea of imagination is something I've done since I was a very small child. In my youth, I quickly came to recognize how imagination is not only your friend, it's also your most valuable tool. It's much too easy to become

complacent in daily life. So, you must spend as much time outside of your comfort zone as possible. Imagination gives you a way of pushing boundaries theoretically and creatively before taking action.

Imagination also gives you an added ability to keep pushing forward when things get tough. The more imaginative you are, the easier it will be for you to recognize solutions. Each new challenge presents an opportunity to learn something new, plus more fuel for your imagination. If you're going to be effective at anything in life, then you can't stay on the shore; you need to learn how to set sail!

The world we live in can be overwhelming, complicated, and even frightening at times. Sometimes, the only place we can find peace and stability, or even rest, without constantly being pushed to move faster and work harder is inside of our own imaginations. Our imaginations offer us a place which may appear totally different from the world around you. Yet, it's actually based on all of the imaginings inspired by your own life experiences. You don't need to save up or plan a vacation to enjoy a different perspective on the world; all you need is your imagination to create it yourself!

Too often, people limit their imaginations to things within their own comfort zones. Unfortunately, our comfort zones are often filled with tired ideas and repetitive tropes. It's more useful to challenge your

thinking beyond your immediate surroundings and situations. What's possible if you just let your mind wander? Are there real obstacles in your way of succeeding at your goals, or are they just paper tigers?

Fortunately, if you're able to dream it, then it's just over the horizon, and well within reach if you're willing to take risks. Remember, anything can happen out on the sea of imagination! You just have to be ready to face the waves.

A Moment Of Clarity

Every so often, we find ourselves at moments of sudden clarity. Unfortunately, most of us dismiss them either out of being distracted by things of the moment, or as inconvenient truths we would prefer to ignore. For whatever reason, I find these moments come at almost regular intervals. I believe this is only because I consciously partake in existential pondering sessions, in which I come to seemingly wild conclusions. But, while I use these to question the essential purpose of my own existence, I discover some very interesting contradictions in the things we are taught and urged to believe.

All my life, I've owned this intellect, and yet, I had nowhere to apply it to outside of the pages of my own journals and weblogs. I felt that anything I had to say was rarely of any consequence. It took one such moment of clarity well into my adulthood to realize that this was a mindset enforced by a society giving into reductionism and oversimplification.

In my youth, I believed Academics were meant to hone my skills of expression. Yet, I found that my pen only dulled as the expectations of my output became nothing but producing endless drivel full of summary. There was nothing in almost any academic assignment that left me inspired to add my own commentary.

In the process, I also found myself being wrong about a great many things. But, when I actually could be proven right on something, my shortcomings would be brought up in evidence against me. Any arguments that I correctly made were suddenly found unceremoniously dismissed. So, I felt invalidated by the spurning of those who I thought were elders and paragons I could respect.

At work, I was doomed to an endless cycle of entry level positions. I finally recognized that this was because I was considered too dangerous to the welfare of everyone above me, or so they thought. They saw my coming up as a threat to their own selfish interests, so they did all that they could to make sure the day never came where I supplanted them.

Yet, all I ever intended was to benefit all those around me. That's how I was raised to believe that organizations work. While in theory that's true, that every whole can become more than the sum of its parts, in actual practice, those at the top often take the lion's share of the benefit from most of the pyramid below.

While I'd love to flip the pyramid upside down, I then realized that such a maneuver has been tried on multiple occasions. Sadly, we often find that the cycle of the rich getting richer eventually just happens all

over again. I'd like to think that people simply don't know any better, but it's more that they simply don't care. Perhaps the better solution instead is to tip the pyramid over on its side and let the natural forces of gravity decide the fate of the majority.

Before you dismiss all this as abstract philosophical rhetoric and nonsense — which certainly sounds good enough to be fit for print — I do have something meaningful and concrete to say about economics. For example, I'll freely admit that capitalism itself isn't the problem. After all, humankind has seen other popularized economic models, such as Communism, fail spectacularly time and again in just the past century. The issue isn't so much about "free markets" themselves, as much as it is the unscrupulous actors who motivate and skew them towards their own favor.

Realistically, there is no such thing as a "free market" because the laws of natural economics dictate that there must be an exchange of labor, capital, technology, or assets in every transaction. As it so happens, Nature has its own technology, and the study of that is what we call science. We humans are simply mimicking what we find to be true in Nature. While we may foolishly believe that we are somehow improving upon it, we are in fact simply reflecting the hidden aspects that the Divine Mind intended us to find, or at least that's what I prefer to believe.

I still believe, despite great volumes of evidence to the contrary, that human beings still have a limitless amount of untapped potential. But, we'll never reach loftier heights if we don't stop picking on one another and tearing one another down. We expend so much of our energy, itself a valuable and very limited resource, on matters that only serve to degrade our contemporaries. We're all forced into roles within the telling of an epic of nonsense told by fools who stand to make some sort of profit, real or imagined, from breaking the stories.

You wouldn't believe the things I used to think about as a child, presupposing many of the concepts that scholars think up as their theses and dissertations, replete with better ways to run things. These days, I tune in to podcasts with hosts interviewing these so-called experts of their various fields, and find myself pausing them before they get to the pith of their talk. I make a comment to my wife predicting what they're going to say, only to then restart the playback and discover that they inevitably parrot my offhand comment.

This isn't because I am some uniquely gifted genius who simply has come to know of what someone will say thanks to some divine intervention. It's because I've actually thought about these things before on my own. Rarely are we ever alone in actually considering things. But, in actual realizations,

such a small percentage of us ever become inventors who make real our hopes and dreams.

Those who we remember as great inventors and foundations of our society didn't conceive of their inventions in a vacuum. They simply dared to act, in and of itself an act of bravery in the face of ignorance. Ironically, what inevitably happens is that when something new and exciting breaks into the world market, you have dozens, if not more, smacking themselves in the head asking themselves, why didn't I think of that? The irony is that most of them probably did, but never bothered to act.

While I'm not at all skilled with invention in the physical sense, I do know how to craft my words just eloquently enough to relate these discoveries of mine to you in prose. I hope that with my relating my own observations, you will come to respect and share your own in kind.

Our Privilege Of Consciousness

Each of us are blessed with a great gift: the privilege of consciousness. The mere fact that we're aware of our surroundings, our emotions, and our own existence is a remarkable thing. We often take this privilege for granted, but it's the one that we should most cherish and celebrate.

To be conscious means to be alive. Living means we can feel the warmth of the sun on our skin, hear the rustling of leaves in the wind, taste the sweetness of honey on our tongues, see the beauty of a sunset, and smell the freshness of the morning dew. We're allowed to experience love, joy, happiness, and a whole host of other emotions that make life worth living. But unlike mere beasts, we can communicate, express ourselves, and create. We can think, reason, and ponder the mysteries of the universe.

The privilege of consciousness also means we have the power of choice. We can choose our actions, our thoughts, and our attitudes. Perhaps the machinations of society, which we contribute to both directly and indirectly, can seem to limit our ability to choose. But, with the privilege of consciousness, we can choose how we are to others in our disposition.

Consciously, we can control our attitudes; we can choose to be kind, compassionate, and empathetic, or we can choose to be selfish, cruel, and indifferent. We can choose to follow our dreams and passions, although many seem to settle for a life of mediocrity; the latter is still a conscious choice for which there's no excuse.

Most importantly, the privilege of consciousness also brings with it a sense of responsibility. We can choose to make a positive impact on the world, but we can also choose to contribute to its destruction. Over the course of our lives, we sometimes do both, and not always entirely consciously, revealing the paradox of our own free will.

But, our own ignorance of the subconscious and unconscious forces at work manipulating our conscious being can't be easily explained away. No matter what we do, we're responsible for our own lives, our own choices, and our own happiness. Plus, we're also responsible for the impact we have on others. We have the power to make a difference, so it's our divinely-given duty to use that power wisely.

With this great privilege comes great vulnerability. The consciousness that makes us aware of the beauty of the world likewise makes us aware of its darkness. We're aware of the pain and suffering of

others, of the injustices and inequalities that exist in our society, and of our own mortality. We must be aware of the fragility of life; everything we hold dear can be taken away from us in an instant. Any one who denies the existence of one or more of these things is either delusional, self-absorbed, or both.

Despite the many challenges that come with consciousness, and the vulnerability we experience, the privilege of consciousness is a gift that should be cherished. Let's always strive to use it for the greater good.

The Scribe's Paradox

As thoughts swirl ceaselessly round in my head during restless midnight hours, I recognize that there exists a paradox as old as the art of storytelling itself. The act of writing is as much a solitary waltz as it is a grand ball. It's a playful dalliance between the self and the many, inviting us to step closer to the mirror and peer into our reflections, even as we extend a hand to invite others to join in.

For most, the act of writing is, at its core, a deeply personal endeavor. Writing well requires us to have an intimate dialogue with our innermost selves. The words we pen are reflections of fragments pulled from our souls. We write to better understand both ourselves and others, and to bring to life the stories that reside in the shadowy corners of our minds.

Yet, as we proceed with what may be considered a solitary task, we must also be acutely aware of the eyes that watch us. These are the readers who step into the ballroom of our narratives and join us in the waltz of our ideas, thoughts, and opinions. Writing is a gift that we offer to others, a bridge that connects us to the world.

For introverts like myself, writing is the best way to invite others into my world. Through my articles, essays, and prose poems, I do my best to

offer others a glimpse into my soul. I don't limit myself to a particular niche or special interest, sharing all the wonders and mysteries I've discovered in my thirty-odd years wandering this globe.

I've read much about the playful nature of writing, and how the social aspect of the written word comes into play. This is when writing becomes a game of hide and seek that we play with our readers. We can tease them with words, luring them with emotionally charged narratives that resonate with universal truths that reside in all of us. I've always preferred to write directly to my readers, sprinkling in dry humor as necessary, but never attempting to fool or deceive you.

But, this doesn't mean writing must all be work, either. Writers must play with language, structure, and form to invite readers to discover new angles of attack and patterns of thinking. Even when we're writing fiction, we must create worlds that are as real as they are imaginary. Our characters must live and breathe on the page and the stories must be relatable, captivating, and thought-provoking.

As we read our words back to ourselves, either aloud or silently, we find the lines between the self and the collective other blur, at which point the boundaries between the writer and reader dissolve. We're never just writing for ourselves, even if that was the intention; necessarily, our written words are for

others, as well, since we are writing in a shared language. That is, unless you want to write in a cipher or made-up language all your own.

I've long thought of my words as a conduit, using shared symbols as a medium through which we can connect to the collective consciousness. At the heart of each piece that we write, we must find a way to tap into common visions, dreams, hopes, and fears. Ever since I began writing my own fiction in elementary school, I'd enjoy glimpses of how words have the power to touch others, to resonate, to even inspire to write their own stories.

The blank page is as universal for a writer as it is for a non-writer. Each day we start with that same material, a blank canvas. Writers just use our words as our tool, while others may use brushes, others may use hammers, and others still a host of other implements to go about their work. Even when we don't realize it, even our body language shares more about us than we consciously realize. The work we complete, as much as what we leave incomplete, is its own story, even if it's never written down as such.

Whether or not we are writers, we are never just communicating with ourselves. Even with the smallest interactions, we leave our mark on the world. The next time you think of writing as a purely solitary act, remember that even the most solitary acts can have much further reaching consequences. Every

piece of fruit you buy at the store, every pizza you order, each book you purchase from Amazon; there are so many hands involved in the narrative of each of those things that we never fully appreciate.

Thus is the raw material of the writer, mapping these hidden connections in every day things that others may not even realize they were missing. Non-writers are perhaps even more influential in writing than the actual writer's work. Of course, without the rest of us, there would be no story to tell. Even in the solitary act of writing, we are necessarily acting on the ripple effects of a million other hands in our life story.

Lately, I've been thinking more about how many little incremental actions affect every aspect of our lives. It's a metaphysical process that I'm now making a more conscious choice to include in my writing. Most of the time I think I'm just writing for myself, helping myself to organize my thoughts in a more meaningful and concrete way. But, I'm actually paying forward a whole galaxy of ideas, concepts, and actions that brought us to the here and now.

The scribe's paradox of being both introverted and social through the written word is one that I haven't fully appreciated until very recently. Even if you're not actively a writer, remember that every word you say, every little action you take, and everything

you do is writing both your own story and that of everyone else you meet.

A Voice Clear And Unmistakeable

Tangled up in the ordinary, I spent years suffering under the weight of the mundane pressing down upon my soul. For me, the world progressively lost its luster, but I knew I wasn't alone in this observation. A seemingly endless parade of dreary days shrouded my heart in an impenetrable fog.

In this time of dire need, my spirit thirsted for the arrival of a magical miracle, a voice that would pierce the haze with the clarity of a thousand crystal bells. I prayed for a beacon of hope to guide us all back to the luminous shores of Wonder.

This voice would be one so distinct and unyielding, it would leap into the heavens. Like a whirling dervish, it would spiral through the cosmos, inviting those from even the most distant stars to join the audience. The voice would remind us that in essence we are all stardust, bound together by the enigmatic forces of Destiny.

I longed for this voice to rise like a Phoenix from the ashes of our collective disillusionment, igniting a fiery passion that would sweep across the globe like an unstoppable tempest. I envisioned this voice's words to become a blazing seraphim soaring

through the sky, trailing ribbons of golden light that would awaken our slumbering souls. With such pure and honest power, it could resonate within even the most hardened hearts.

This beautiful voice would ring eternal, echoing through the annals of time, a clarion call for unity and transcendence. We would all be invited to rise above the petty squabbles that have divided us all for so long.

To this day, my heart aches for this voice to emerge, to shower us with brilliant celestial rainbows, banishing the grays of despair and painting the world anew in vibrant shades of hope. In the wake of this magical miracle, we could find solace, salving the wounds that have long festered in the shadowy recesses of our souls.

My fervent belief is that it's past due time for this voice to rise. Our world is yearning for a renaissance of the spirit, a resurgence of the light that has been lost for far too long. It's time to reclaim our birthright, to awaken the latent power that resides within each and every one of us.

Perhaps, I've waited so long, only because the answer was always right nearby. This voice, clear and unmistakable, has begun to rise up within me. Other voices, also unmistakably clear, are starting to make their own beautiful noises heard. I finally learned, that

only when we embrace this voice within ourselves, can we truly break free from the chains that bind us.

It's only when we listen to the voices within, the ones that tell us only the clear and present truth, that we may soar on the wings of destiny and write a new chapter in the story of our lives. The hour is nigh, and we can wait no longer to hold our breath; the call for singing out resounds with a clarity that can no longer be denied.

Let us join together and bring our voices into harmony, united in our longing for truth and forgiveness. We must summon the miracle that will usher in an age of wonder and enlightenment. If we come together and recognize the power of our own voices now and forever, we will mark a new era where the voice of magic rings clear and unmistakable.

Summer

An Ode To The Beautiful Chaos Of The Mind

I've come to understand my own often complex and dizzying thought process as a vibrant medley of colors, textures, and patterns. Unlike many people, though, who find solace in the simplicity of order and the comfort of structure, I've learned to love the chaos. Most people in my life have tried to morph me into a guardian of tidiness, an orchestrator of efficiency, and a champion of organization. For reasons unknown to me, these people sought to impose their rigid ways upon my own chaotic existence.

Time and again, I've encountered such well-meaning souls seemingly possessed by an urge to box my ideas into neat compartments. I'm often cornered into setting my life on a meticulously planned path. But, each such encounter leads to their well-intentioned efforts only serving to stifle my creativity. I've certainly become far more efficient in my work process as time has passed. I'm certainly much tidier than I once was. But, to try and organize all of my ideas and perspectives into boxes chokes my inspiration and tires my soul.

As a young adult, I once found myself entangled in the web of a relationship with a woman

who sought to tame the wild tempest of my imagination. She was a siren of structure and a prophet of planning, tirelessly endeavoring to reshape my untamed ways to fit her desired mold. The more she tightened her grasp, the more my spirit chafed and withered beneath the crushing weight of her expectations. Once teeming with hope and promise, our relationship as creative collaborators rapidly devolved into frustration and madness, ultimately ending our entire friendship in discord and heartache.

But, in the wake of this storm, as the dust settled, I found support in the arms of another kindred spirit. She would embrace the beauty of chaos as fervently as myself. I saw her as the moon to my tide, the yin to my yang. Together we took great pleasure in the disarray of our reckless and wild dream chasing. For several years, she and I would revel in unfettered disorganization, throwing things at the wall relentlessly hoping something would stick.

Indeed, there's an art to embracing chaos, a method to the madness allowing us to tap into the deepest wells of our own creativity. Allowing our thoughts to roam free, unencumbered by the constraints of structure, can unlock the doors to new worlds, ideas, and possibilities.

Unfortunately, in all of the chaos, this union between the moon and the tide was broken by our erratic, asymmetrical orbit. Still, as painful as the

failure of that relationship was, I learned many things about how to make the most of disorganized brilliance.

Today, I'm a living, breathing advocate of the disorganized and the scatterbrained, the chaotic and the unfettered. This is because after the end of that tumultuous, yet extremely educational relationship, I decided to let my imagination finally run free. I was mocked for my freewheeling style of expressing myself, but doing so led me down the path I'm on now. Today, I have the love of my life and everything I could've ever hoped and dreamed for at my fingertips.

I'm not going to be all cliché and say following your heart is the way to go. You still need to have some sort of end goal in sight. Mine was to find someone that appreciated the skillsets and unique perspectives I had to offer. Whatever your situation, the key to success is finding those who will lift you up, while ignoring those who would conspire to bring you down.

Remember that the most breathtaking sunsets are born not from uniformity, but from the brilliant clash of colors lighting up the sky in wild abandon. Embrace the chaos, my friends, and let your spirit soar to the heights of your wildest dreams.

Be Love And Spread Love

Every morning, I must remind myself that I must be a champion of Love. It's not just a feeling or an emotion; it's something that reverberates through every fiber of my being. Being the most loving person I can is the key to who I am, and my purpose in life is to spread that Love to others.

Without a doubt, spreading Love is worth every drop of my sweat and tears. From the moment I step out of bed, I let my heart radiate with the warmth of love. With each breath I take, I inhale and exhale Love wherever I go.

In my view, Love is the most potent force in the universe, because of how infectious it can be. When I show kindness and compassion to someone, it's like throwing a pebble into a calm pond. The smallest gesture of Love can cause ripples, and enough of them in concert can create a chain reaction with the power to change the world. I'm not perfect, and sometimes I falter and give into frustration, but I never give up trying.

No matter what life throws at me, I always must choose to pick myself up, dust myself off, and go on spreading Love. It's the only way to combat hate,

ignorance, and selfishness. This will be the hard road many times, but I know it's worth the struggle in the end. But, it's extremely difficult to retain this mindset when you find yourself knocked down and stuck in the mud, with people just walking by and laughing at your misfortune.

I've learned the hard lesson through many trials and tribulations that Life is an adventure that we're all in together, even if it doesn't always seem that way. I hope more people come to realize that we're all on the same journey, just taking somewhat different paths to get to similar goals. Focusing on the positive, small victories along the way, is the key to making our lives brighter and more productive.

When I see someone in distress, my first instinct is to be there for them. I'll listen to their struggles and offer comfort and understanding. I try to put myself in their shoes and imagine how they must be feeling. Often, it only takes a smile or a kind word to brighten someone's day. It may not always work, but it won't stop me from trying to share a smile whenever I have the chance.

Many people's problems are beyond their own control. But, I believe that even if you can't solve someone's problem directly, you can still always make a positive difference by just being there. This is why even when I don't see much hope in a given situation,

I still try to do something small to make others' days a little bit better.

One lesson I learned early in my childhood is the golden rule: to treat others as I would like to be treated. I believe that everyone deserves love and respect, regardless of their background or beliefs. When I encounter someone who disagrees with me or has a different opinion, I try to listen with an open mind and friendly heart. Remember that we all have our own experiences and perspectives, and this is the essence of what makes life interesting.

Spreading Love doesn't need to involve grand gestures or massive acts of kindness. Sometimes, the little things make the most significant impact, like holding the door open for someone, complimenting a stranger's outfit, or merely saying "thank you." These small acts can have a big impact on someone's day, and it takes so little effort to do them.

Being Love and spreading Love is rarely easy. Sometimes people can be cruel, and it can be hard to keep a positive attitude. Whenever I find myself becoming negative, and even at times spouting out with cruel rants, I remind myself that Love is more potent than hate. I know I can make a difference in the world by spreading kindness wherever I go, even if it's not always obvious.

For me, there is no other way of life than being love and spreading love. I believe that love can still change the world, and I'm committed to doing my part. Every day, I wake up with a heart full of Love, ready to share it with whoever needs it.

Chasing Starlight

Have you ever found your eyes chasing starlight? Do you ever find your mind wandering, drifting off towards the heavens? Will you sometimes gaze and wonder at what's out there in that great infinite beyond?

Dare to dream that deepest dream. Chase it to the depths of the deepest seas if you have to. Never let it get away from you. Yes, sometimes the things that go on in this world get you down. I know that too well.

I've just been so down on the world lately. But, I forgot it's not the world, but the society that often holds back the people in it. So, it's well past time for me to focus on those worth saving. Let others try to figure it out for themselves if they don't care to listen to what I have to say. All I can do for them is keep my door open, even if just a crack.

The sad truth is that I've forgotten how to love so many things in the face of hating myself for such a long time. It all starts with the self seeking True North. And, as much as I hate to admit it, how we each get to True North is a lot different sometimes.

Many times, the pressures on us in our lives are astounding. It seems too heavy to bear them

sometimes. But, instead of worrying what's to come, we must live in the now. This moment is precious and we must take hold of it with all we have. After all, life is about the journey, not the destination.

As I write this, I've thought much about Rihanna's song "Diamonds" recently. I began to think about how diamonds are actually formed. It's a long and very difficult process. But, the end result is worth it if you see it through. Something so precious comes from great heat and pressure. While striving to be a fearless individual requires time spent in a pressure cooker of demands and expectations, the tribulations are worth the pain and exhaustion to come out shining in the end.

I could never come to appreciate my true self without all those trials I've experienced. Of course, these experiences involve a wide range of people: those we've loved, those who love us in return, those who love us no more, and even those that seemed to but never really did in the first place. My interactions, agreements, and disagreements with this wide range of individuals have all molded me to realize a self-awareness I never thought was possible.

It's clear at times we must diverge from the paths of others we love, as painful as it can be. But, we can't hold regret in our hearts. We need to fill our hearts with Light and Love, and keep them burning true.

In our ever darkening world, it's easy to be against its evils. But, it's far better to instead be FOR the highest truths of Faith, Hope, and Love. The evils in our world, after all, are due to the lack of these precious virtues being recognized in many aspects of our world. Yes, we should face Evil head on, but not out of fear or hate. We must face them with resolve in the armor of Truth.

It took me reaching the end of my rope to realize all this. Now, it's past due time for me to realize my truest self. I feel my calling is as a Phoenix, singing a Desertsong of Love, loud enough that everyone who's still stuck in their own private wilderness can hear.

To those of you reading this, thank you for blessing me with your attention. Know that my love goes out to all of you. But, remember that you yourself are blessed, even if you don't realize it yet. After all, we're all made of stardust, and that's why we often find ourselves chasing starlight.

Never turn your eyes away from what lies in front of you. But, don't forget to look up sometimes and remember we're all little stars. You can change the world in ways that no one else can. You've been blessed with talents unique to you, knowledge and experience, and a narrative no one else can tell.

If you are well, count your blessings and be the best you that you can be. If you aren't well, then do what you can to let the Light in. Remember, Love is always there, and it's greater than all of us, and it exists in all things even if we can't always see it. You can rise above where you are now, far, far above.

I'm a Phoenix, and so can you be! Let's chase the starlight together!

Finding Greater Clarity To A Soundtrack Of Birdsong And Rushing Rapids

As inconvenient as it sometimes is, it makes a great difference to sometimes retreat from the ways of the world to find greater clarity. Only when you turn off the noise and tune in to the rhythms of nature around you can you realize who you are meant to be all along.

Prudence is a Virtue that has long served me well. Yet, I still often deny the little voices who serve as my warning muses of lurking demons who seek to thwart my pursuit of happiness. I have wearily sought hidden meanings to life's trials, often while slipping into a state of melancholy in self-inflicted solitude. But, they are finally revealed to me through the melodies of birdsong and the rough but harmonic flow of the rushing river behind my home.

I have long mistaken feelings of anxiety, anticipation, and nervousness for what they really are: my interpretation of sudden shifts in the fabric of the unseen aether that surrounds us all. We as human

beings all have this sense, but very few of us ever tune into it as we should.

Every day is a new beginning, flush with the possibilities of seemingly trivial choices that can lead you down new trails yet to be conquered by warriors of reason. I watch as the late model children of today are presented with more opportunities than ever, yet still find themselves filtered out and discarded. Many others are funneled towards well worn roads replete with potholes and deep ruts. Only the brave few navigate the perilous seas of invention, knowing that failure is inevitable, yet these shortfalls also serve as fuel to seek even greater success.

Every living creature has a purpose, even if in our limited field of vision that's not at all clear. Whatever divine purpose endows us with our widely varied and often unique cosmic assignments cannot be fully known by even the whole of our impressive, yet still quite unevolved, species of mammal. We can often only approximate the entire truth of any happening; its effects may be clear, but its causes can be often hidden and possibly nearly infinite in nature. Whatever ideas we form will always be hopefully incomplete, even if they are more than adequate for our purposes.

With no roadblocks or obstacles put before me, I always choose the long road. We should never treat our journey through this existence as a race. The

saying "haste makes waste" is well known, and it is true. "Slow and steady wins the race" may be grossly cliché, but it's even more true when you stop looking at everything around you as a competition. Being first in something does not mean you are the best at something, and I must constantly remind myself of this sometimes hidden truth.

From Sunrise To Sundown

From sunrise to sundown, the light touches each of us a bit differently every day. Some days, it seems to fail in touching you much at all. Rest assured, though, you'll always find a ray of sunshine if you know to look for it. Even if you miss it during the day, there's always a glimmer or two of starlight you can find in the pale moonlight to set you straight again.

On my better days, as the dawn crests the horizon, Sol paints the sky in hues of fiery orange and blushing pink. I feel the gentle caress of His first rays upon my face. Like a lover's tender touch, they awaken my senses, coaxing my soul to breathe life into the day. I begin to stir, slowly finding the strength in my muscles to rise and begin my routine. Each morning, Sol's arrival arrives much like a delicately composed symphony of color and light, setting the stage for the day's unfolding narrative.

Yet, there are days when we fail to be graced by our Sun's benevolent touch. Some days, sullen skies and brooding clouds shroud the world in a cloak of gray, as if the heavens themselves are weeping for the happenings on earth below. On these days, the Sun's touch is but a fleeting whisper, an elusive ghost

whose ethereal fingers fail to leave an imprint upon us.

Whenever I feel like a shipwrecked sailor adrift on a sea of despair, I cast my gaze outwards in search of that elusive glint of light on my darkest day. With every breath, I seek out the Sun's gentle touch to guide me on my journey through life's stormy seas.

Lo and behold, eventually I'll find that ray of sunshine, peeking through the veil of clouds like a shy child peering out from behind a curtain. This single beam of light is a pleasant reminder to me that hope is never truly lost; there is always a glimmer of brightness to be found wherever we might be. It's in these moments of quiet revelation that we rediscover our own strength, our resilience, and our indomitable spirit.

As each day wanes and twilight descends upon the land, our Sun bows low in the sky, His warmth gradually fading into the shadows. Yet, even as the darkness encroaches, there's a glimmer of solace to be found in the celestial dance of the stars. Each twinkle and each shimmer are whispered promises that the Sun shall rise once more, and the cycle of light and dark shall continue in harmonious balance.

Basking in Luna's silvery glow, I find contentment in the quiet beauty of the night. Like a

sprinkling of cosmic diamonds, the stars serve as gentle reminders that even in the absence of the Sun's touch, there are still lights to guide us and set us straight on our path through the darkness.

From sunrise to sundown, there's a constant seesaw battle between shadow and brilliance that echoes the rhythm of our own lives. In the midst of life's ebbs and flows, we must always take a moment to rediscover the strength to carry on, the courage to face whatever challenges today may bring, and the wisdom to find beauty in even the smallest glimmers of light.

Manifesting Expanding Horizons

Since I began my pursuits as a freelance creative dynamo, my most vital endeavor is seeking new and creative ways to help people steadily and efficiently expand their horizons. Standing at the precipice of uncharted territories, with riches yet strange and unknown to be discovered, I've long wished to be the guide for curious minds eager to pursue intellectual adventures.

Each day, the Vermont air is thick with potential, as if the very particles composing it are eager to bear witness to my grand design. Waking to the ever-familiar tunes of the morning birds, I feel a tingling sensation that electrifies my very essence, permeating my core with a boundless zeal to manifest my deepest desires. These aren't mere whims of fancy, but rather, the heartbeats of my soul, echoing through the chambers of my being.

Happily for me, my pursuit of happiness isn't a solitary quest, at least not any longer. After long searching, flitting between muses over the course of difficult years lost in confusion, I finally found my lifelong partner in creative pursuits. It's quite fortunate for both of us, as the transformative power of

collaboration can unlock the limitless possibilities that lay dormant within us all.

In our chaotic modern world, the din of distraction threatens to engulf our conscious minds. So, I seek to create a chorus of thoughtful voices, harmonizing in the pursuit of wisdom. I wish my words to become a catalyst for growth, and myself to be a mindful conductor, carefully orchestrating the instruments of innovation, as I lead my ensemble through a rhapsody of exploration and discovery. My goal is for our melody to resonate far and wide, inspiring generations to come and dance to the rhythms of their own curiosity.

Even where others may see an intellectual wasteland, I choose instead to see fertile fields of human potential stretching out before me, simply waiting to be cultivated. I'm happy to guide others in creating their own art, allowing them to unlock the hidden beauty within their souls. Together, we may paint a magnificent mural that adorns the walls of human achievement.

During my pursuits, I've pondered many new possibilities, chasing ideas through the twilight of reason into the dawn of understanding. My self-education involves weaving together threads of wisdom from various disciplines, unearthing the commonalities that unite us in our shared desire for growth. Daily I traverse the labyrinthine corridors of

knowledge, seeking out hidden treasures that have laid buried for far too long.

With each step through these often dark and perilous dungeons of learning, I'll gather these precious gems to share with you, my readers. Through the crafting of my essays, I'll fashion them into dazzling jewelry, which I'll happily thrust upon those who dare to dream.

To make this vision a reality, I've long yearned to devise a sanctuary of learning, a bastion of intellect beckoning all who thirst for enlightenment. This temple of wisdom would be a beacon, its illumination banishing the shadows of ignorance and the darkness of the unknown.

Here, we can gather to share our unique gifts of expression, to forge new pathways of understanding, and to empower one another in our quest to ascend to greater heights. Fortunately, my personal portal within the great web of the internet, can serve many of these roles. But, you as my readers must venture forth to forge your own paths through the jungles of unexplored realms.

Poised on the edge of eternity, the winds of change whisper their secrets to us even if we don't realize it. I've chosen to calmly and intently listen, and in the silence that follows, I find the strength to take the next step on my intellectual journey. I am a

seeker, a guide, and a pioneer, and I shall continue to journey forth into the great unknown, wielding the torch of knowledge as I blaze a trail through the cosmos of the mind.

But, in these adventures, I know I'm not alone. I wish to hear the voices of those as immensely curious and thirsty for new learning as myself. After all, only through the collaboration of minds united in a shared purpose can we achieve the ultimate manifestation of my dreams for humanity: the infinite expansion of our collective horizons, as we soar, hand in hand, into the boundless skies of human potential.

Ode To The Juice Box Heroes

As a symbol of sugar and sustenance, the Juice Box is the embodiment of childhood dreams and lunchtime ecstasy. It's the unspoken hero of many of our childhoods. Amidst the chaos of the cafeteria and playground, the juice box stood as a beacon of hope for parched throats and weary souls. With its trusty straw-sword, it could pierce the hearts of thirst and help to conquer the land of hunger. The Juice Box hero tirelessly fulfilled its mission to provide nourishment and never wavered in its commitment.

For me, the Juice Box is the guardian of treasured memories, a flashback to sunlit days and playground revelry. Through the looking glass of time, I see my favorite juice boxes nestled in my lunch pack, concealed between peanut butter & jelly sandwiches and bags of glistening apple slices and carrot sticks. These juice boxes were silent witnesses to whispered secrets, joyous laughter, and the unadulterated bliss of youth.

Their humble exteriors, emblazoned with vibrant colors and whimsical illustrations, tell a story of innocence and wonder. The fruits of their genesis, the sweet nectar of apples, oranges, and grapes, swirl together in a harmony of delightful flavors that dances

upon the tongue. As the liquid essence flows, they refresh and revive the spirits of all who partake in their offerings.

Juice boxes were shared among friends on sweltering afternoons, their lifeblood quenching the thirst of the collective. Beyond their obvious purpose, juice boxes could even be a currency of goodwill, a token of friendship, and a bridge across seeming chasms of difference. For me, juice boxes aren't just a symbol of nourishment and rejuvenation; they can bring together the young and the young-at-heart.

Surely, the sands of time are quite unkind to these Juice Box Heroes. With each sip, their life force ebbs away. Their once-robust frames crumple in on themselves as they approach their final moments of usefulness. With their purpose now fulfilled, their empty husks are cast aside, crumpled and almost instantly forgotten. But, they served their purpose well, and did even more than they were designed for; they brought us happy memories, too.

The Juice Box Hero is ephemeral, a flash of brilliance in the sweeping sands of yesteryear. But the memories of bonds forged over shared sips of sweet nectar long endure after their demise. Juice boxes are more than mere packaging for cheap fruit juice. They are symbols of connection, harbingers of joy, and champions for unity in a world that so desperately needs all three.

So, let's remember the legacy of our favorite Juice Box Heroes. These humble purveyor of sustenance and sweetness should be remembered through the ages as the guardian of youth's fleeting innocence. As I see children today partake in the offerings of the Juice Box, many of them with perhaps even cheaper contents than in my youth, I revel in the good times of warm days spent with my Juice Box Heroes. That's even if the friends I once shared them with have long since departed my life.

Perhaps in the grand scheme of history, juice boxes will never be revered as a hero. But, I think it unfair to dispose of them so out of hand. Also, I wish that many juice box handlers would be so kind as to deposit their tattered bodies into a recycling hamper. That way, their empty shells may yet again be reborn as yet another Juice Box Hero one day.

The Paradox Of Plenty

Our world often seems to be racing against the ticking clock. So, for many, the notion of having too much free time might appear as a distant, almost utopian concept. Yet, as John Koenig astutely observes in his book "The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows," an abundance of free time can sometimes morph into a kind of existential quicksand. He's termed this sort of phenomenon as "Angosis".

This term encapsulates the paradoxical malaise that seems to seep into the human spirit when presented with an unbounded horizon of time. It's a scenario where the abundance of leisure time seems to dissolve our ambitions and aspirations. The roots of this paradox lie in the intricate relationship between time, value, and the human propensity to aspire to be more.

It's essential to understand that our goals often derive their value from their position within the finite framework of time. When time is limited, it becomes a precious commodity for us. In this context, goals become focal points of convergence, where our energies, efforts, and time meet to create something of value, something to show for our efforts.

However, when time seems to stretch infinitely before us, devoid of any pressing demands or

constraints, it tends to lose its value as a commodity. It no longer serves as a motivating force propelling us towards achievement. In my own retirement from the workforce, time transformed into an ever-expanding ocean. My once most anticipated goals now appear as distant, insignificant specks, barely visible on the vast horizon.

As I've accomplished much of what I wanted from life, in the face of such boundless time, the urgency to achieve, strive, and create diminishes. I've given way to a languid state of existence where aspirations seem futile and devoid of any real purpose. I may have a forever home, a loving wife, and enough funds to live daily without any additional effort on my part. But, what else is there?

This feeling is common for the homebound among us, whether due to declining health or any number of other personal reasons. It's because the human psyche is intricately wired to derive satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment from overcoming challenges and achieving goals. When we're stripped of the necessity to strive against the ticking clock, we're also robbed of the opportunities to experience the joy of victory and the satisfaction of achievement that comes from overcoming hurdles.

As my own free time expands, the contours of these fulfilling experiences blur, leaving me in an existential crisis in which nothing seems to hold value

or significance. Moreover, Koenig's phenomenon of "Angosis" can also be seen as a reflection of the human tendency to take things for granted when they're available in abundance. Just as the value of a precious gem lies in its rarity, the value of time, too, seems to diminish when it's available in seemingly unlimited quantities.

The human spirit thrives on challenges and the pursuit of excellence. So, it finds itself adrift in such a scenario where these challenges are no longer present or offered. Therefore, we must then anchor ourselves to meaningful pursuits that add value and richness to our lives and those around us.

In the process of my introspection on the implications of the term "Angosis", it becomes evident to me that the malaise stemming from having too much free time isn't just a reflection of diminished value. Rather, I've gained a broader perspective on the human condition, thinking more deeply about our intrinsic need for purpose, for challenges both real and manufactured, and for goals that infuse our lives with meaning and direction. In the face of boundless time, the human spirit can wither, unable to find the nourishment it needs to flourish and grow.

So, as we navigate through the complexities of life, it becomes imperative to strike a balance. We must find that golden mean where time becomes not an enemy, nor an overabundant ally. Time must be

our most precious companion that walks alongside us, urging us to aspire, to strive, and to achieve. It must never become our mortal enemy, either by having too little or too much.

We must create our own goals in the absence of subsistence, necessity, or demand. Only by appreciating and maintaining our productive use of this most delicate and precious resource of time do we find the true essence of living. Each day we must manage ourselves to remain in a state where goals retain their value, where aspirations fuel our journey, and where our spirit can find its true fulfillment. Whatever we do, we must never allow ourselves to be encumbered by the malaise of "Angosis" for any longer than we need a short respite to gather our bearings.

Road Trips

Road trips are one of my all-time favorite pastimes. Adventures on roads less traveled are even more my favorites. Back roads often provide the most inspiring memories. But oftentimes it's less for the remarkable scenery and landmarks than the company shared between family, dear friends, and special loved ones. The conversations shared range from small talk, to inappropriate jokes, to cherished memories of yesterday, to life altering reflections on Life.

One long and lovely trip down beautiful country roads with spotty cell service and long stretches of barely defiled backcountry, the life altering variety of road trip conversations took place. Too long I neglected my own self-care for the sake of others either too young or ignorant to care. The selfish acts of just a few misguided souls derailed my entire life.

In our society, it's far too easy to let a single soul's ignorance or malevolence harm one's livelihood, self-worth, or sense of purpose. There's an overarching theme of passive-aggressiveness, credentialism, and elitism that often greatly hinders or even prevents truly creative and talented people such as myself from truly achieving greatness.

I've met countless souls with dreams far more focused and realistic than my own who find themselves discarded and unappreciated. I watch far too many of them suffer as they attempt to conform, as I did for over two decades myself. Some of them shuffle along and get by, while many others slowly and painfully waste away, as if the passage of time is their slave master.

But, thanks to a rather hastily planned and free bird approach to road tripping around the borders of civilization, a dear friend and I connected on another level I didn't think was possible. Suddenly, once disjointed thoughts find new connections through community and the shared experience of wandering back roads often taking unexpected turns and detours out of necessity.

With these trips taken, I finally found myself at some sort of peace, the sort I hadn't felt in years. I finally knew who I am. So many years I was captive to uninformed opinions and bigoted preconceptions. Upon these long periods of reflection and recreation, while the peace has been far from an interrupted frame of mind, I came much further thanks to some impromptu road tripping within the space of a few weeks than I ever did in over three decades on this earth. This little Phoenix, for better or worse, now flies free!

The Secret Language Of The Child's Mind

As a child, my world was a symphony of sounds and melodies that swirled around me in a whirlwind of wonder. I'd hum along to familiar tunes, losing myself in the rhythms and beats. I let the music take me to places beyond reality, stimulating my already wild imagination.

During these innocent times, I'd often mutter senseless, totally absurd rhymes in place of the regular lyrics. In doing so, I'd create my own whimsical world of words that made no logical or rational sense, yet sounded magical nonetheless. It was as if the music unlocked a secret language within me, one that only I could understand.

I fondly remember sitting in my room, with my cassette player on full blast. My headphones would cover my ears like a shield from the outside world. I'd sway to the music, my body moving in time with the beat, and my voice blending in with the melody. I let the music wash over me, turning me into a vessel for its magic.

These were prime times for the silly rhymes to emerge, tumbling out of my mouth in a semiconscious jumble. But it didn't matter if there was any sense to

them; after all, in the moment, I was lost in the music, escaping to my own world of whimsy.

Sometimes I'd even make up my own songs, creating melodies out of thin air, with the lyrics flowing in a stream of consciousness. These songs of a child's mind had given me the power to create my own reality. There I could shape my own destiny, in a secret language no one else could decode.

Looking back, I realize how precious and innocent those moments were. As an adult, it's all too easy to get lost in the stresses and pressures of everyday life. We must never forget the simple pleasures that once brought us so much joy. In all fairness, while many of those silly rhymes have been lost to time, they were important practice. They led to the poetry I would write over the next two decades.

When I think back to those days of humming and muttering senseless rhymes, I'm reminded of the beauty of childhood, the magic of music, and the power of imagination. I'm grateful for those memories, because they remind me that even in the darkest of times, there's always a melody waiting to be heard if we take the time to listen.

But even now, I still can't decode the secret language of the child's mind, even that which was once my own. Still, even with the passage of so much time, I still won't stop me from trying to recapture that

now hidden magic, to relearn the secret language of
the child's mind.

Sepia Toned Memories

Looking back fondly, particularly at my early childhood, I'm often confronted by a curious sensation. Echoes of what were once the moments of my waking life seem to be transfigured into wondrous exhibits. Many of these memories become like pieces of artistic curiosity displayed in galleries of reminiscence, rather than snapshots of events that actually occurred within the reach of my senses.

Blurred lines border many of my more distant memories, the shapes and colors distorted with age. Often when I take time to recollect the best times of my youth, the once-vibrant colors of those energetic days of wonder have faded into soft, muted shades, like a sepia photograph. While I've never dreamed in black and white, this sepia tone has often appeared in vignetting certain scenes from my distant past.

As I gaze upon the amber-hued vignettes that now frame my young misadventures in nature, they take on the veil of an ethereal dreamscape. The verdant greens of the grassy fields, the cerulean sky above, and the rich, earthen browns of the world beneath my feet are distilled into subtle shades. The sounds of buzzing insects, fluttering birds, and wandering beasts are now but wistful whispers. The scents, at least the memories of them, are mostly drowned out by a saltwater breeze, even in those places not by the sea.

Perhaps the bizarre nature of these remembrances are at least in part due to pretending the fields I absentmindedly roamed were actually the interstellar void between the sparkling stars above. In my flights of fancy, my youthful imagination transformed the earthly meadows and woods into celestial playgrounds. Traveling through this open space with so few cares, I frolicked amidst the constellations within my head, my laughter mingling with the cosmic winds as I attempted to unravel the mysteries of the universe.

That isn't to say I didn't prize these places for what they were in reality. In fact, I one day dreamed of purchasing my family's favorite vacation spot for my own, about two dozen acres overlooking a river in Downeast Maine. This dream would never become reality, and perhaps for the best.

In the very last year of our favorite resort's operation, as I stood at the precipice of adulthood, I couldn't help but be drawn back to those days of innocent adventure. I took many photographs of the property with its fifteen cabins and many acres of natural beauty. These photos are all that remain of the great things that once were to behold there; they have now been all but lost to history. These captured images now serve as the sole testament to the grandeur that once graced these grounds.

I finally returned to what was once the dream property of mine, only to find it ravaged. Those structures I could see from the road were left in sad, deconstructed miserable states. For the young child still lingering within me, this was a heartbreaking realization. It was as if a black hole enveloped an entire solar system once full of life, now decimated for raw materials. I wondered who took it upon themselves to desecrate that once holy ground, then realized that it probably didn't need help to deteriorate at all; Nature had clearly forsaken it, too.

It finally dawned on me that someone actually owns that sprawling property, letting it fall into such disrepair. Considering how socio-economically depressed that region has become since the last time I was there in 2007, it's hard to say what the drivers were in letting it become that way. It's sickening to me that a place with such history could have the entire community spit in the face of it. It may not even be the owner's fault; they may just not have had the resources, the desire, or any real reason at all to restore it, just for history's sake.

Upon seeing this abomination, my wife and I made our way down to Eastport, where I could stand on the pier one last time, as I swore this is the last time I'd ever return to this state I needed to now forsake. The whole road trip had been eye-opening; so many things were now left abandoned, and many

things that appeared so were still inhabited by those who were unable to leave them behind.

I realize now it was for the best I lacked funding to buy that property when it finally came up for sale over a decade ago. As such, my fortunes weren't made until long after it did sell. Today, I have a property in Vermont that's in many ways superior, yet my mind would still often go back to that Maine property whenever I'd search for inner peace. After seeing its current state, I can now only think of home here in Vermont when I need this reassurance, which is quite easy to do; I just have to wake up and look outside.

Still, on rainy days, I still find my heart yearning for the boundless horizons of my childhood reveries. As I think back, I feel like I'm entering a world where the line between real and imaginary things blurs. My imagination creates an exquisite collage of my own personal record of the human being, with all my five senses blending a strange concoction that will always taste simultaneously bitter and sweet.

With further introspection, I've come to the sublime realization, that no matter how long I live, I must never let my memories lose their color. We must always appreciate the beauty of our past to remind us who we were to inspire us to be who we're still to become.

Too Much Time To Think

As I sit here, with the sun streaming in through my windows and the gentle rush of the stream outside, I find myself lost in thought. These days I find are filled with too much time to think, but not enough energy to take action.

Even when the world seems to have slowed down, my mind yet races with endless possibilities, hopes, and fears. I have all the time in the world to ponder the future, to dream of new beginnings, and to reminisce about the past.

But, there's a sense of restlessness that permeates my every thought. Most days I'm stuck in a limbo of inactivity, unable to muster the energy or motivation to do much of anything productive. My body begins to feel heavy, weighed down by these idle moments. I'm not sure how much of it is chronic fatigue and how much is just the circumstantial evidence of a crumbling society.

In these moments, I find myself watching the world go by. The trees sway in the breeze, the birds flit between branches, and the clouds float lazily across the sky. Even gazing upon this peaceful scene, my mind can't seem to find peace.

I become consumed by the constant churning of my thoughts. I think of all the things I could be doing, but simply can't bring myself to do. There are moments, fewer and farther between than I would prefer, when I am filled with a sudden burst of purposeful energy that propels me forward. But soon enough, I'm back to where I started, lost in the fog of my own indecision.

Still, I cling to the hope that one day, the fog will lift, and I will find my way out of this limbo. Until then, I must continue to ponder and dream. As the words find their way to my fingertips, I will share them. But when they don't, I'll wait and let my mind wander until I find my way back to write down what I've found.

You Should've Seen It In Color

During the COVID Pandemic of 2020, I made the brave choice to give up on writing freelance assignments. One of the main reasons I did so was because I felt the color draining from my writing. The grind of churning out what felt like grayscale articles on a daily basis took a toll on my sense of creative integrity.

When I first started writing professionally, artistry was often encouraged and sought after. Nowadays, it seems personality is better left to voice talents and video stars, not scribes. Meanwhile, many writers are left to suffer in a black and white prison if they ever hope to earn any sort of living. Then, if what you're writing isn't fictional, serialized, formulaic, or some combination of the three, you're likely a starving artist.

Perhaps I'm fortunate to be old enough to recall black and white television sets still active in households when I was young. Rarely were they the main set in a house, but rather stashed away in some back room or even in a kids' bedroom. What fascinated me most about black and white televisions is you must imagine what's shown on the television as it would look in color.

Naturally, your brain wants to colorize everything. So, after a while, your mind's eye begins to fill in the colors for you, at least in your recollections. For whatever reason in my writing, due to stylistic expectations as a professional writer, I lost my ability to write colorfully. The joy I once had in painting word pictures was on the verge of being lost forever.

People say they value storytelling even in professional work. Yet, many of the stories I read today lack depth. They become increasingly derivative by the day. Sure, I find some writers who still manage to inject some humor and nuance into their work. But, even then, the positive aspects of these pieces are often based in pop culture references, and I've grown weary of those. Sometimes, I still find wordplay cleverly woven into narratives, but this is becoming increasingly rare.

Unfortunately, most often, I find many writers who seem to believe themselves more clever than they really are. I see fools armed with expensive Master's degrees attempting to force their art for the sake of appearances. It's rare that I come across writings that truly inspire me to expand my own palette of expression and to dig deeper.

I've always found it incredibly difficult to dredge up more tear-jerking memories and thoughts to share

in my writings. Yet, it's only in the color of these powerful emotions that my writing can gain its vibrancy. To act as a neutral observer and third party for the sake of a subsistent paycheck is simply damning to one's artistic palette.

So, when does the work of writing cease to be merely scribbling for the sake of others' whims and become something worth celebrating? I didn't come to a solid answer for that question, until after hearing a particular lyric: "you should've seen it in color."

I could go more into the song that the line was from, but in isolation, it made me consider just how grey so much of my thinking has become. My line of work had forced me to give up on myself, and only care about what others wanted of me. Who I am as a human being became immaterial; all that mattered were popular search queries and trending topics.

It's strange to me how black and white my past looks to me now. Much of it has become obscured by the imperfections of long-term memory. Many details inevitably fade into white noise as our experiences slowly, yet steadily, retreat into what then becomes our distant past.

Now, I must put on my three-dimensional glasses with vivid color filters to see what I've been missing. But, before I get too dizzy and nauseous from the experience, I have to write not so much what

I see, but rather what I perceive. Only then can I bring back living color into what has been my life.

For too long, I failed to find the silver linings in what has often been a very unfair life. I'd rather forget so much of it; yet there is much worth telling in the colorful moments I have yet to share. But so much of what bookends the colorful times is too painful for me to recall. The dark pages are often full of identity crises, mixed emotions, betrayal, abuse, and despair.

Still, there are moments deserving to be captured and eternally fixated in prose. These remembrances aren't just for me. They are also for the enjoyment of imaginations looking to find a splash of color in our often too binary, grayscale lives.

I wish to bleed living color back into a dimming black and white world. The colors I see now are much too dull and muted for my liking. So, what choice do I have but to pierce the mundane with my own sharp wit and intellect, both of which I tragically allowed to dull for too long?

I must retrain my mind to again see the vivid colors within the shades of grey shown to me. This is how I once saw things as a child. It's a true irony that as our digital displays grow more vivid, the duller our imaginations become. The resolution of our experiences becomes worse as the bitrate of our input increases. This is happening exponentially year

after year. We too often let technology do the work our imaginations were designed to do; so, our senses dull as a result.

Of course, many artists still strive to keep their dreams and stories they tell alive. Sadly, technology has given the public unrealistic expectations of what to expect from the art they consume. Therefore, many artists then see their work not only go unappreciated, but often become openly mocked. The limitations of the technology from my past made us all think more artistically and vividly from the limited palette digital artists once had. Now, the more primitive the technology used to create art, the more I appreciate it.

What now, dear reader, do you wish you could recollect in living color that others around you perceive in black and white? It's a true irony that you can paint with unlimited colors with today's technology. Yet, time and again, I'm seeing the world more in black and white than ever. What color can you inject into the world today through your own personal artistry? Is there something that deserves to be brought back to life that you can't live without?

For me, I must spill color back onto the pages of my past, no matter how messy the process may be. If my past remains a negative roll of grayscale, my tomorrows will continue to appear ever bleaker.

Autumn

The Acclamatio Of Social Media

Long ago, the Roman Senate was the epicenter of imperial governance. It was a swirling vortex of ambition and intrigue. Clad in the trappings of their station, these men of power engaged in ceaseless political maneuvering. Their voices echoed through the Senatorial chambers, booming like the clarion calls of war trumpets.

Today, echoes of that tumultuous past resound in the digital agora of social media. On these platforms, a similar brand of capricious pseudo-direct-democracy holds sway. The mob mentality prevalent on these web portals is now threatening the stability and unity of our modern world.

During the glory days of ancient Rome, the primary factor in Senators' decisions was what came to be called *acclamatio*. This Latin word means "an eager expression of approval." In politics, it came to mean the public expression of pleasure or displeasure for measures by way of loud acclamations.

Within such a feverish political climate as the Roman Empire, the Senatorial acclamations were a potent weapon. They were capable of conferring

legitimacy to those they saw fit. With a single, collective cry, the fickle winds of popular opinion could change direction. Acclamations could propel some towards glory while casting others forever into the shadows or condemning them to cruel fates. Unbeknownst to these Senators, their acclamations would shape the course of history in ways they couldn't imagine.

In much the same vein today, social media platforms have become the modern colosseum in which the masses gather to witness spectacles of public opinion. Hordes of quarrelsome choruses of digital voices swirl through the digital maelstrom, made up of information-hungry souls waiting to make their own opinion known. Social media feeds are filled with melodious songs of the righteous mingling with the discordant cries of the disaffected. Each new status update is a gladiatorial thrust, each 'like' a laurel wreath, and each 'share' a ripple propagating through this vast, interconnected network of globalized humanity.

The rising mob mentality of social media is a curious doppelgänger to the acclamatio of the Roman Senate. But, it has mutated and become magnified by the vast reach and speed of the digital realm. As in ancient times, this new form of pseudo-direct-democracy has gained the dangerous power to elevate or eviscerate both individuals and entire groups of people on a whim.

Once confined to the marble and frescoed chambers of Senate, the dangerous and unruly collective voice of acclamatio now wields a pervasive, insidious influence on our lives across the globe. This virtual Senate, however, is far more unruly and unfair than its Roman counterpart. The relative anonymity of the digital world emboldens individuals to embrace their basest instincts. This allows the loudest voices to unleash a torrent of invective and vitriol that can drown out the most cogent, reasoned arguments.

This tempest of voices is further amplified by algorithms that stoke the flames of outrage and polarize opinions. This is a purposeful attempt by corporate money-making machines to foster an environment that rewards impulsiveness and punishes nuance. There's also a seductive allure to this new form of populist democracy. It's the intoxicating promise of having one's voice heard by millions, of the remotely possible chance to shift the course of history with a single tweet or post, which is a siren song that few can resist.

So, by participating at all in modern social networking we plunge headlong into the fray only to most likely be swallowed by the maw of ignorance. Unless we're driven by a primal yearning for validation and influence, we can each profit almost nothing by taking part. This is why I decided to let go of the supposed necessity of being active on these social

networks; all they were doing was wasting my time, and most likely, they're wasting yours, as well.

As we navigate the perilous waters of this digital age, we must heed the lessons of history. The tumultuous acclamatio of the Roman Senate should serve as a stark reminder of the power and danger inherent in decision-making swayed by loud, angry mobs. We must be ever vigilant against the capriciousness of such mobs. Otherwise, we may well find ourselves in the thrall of a pseudo-direct-democracy that threatens to tear apart the very fabric of our society. Only by tempering our own passions and embracing reason can we hope to chart a course for ourselves that leads us towards the shores of unity and enlightenment.

The Crossroads At Panic Street And Heartbreak Avenue

I've come to many crossroads in my life, but none so daunting as the one I'm facing now: to sleep or not to sleep. Every time I lay my head to rest, I find myself in a state of panic, for my nights are now overloaded with bad dreams, many of which feel so real that I literally have to pinch myself to realize they are all within my head.

Even in a state of exhaustion, I find myself unable to find any peaceful rest. This is hardly new for me, but even when I try to vacate familiar surroundings, hoping that an idyllic setting will somehow reset my string of nightmarish cycles, I can't even shut my eyes without fear of what that deep sleep will bring.

Part of me wishes to revisit the many fictions I have begun to write over the years. All of them are in some state of incompleteness, many of them barely begun to be explored. But, there's so much realness to cover, so many relevant topics I would like to touch on, not that any of it will interest all that many readers. Yet, I still want to write about them nonetheless. Much of it has to do with the seeming lack of incentives

towards common courtesy and “goodness” in a post-pandemic world. I find myself wondering just how I came to be so remarkably intelligent and clever in a world that’s growing dimmer and more brazen each day.

All I want is to spend a good day with my beloved, yet here I am unable to find any sort of restfulness. My mind keeps racing a mile a minute, but my body is so exhausted that there isn’t much energy left for me to express what I’m on about. I feel as if hidden within my archives are all of the things I’ve always needed to say, but not put in quite the way I meant them. Many vital things are hinted at, but only alluded to, especially within the denser passages of my fiction.

There are certain patterns of thinking that had little to do with telling any sort of story and were simply my way of expressing difficult thoughts that I was having. It took me many years to become any sort of expert journal writer. Even now, I find myself endlessly drifting from topic to topic, droning on with a futile hope that the very act of putting words together in some coherent form will give me enough comfort to retire for a night. Yet, that exercise is rarely good enough for that purpose.

I have seen so much on daily drives, and so much of it is the same. Buildings and other human built properties stand in various states of decay, many

of which are still occupied by human beings, themselves in various states of decay. I see humanity in dire straits; there is little hope that I see available for the common populace, and I do indeed pity my less fortunate contemporaries. Were it not for my skill with the written word, I likely would've met a gross fate due to desperate measures I would have taken in order to make myself known.

I've known so many people who I thought were in general good and honest, but I now see as simply arrogant and self-serving. Perhaps I've been a bit arrogant at times myself, but only because I felt that I was in the right. As time passes, my observations prove to be rather keen and my predictions shockingly accurate. But self-serving, besides trying to simply survive and find purpose to bother breathing for another testing day, I'm certainly not.

Each day truly is a sort of test for me, of my resolve, of my patience, and of my very will to exist among fellow humans. I often feel that I am presented with many multiple-choice questions. The potential answers provided are rarely satisfactory solutions. So, I often write-in my own, filling in the blank with some morsel of sarcastic wit.

I do not wish ill on most, but there are many whose sins will lead them to soon receive their just desserts. No divine judgment is necessary; the very dog-eat-dog nature of our crumbling society will enact

its heartless fates on those it deems unworthy. No maledictions are necessary.

I have often lived under protest and under threat, overstimulated, overdosed, and overloaded. None of these things are ideal, of course, and yet I somehow persist. Survival is likely an inaccurate term for my continued existence, rather it is much more a form of semi-functional persistence. I refuse to live in a big-box economy, and that is what we have; shipping lanes are overcrowded, containers bulging at the seams, and not enough drivers to whip the horses into shape.

There is too much stuff, and stuff mostly without substance, shiny plastic exteriors belying substandard innards, high prices suggesting luxury yet simply disguised under clever branding. What is the point of amassing fortunes that are built primarily on unrealized gains, while borrowing against imaginary and arbitrary valuations of assets denoted in a currency which has no intrinsic value on its own, besides whatever the oligarchy who controls the monetary system says that it has?

As we ask the difficult questions, those that seemed too foolish to ask, yet seemed surprisingly relevant, we find the truth we uncover to be uglier than we could have at first expected. Yet we must ask, for curiosity's own sake. The thirst to know what makes up everything and why whatever does what it

does, this is the one thing that humanity still has, in some form, but is wildly misguided. What I've learned, I try to share, but few ever listen. Now, as I seek a greater audience through writing proper books, I realize that it's not the volume that matters, but the frequency.

The Ebbs And Flows Of Creative Juices

Have you ever had a moment where you were sure the creative juices were about to start flowing, but then refused to gel into anything useful? Many of my scribblings over the years would start with a great idea, then suddenly stopped making sense. Sometimes, my train of thought will even stop mid-sentence.

Sometimes, I'd realize I was trying too hard. So, I'd try and relax, sit at my desk, and stare blankly at the screen in front of me. I'd do this in order to feel the ebbs and flows of my creative juices.

When the creative juices are flowing, it's as if floodgates have opened, and my mind races with ideas and inspiration. My thoughts come at lightning speed, and my fingers can barely keep up as I try to capture them.

On days where my writing is going well, it even affects my entire day. Colors seem brighter, sounds more vibrant, and almost anything in my environment can become a source of inspiration. When I get this magical feeling, I relish every moment of it.

Then, there are the days when the creative juices run dry. My mind then seems trapped in a parched and barren desert wasteland. Hoping that inspiration will strike, I stare at the blank page, but it never comes.

But, my lack of inspiration doesn't just affect my ability to write something meaningful. All around me, the colors become muted, the sounds duller, and I become frustration at just about anything that comes unexpectedly. It's a painful feeling when I'm running on creative empty, and I struggle mightily to find my way out of these funks.

In my quest to mine for creativity, sometimes I try to will the beauty of a new inspired passage into existence. Sheer determination and tapping away at the keyboard sometimes seems the only way to bring the ideas back to flowing again. Unfortunately, this approach typically leads to burnout and frustration.

I've learned the hard way, by dealing with consistent bouts of anxiety and depression, that creativity isn't something that can be forced; rather, it has to come naturally. Some days, the inspiration will simply not be there, and I have to simply accept a dry and arid day for what it is.

So, when I find the creative juices are ebbing, I try to step away from my work and do something else. I take a walk, read a book, play a video game, or

watch a television series. When these pastimes don't lead to sufficient recreation, I then meditate. I try to clear my mind and let it wander, hoping that the universe will bestow some inspiration onto me. Eventually, it always does.

Once the creative juices begin to flow once again, I feel reinvigorated and inspired. This never-ending cycle of ebbs and flows is what makes creative pursuits so infuriating, yet also so rewarding. Despite the many frustrating dry spells, I wouldn't trade my vocation as a writer and editor for anything else. The highs are worth the lows, and the act of creating meaningful works are worth the struggle. These struggles alongside the victories are what makes the creative process so beautiful and rewarding.

So, what happens when the words still won't say what I want them to mean? My coherency is at times fleeting, but not always due to internal or external stresses. The passion for the written word ebbs and flows for reasons governed mostly by my unconscious. Yet, sometimes the more mixed up I get, the more I need to write, even if the result is pure garbage. At times, these moments of incoherent rambling serve as a sort of a writer's tune-up for me, even if the product is less than desirable.

There was a time I didn't think very much of my scribbles and the value they might hold. But, as I

return to them later, they gradually make more sense to me. Writing is a beautiful exercise of the mind. It's funny what you can come up with when you write whatever words pop into your head.

In addition to many words, I'll often get images in my mind. But, since the quality of my doodling leaves much to be desired, I prefer to wait for the words to come to describe these imaginings. Some of them, however, aren't easily explained with words alone, grand designs which I can't figure out how to express.

So, the reason I write so many different things is that I can't just stick to one type of writing. My brain moves so fast that when the flow is going, it's often overwhelming. This is how I lose interest in a particular subject before I even get going. It's like I always need a new more complex vehicle to convey my ideas, so I need to wait for the language to catch up with me.

The trick to being creative consistently is keep yourself motivated even when you're not being productive. Creative juices are a fickle resource, and you can't always manage when they'll be flowing. This is why I've tried so many different genres over the years — essays, poetry, short stories, etc — hoping that I could find a spark just by adjusting my process. Sometimes, this can work, but it's not a guarantee.

But, as I found myself leaning into writing essays much more than other genres, I realized that essay writing is where I find my creative flow is at its best. Even when ideas are trickling in, I can use the essay form to be the most productive. So, I finally found a happy medium with my writing. While I certainly haven't closed the book on writing novels or poetry, essays have become my chief genre because my thought process seems best captured in essay form, even when I'm not nearly at my creative best.

As a creative who relies on imagination and ingenuity to make a living, I've had no choice but to learn how to manage the inevitable ebbs and flows of my creative juices. No matter how experienced you get in your chosen art, it's always a challenge to be consistent. So, for those about to create, I salute you. It's a hard road to get where you're going, and most of the time you'll end up somewhere else entirely. But, eventually, you will make your road map, and you will finally say what you need to say.

Falling Through The Cracks

Often I ponder how many incredible ideas end up falling through the cracks over the years. With the postal service and shipping industry both in overload crisis mode, it's not just ideas getting lost in the mail. Of course, who really sends letters anymore? Rather, how many great ideas, including pitches for manuscripts that never get written that could be mind altering and life changing, are lost forever because they got caught in a waste-bin or spam filter?

How many great writing careers are ended before they start? Who really gets lucky anymore when it all seems like random chance who gets to be a millionaire, whether in dollars or views on TikTok? The latter seems just as relevant as the former these days, though hardly relative.

Nowadays, I avoid reading fiction more than ever; while it has its place, I grow weary of plot holes and the presuppositions required to assume any sort of fictional world can actually exist. While fantasy certainly has its place and I'm not dismissing its utility, especially in my own life, truth is much more bizarre than any fiction even the most genius fictionist could concoct.

The real is much more fascinating thanks to the correlations and true causes of the effects we like to colloquially know as the present day; these causes and their effects are much more measurable, relatable, and learnable in ways that in fiction is impossible. A single plot twist in fiction can break continuity for good; but, a plot twist in real life, if you dare to assume that our real lives even follow any sort of predestined narrative, doesn't mean anything beyond what you conclude it to mean.

Our lives are full of often inexplicably cruel moments, such as coming into work finding the store shuttered up and your job no longer exists in an instant. For many folks, this spells complete and utter disaster. But, for all you know, losing that job, which probably wasn't all that fabulous to begin with, could be the best thing that ever happens to you. The worst events can lead to the best effects, in ways that you couldn't ever back up in fiction, no matter how hard a clever writer may try to do so.

There are so many what-ifs that pervade every decision we make. The further from the decision we get, the more we tend to question it, imagining alternate realities that could have placed ourselves in even better conditions than we enjoy now. But these little daydream fantasies are quite dangerous, as they presuppose factors that we can't begin to intuit without understanding that we must account for butterfly effects we rarely even recognize.

Many so called experts in their fields will say that the art of prediction is just that, an art. In science, experts rely on best guesses and educated opinions, backed up by dozens of citations and hundreds of pages of proofs, facts, and figures. Yet there is a huge movement among the disciples of Big Data who believe machine learning can predict anything.

Of course, machine learning all begins with an algorithm, and while the machine can adjust over time and evolve as datasets improve, whatever presuppositions were built into that initial seed algorithm are going to eventually prove flawed in some way. These limits of human imagination will cause these models to miss out on perhaps the greatest key event in history in that given field, because who could have seen it coming?

Then, you have those who become labeled seers, or even witches or wizards, who seem to predict events that they couldn't possibly have logically foreseen with uncanny precision. Is it truly supernatural? Or do some minds simply function on levels that your average Joe or Jane couldn't begin to fathom?

We all think about possibilities in our world on a regular basis that could be groundbreaking. Yet, hardly any of us realize what we are thinking up at the moment these lightning strikes of inspired genius

electrify us. Most of us never give these clever moments a second thought, and it's a damn shame.

Many of us spend far too much energy on things we can't control. What we should be doing is using our moments of indecision as meditation periods to figure out what we do have control over. Most people who are faced with sudden job loss, for example, don't react rationally. They lash out, demanding an explanation.

While it's not wrong to want an answer, it's best to simply walk away and find another road to take. Many people simply fume about unfair things. You have to immediately ask yourself, and you can only do this by mindfully retraining yourself as I have had to do, is this something I can control? Sometimes it is. When it's not, find what you can. What was hidden before that is now revealed?

Many times we are too close to current events to realize the lessons we should be learning. This is why hindsight is so clear, because we lose sight of the context in which certain events occurred. Even if you were to predict 99 percent of events spot on, it's likely that the 1 percent you miss on end up being the most important.

While having powers of prediction can seem awe inspiring, sometimes these predictions are based solely on life experience and learning how to read

people better than they can read themselves. I've watched far too many people falling through the cracks, even after getting second chances, all the time. Too often, people pass up opportunities simply because they couldn't see the road ahead for what it was, another journey just waiting to happen.

Sure, you will get a flat tire every so often; something will break down without warning and you find yourself stranded. But, these are meant to be pushpins on the map of your life's itinerary. The more we try and plan things to go right, the less they ultimately will.

It's much better to look at life as an impromptu road trip. You departed on this trip as soon as you were born into this strange, wonderful, and often troubling world. Now, it's time for your story to unfold. Come what may, you just have to live it as best as you can. You are the main character, and you must choose your own adventure.

The Great Pretenders

In one way or another, we're all masters of disguise. We don the masks that suit the roles we're expected to play. Sometimes we do so with such finesse that the lines between the character and actor blur into nonexistence. In the realm of education, I've often found myself in the midst of a grand facade. So many teachers pretend to be experts, when they are as much a student as those who are supposed to be instructed. I prefer to always play the role of a student, even now as a professional writer. After all, we're all perpetual students in the grand classroom of existence.

So, stepping daily into the role of the student, I embody the boundless curiosity that most people consider a hallmark of youth. In the words of the great philosopher Socrates: "I know that I am intelligent, because I know that I know nothing." You can never allow yourself to be satisfied with any single answer. Each answer I discover to one of my quests spawns many new questions. Every new revelation brings with it the promise of deeper mysteries to unravel.

Albert Einstein once said, "The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing." Expert and novice alike must be united in their quest for understanding, fueled by an insatiable desire to learn and grow.

Despite their claims to expertise, teachers are just as enchanted by the allure of the unknown as any of us. But, many of them have been taught that to be effective instructors, they must also be great pretenders. They feel it's necessary to master wearing the mask of authority while nurturing a heart that remains forever young and eager to learn. These pursuits, unfortunately, aren't compatible, so one must be inevitably be chosen over the other.

The classroom should be a playground, a space where we can let our guards down and revel in the joy of discovery together. Teachers and students should become collaborators in a grand adventure, charting unknown territories of knowledge and wisdom. Discovery should be as exhilarating as it is enlightening, not be a dry run through textbook courses, rote memorization, and contrived pre-packaged perspectives.

The beauty of education doesn't lie in the perfection of the steps, but rather in the joy of moving progressively through ideas and concepts. Education should be about being in motion, but never just in a straight line; learning necessarily should have its share of twists and turns to keep things interesting. To stop learning is to stop living, and many people give up on learning because they are taught in ways that bore them.

This why teachers should always encourage students to keep learning outside of the classroom. True education exists all around us if we just know where to look for it. The great science-fiction writer Isaac Asimov once said, "Self-education is, I firmly believe, the only kind of education there is." Any expert that pretends to know all that they need to know still has much to learn from their students. The wisest teachers embrace the knowledge that, through teaching, learning becomes a shared experience.

It seems that teachers becoming great pretenders leads most of us to enter the grand theatre of life posing ourselves as masters of disguise. Some of us are able navigate the complexities of modern life with grace and poise; sadly, many of us fall flat and are doomed to playing a backup role. But those of us who stumble, yet never falter in getting back up while learning all we can from our mistakes, can find a happy medium in our quest for constant discovery.

Never be fooled by the masks we each wear day-to-day. Beneath our façades, we're all united by our collective quest for understanding what, how, and why we are each here in this world. Even the wisest person knows only an infinitesimal fraction of what there is to know. But, the greatest knowledge of all is knowing we each have a little bit of knowledge to share with one another. So, let's get out there and work on learning together and stop being great pretenders.

I've Lived A Life Full Of Almosts

Many of my memories are filtered by the bittersweet hues of "almost." For many years, the word "finally" was elusive as the wisp of a cloud on a bright summer day. From the earlier moments I remember of my youth, I've embarked on a surreal adventure of nearly-there's and not-quite's.

I've skimmed the surface of greatness, only to watch it vanish like a mirage. I was the princess of the penultimate, the ruler of the runner-up, and the sovereign of the second best. As I endured the dungeons of adolescence, I courted an ever more tantalizing waltz of almosts. I was to be the starving artist whose masterpiece was always just a keystroke shy of perfection before it was all laid to waste.

In the world of academia, I basked in the warmth of the penumbra of brilliance, but never quite stepped into the light. Rather than be a bridge to a wider world of lifelong learning and scholastic achievement, my higher education career was a procession of missed opportunities, narrow misses, and close calls. I pirouetted around the precipice of achievement, forever teetering on the edge of greatness, but never quite enjoying any significant triumph.

But, amid this swirling storm of almos^ts, there were moments when "finally" would grace me with its presence. These rare, resplendent gems I treasure, as they form the foundation for the works I still build upon to this day. They sparkle as testaments to the elusive power of perseverance and hope. In these ephemeral instants, I'd begin to feel the warm embrace of success. I eagerly awaited someone to finally pluck me from the shadows, placing me upon the dais of achievement just for a few minutes of fame.

These were the moments when I basked in the glow of a grade A-plus paper, my words painting a vivid picture so complete that even the harshest critic couldn't deny its artistry, even if they disliked its premise. There were moments when I was recognized for poetic achievement, few and far between as they were. On these rare occasions, I felt my heart swelling with pride, being momentarily elevated from the ranks of the also-rans to the realm of the well-regarded. They were the moments when Love, so often a fickle and fair-weather friend, would plant a tender kiss upon my cheek, but they were only whispering sweet lies of affection.

So, like so many things in this whimsical world, these moments of "finally" were fleeting. Soon, I found myself once more immersed in the bittersweet sea of almos^ts. Yet, rather than despair about the near

misses, I began to appreciate the elegance of the almost-was and the not-quite. It's in these almos that we find the poetry of life, as with all the ups there must necessarily be downs. If we never had the valleys and drops to humble us, we would end up climbing hills so steep we'd slide back down thanks to the inevitability of gravity.

Life is not a destination, but a constant learning process. We must either learn how to properly conduct the orchestra of our emotions or otherwise we allow ourselves to drown in discordant mediocrity. Even as our lives may be awash in the pastels of almos, I must recognize it as a work of art nonetheless. Our own stories shouldn't be tales of pity and regret, but rather stand in evidence to the human spirit's indomitable desire to strive, to reach, and to dream.

The hardest lesson we must learn is that there is no shame in falling short. To paraphrase another cliché, if you continue to reach for the moon, and fall short, you'll still be among the stars. Elusive as a butterfly fluttering just out of reach, "finally" may slip from our grasp time and again.

Yet, it's most often in these "almos" that we discover the authentic cadence of our own existence. If we just stop and listen for long enough, we'll begin to hear the overtures of a grand symphony of optimism, fortitude, and magnificence that echoes

resoundingly across the ages. We must either learn to appreciate the chaotic, but beautiful nature of existence, or suffer quietly in self-imposed shameful exile.

I've lived a life full of almos^ts, dabbling in the not-quite and nearly-there more times than I can count. But, I wouldn't trade these experiences for unrealized successes, because then they wouldn't have been earned. I'd rather appreciate the little victories when they come, because their very rareness is what makes them so special and worthy of our praise.

I'm A Builder Of Bridges

As I write this, it's nearly Thanksgiving. I find for all the evil that has befallen the world this year, I still have plenty for which to be thankful. Indeed, this year I found the love of my life, someone who finally gets me the way I get her. We found something special in our sudden, but powerful connection that's irreplaceable, invaluable. and precious.

I heard a song today that made me think of us. One line in it directly inspired me to sit down and write what I am about to say. "Well, I'm a builder of bridges," the song said, "and I could fly us up to the moon. When your time is limited, well nothing happens too soon." The song is "Matter of Time" by Eddie Vedder, better known as the front-man of Pearl Jam.

I've long been gifted with the power of putting words together in ways that sound remarkably intelligent. But, for years, I've drifted from fancy to fancy, not really sure how to best use my writing talents for the common good of humanity. I've written poetry for many years, thousands of verses, many of which became discarded in years since. Still, many forsaken poems hang around my archives hoping to eventually see the light of day.

I have countless essays on hundreds of different topics. Some are derived from notebook musings and others from actual academic assignments. Many more are written on topics I couldn't shake from my conscious mind without putting them into essay form. But, a great many of them revolve around my longtime obsession with trading card games. Sure, they were helpful to particular audiences at the time they were written, but their value to the world at large diminishes as the years pass.

I've spent countless hours over the past year editing and refining those pieces that I feel still deserve to remain published somewhere. While I still write here and there, I've lost creative direction more recently, despite still note taking and musing on and off. But, hearing that song made me consider something about writing that I hadn't thought about before.

When we decide to write, create any sort of art, or construct anything at all, we automatically become builders of bridges. After all, why do we use bridges in the first place? We have bridges to connect two places that otherwise would never meet. Writing offers one of the most straightforward ways to build mental, emotional, and spiritual bridges to countless others.

Whether people decide to cross those bridges or not isn't up to us, though. Some will just stop and

stare, maybe snap a photograph. Others will come halfway, then go back. But, when someone crosses that bridge and truly connects with our art, that's the result we all long for when we set about to create. At least, I realize now that should be the end goal.

For years, my writing became a reflex when I didn't know what else to do with myself. But, by late 2020, I was determined to no longer waste this gift for petty ramblings or subjects that don't truly matter. That's not to say I won't continue to share revised works from my archives. In fact, I'm more motivated to do so as ever. To present my works in an entirely nonlinear fashion makes them in a way even more timeless as the fruits of a tireless and often unappreciated artist.

Still, I continue to shy away from writing about many hot topic subjects, due to potentially causing immeasurable controversy and grief for me. But, what if something I write builds a bridge between ideas and concepts that people desperately need to read? What if I create a connection with others who actually understand their pains and their problems? Taking that risk does seem worth it, if my end goal is justified.

After all, none of us truly exist in isolation from one another. Many times our isolation seems, and even can be, self-imposed. But, most often, it's that the bridges that connect kindred souls which simply don't exist yet for us to cross. Writing helps to bridge

these gaps; this is why I continue to write even when it doesn't seem like any one is reading. Eventually, someone might just read my words at just the right time. That is to say, I write for those who will eventually read, but I have no control over when that will be.

In fact, it was a written piece of great artistry and soulfulness that built the most important bridge I've ever crossed. Through it, I stared straight into a soul who desperately needed to find a new connection, and that piece succeeded in such a task. I wish that my own works will one day build the same bridges for others who feel empty, lost, or otherwise befuddled to find some sort of comfort. I have a strong need for my words to work as well as that piece did for me.

I'm done seeing myself as a troubled artist, as I have for too long. Instead, I must see myself as a builder of bridges through composition and wordplay. The trouble I face is my tendency to write at a reading level that seems to exceed that of the general audience. This isn't on purpose, but just like bridges, words will fail when they aren't properly engineered or aren't put quite at the right location. What good is a bridge that no one crosses? Of course, what good is a bridge that fails in its purpose of getting the visitor to cross to the other side?

Still, I can't hold back expressing myself out of fear of judgment or misunderstanding. After all, such judgment is often borne from ignorance, contempt, or both. All I can do is keep writing and try to be as relatable in my prose and verse as possible. As long as our words persist in some sort of media, they forever stand as bridges, practically indestructible connections from one intellect to another. It only takes one brave soul to cross one of these bridges to justify its construction.

My musings may simply be a sort of therapy for myself as I write them. But, it's what they become once they are written, which then come to mean whatever they are interpreted to be by those who read them. In any case, it's important our thoughts, feelings, and ideas be shared for others to ponder over for the rest of time. Our words are bridges for our thoughts to cross over to the worlds of others. You never know just who may be waiting to receive them on the other side.

The Monochromatic Convenience Of Oversimplification

Today's educational paradigm of oversimplification has caused the intellectuals among us a great deal of grief. The lure of simplicity is the crux upon which knowledge today is distilled. But, to take simplification to the extent of pacifying the lowest common denominator is a panacea we guzzle down without pausing to consider the consequences.

The dummy approach to public education began with promises of ease and efficiency. It gathered approval with the claims that the more palatable we make the knowledge we impart, the more lives we touch for the better. With good intentions, educators shaved away at the edges of complex ideas, watering down the intricacies, and delighting in the resulting smoothness of simplified expression.

Few bothered to ask, however, what would be lost, and that would often be the context in which certain concepts are best understood. Many complex laws of Nature are reduced in today's textbooks to mere facts and figures that you simply must accept as

truth in order to pass your tests and proceed through your compulsory education.

We're becoming a world full of young and impressionable individuals molded into cookie-cutter shapes, pressed out by a giant rolling pin of oversimplification which flattens our natural curiosity and passion for understanding. The rich fields of learning become washed away, leaving behind a drab emaciated landscape where the nuances of ideas are lost, diluted to the point where we can no longer discern their true forms.

In haste to make knowledge digestible through oversimplification, those supposedly wiser than we in affairs of educating our youth have unwittingly choked the life out of it. Who did we leave in charge of this terrible campaign. How could we let this happen knowingly to our younger contemporaries?

Whomever they are, they've taken the lush galleries of human intellect, and blotted them with cheap, watered-down paint from the dollar store. Now, with teachers severely hampered by standardized testing and stupefying mandates, it seems today's schooling elite have mastered the art of teaching our students just enough to perform the song and dance, but not enough to truly hear the music or appreciate the aesthetics.

For today's youth, what my generation once knew as the mighty tree of Knowledge has been relentlessly pruned and trimmed, its sprawling branches reduced to a skeletal framework. Beneath this bony canopy, the next generation now gathers, most eyes fixed on the ground, unable to see the rich fruits that once hung within the grasp of our youthful exuberance. The schools and universities we once envisioned as flourishing orchards of promising young minds have become sad gardens of stunted saplings, struggling to sprout amidst the depleted soils rapidly degraded by oversimplification.

As I watch the younger generations traverse this newly paved path of reductionist uniformity, I cannot help but mourn the seemingly lost art of inquisitiveness. The natural hunger to explore and dissect the world has been suppressed, replaced by a chorus of voices regurgitating predigested facts and canned opinions. In our pursuit of sanitized simplicity, we've created a generation too afraid to question and too content not to conform.

I pity those trapped within the emaciated specter of our once-proud educational system. My heart weighs heavy with the knowledge that it's robbing our youth of the vibrant, multifaceted world that is their birthright. We have traded the treasures of thought-provoking and actionable human understanding for the monochromatic convenience of oversimplification. Even as I now sit far from the four

walls of a classroom, I can't help but wonder if we have doomed our progeny to a future of mediocrity, forever shackling our future hopes to the lowest common denominator.

Night Driving

Everything looks different in the dark, and you think differently, too. It's why for many years night drives became my primary source for inspiration. Many night drives made up the majority of my time that I lived in the state of Colorado. Naturally, it's a beautiful place; generally, the people aren't that bad, either. Also, the roads tend to always go somewhere familiar, no matter which direction you decide to go. Every road comes back around to some major city somewhere, even if you have to drive for a few hours.

Now in Vermont, this was the first true night drive that Emily and I had taken together in our new home state. Our destination was a town in Northern central Vermont. Along the way, we drove through a town with business names that bring both chuckles and intrigue. There was a Chinese takeaway restaurant called "Yummy Wok." There was a general store called "The Whatnot Shop." Even the "Laundramat" was misspelled, as if on purpose, to make it appear to be a premier self-service laundry destination.

But, for most of our drive, it was open country. Fields of darkness spanned both to the left and to the right of us. Bodies of water were obscured by the night and only hints of distant spotlights barely even suggested the presence of a pond or lake; this was

even as my senses informed me of cool breezes blowing over them.

In one way, night drives allow you to commune with nature more directly, as there are far fewer distractions of what is likely not properly named civilization. Riding along asphalt and concrete strips that curve, twist, and bend giving way to nature's whims of topography, eventually the paths we drove on turn to gravel, then dirt. It's at this point we'd decide to turn around, as the darkness soon becomes all we can see. Not far ahead was the border of our whole nation, so we would've turned back sooner than later, anyhow.

There are many places and faces I'd rather soon forget, not just in front of me now, but far behind me, too. On these excursions through the darkness, I can't help but think about them, as they emerge from the creeping darkness like monsters. I've spent most of my life feeling disconnected and made to feel diminutive. I became seen as an unmitigated failure, an embarrassment only in the mind of others, driven to prove greatness can emerge out of the most unexpected of valleys to achieve unprecedented peaks.

My very own life journey is mirrored in the travels through valleys, rolling hills, and scarred mountains. In the darkness, the faces of those who either abandoned or spurned emerge like scarecrows

in my rear-view mirror. That's where they belong, and I should be looking ahead through the windshield, paying them no mind.

As we traveled the meandering highway that connects our neck of the woods with the rest of civilization, a full moon shone high above us. It suddenly became far behind as we raced towards home. That night, we had chosen a distant destination. While the place itself was a let down for our hopes for discovery, my partner and I still found inspiration along the way.

Nightly Misadventures Of The Unconscious Mind

I awoke in the mid-night from a nightmare monochrome world where all the color had been drained out, and my very femininity was stripped from me by force. When I finally awoke from this overwhelming level of fright, I found myself gasping for air. After I finally found my breath, I suddenly realized this had been my emotional reality for decades. As I sat up recovering from this horrid nightmare, blood flow slowly returned to my brain. All the while, I found my bodily functions scrambling to keep me to returning to an unconscious state.

I find it quite difficult to relate the events of these surrealistic scenarios, as most of them defy explanation. All I can say is that the more I ran from emotional and verbal abuse — and occasionally physical, too — in real life, I became more obviously female each time. Yet, somehow I continued to be trapped by expectations and misguided intentions no matter where I went, which time and again forced me back into projecting some bland model of masculinity.

The worst part of all this is most of those who perpetuated these abusive acts didn't recognize the

horrible results of their actions, whether through pure ignorance or purposeful bullying. They acted out of limited perspective and ignorance for the most part, while others just labeled me as a target for their learned hatred for those who didn't agree with their limiting, xenophobic beliefs. In any case, once again, I needed to start over, casting off the baggage of my past and pressing forward with the singular aim of freeing my true self.

Alas, as I awoke, I saw my pale visage and worried that perhaps the damage was already done, and I have crossed a bridge too far. For many years, I seemed forever stuck between two worlds, one of which was far from my own making. In light of my recent nightmares, I find it difficult to even regain full feeling in my extremities, giving me an added degree of difficulty in attempting to relate just how far gone I feel in the wake of these night terrors.

Perhaps these words project a sort of bitterness that can't be overcome. It may seem I'm doomed to waste away in the throes of a perpetual melancholy. But, it's unfair to cast judgment on the eventual outcome of my greatly deteriorated state; at the very least, I find it impossible to return to any sort of restful state before a lazy winter sun rises for just a brief time over the chilled Northern landscape.

Despite the days supposedly growing longer as I write this, I see the sun for only a few hours up in the

sky, only to watch it duck down below the horizon before shedding much light and heat upon the wanting souls already desperate for the coming of springtime. Alas, more than two full cycles of the moon must pass before being able to realize the inevitable, yet elusive, promise of a world once again inviting rebirth and a sunnier outlook.

It can be extremely challenging to fill these forced dead spaces between the midnight and the dawn, especially for a mind given too much to consider in the way of plotting the way forward in an uncertain world. The spice of life has often come to me in the form of great uncertainties needing to be explored, then tamed into a much needed diluted form which could be readily broken down into salient options.

Unfortunately, as I reach the midpoint of my third decade perfecting my art of communication through prose, I feel unsure whether I am still living out my second act. At times I feel as if I'm instead in the midst of a sudden thrust into my third act. Are my adventures upon this spinning globe actually wrapping up? Is it now time for me to tie up loose plot threads and accept my retirement into the sunset? Or, perhaps more accurately, must I look forward to my bow into the obscurity of the darkest night?

Last night, I sat upon a porcelain throne, attempting to clear myself of as many impurities as I

could through letting involuntary actions eject excess waste, both physically and mentally. When I finally arose from my cold, pearly seat, my legs had fallen nearly completely asleep, to the point of numbness that made standing nearly impossible.

I found myself pacing around in the chill of the earliest vestiges of morning just to feel my legs function again; my lower limbs felt funny and unsure of their strength or utility. Still, I would press on, and in the meantime, relate the emotional turbulence which nearly made my tattered physical state completely fail to function.

If this truly is my third act, I fear it came too soon for me to fully appreciate the trials and tribulations that brought me here. I'm much too young to see what was a mixed bag of fortunes be tied up in just a few flips of the calendar, with no hope of realizing my dream of becoming my best self.

Perhaps, my vision has been clouded for too long with pessimism to keep me from realizing the climax of my life story perhaps hasn't even yet arrived; yes, I certainly hold out hope that my third act hasn't even yet begun. When it does, I long to share it with the few blood relatives I even care to relate with at this point, those that were brought into this world with the intent of a nobler purpose than it seemed I will ever be ready to fulfill.

At the very least, I've found the purest form of love in my darkest hours; yet, I still feel unfulfilled, despite materially having all I could ever need. I still long for some sort of realization of my talents to be recognized on a greater scale. This isn't for my own ego to be satiated, but to feel I accomplished what I was actually borne into this earth to accomplish.

Often, I fear that these journal entries are all I have to look forward to, which leaves me feeling even more wanting. Still, recently I've come to focusing on the possibility that these quiet, reflective days are simply the prologue of my second act, even if they feel like the opening to a third. Indeed, a potential of a reboot of this life still remains possible whenever my physical limitations ease up just enough to give me hope for a new revival.

Of course, all our days are numbered, and we can never predict the exact day on which we will draw our final breath. Whether this is truly my final act to leave my mark upon the events of human history, I must treat each moment as if it is so. I press on, hoping that these days are leading up to a second climax before a much more glorious wrap-up. Regardless of when my own time is to come, I must continue to let the spirits flow and the inevitable pouring of the sweet wine of thoughtful prose to carry me along.

As I awake from the throes of a recurring nightmare, which promises nothing but a return to my fears each passing night, I realize now that all I need to overcome these nightly misadventures is a redefined purpose. It seems my greatest task now is to use these moments of weakness to dig deeper for a new strength.

I must wield my pen to strike at the heart of my demons and lay them bare. These words I write have given me a chance to triumph and record these little victories, knowing full well the inevitability of the unknown future day I do truly find myself choked by the blissfully ignorant passage of Time.

On The Periphery Of Posterity

The prospect of becoming a footnote in history grows more intriguing to me with each passing moment. Contemplating this leads me to better appreciate the sheer significance of having any sort of legacy, minimal as it may first seem. By expressing myself through these reflective, introspective essays, I can create a legacy for others to learn from and possibly even admire in the future.

Sadly, most people fade into the blackness entirely, letting time leave them to be forgotten as anonymous also-rans. I've always yearned to hum a different tune, one that may linger long after I have shuffled off this mortal coil. So, I work ever harder to create something that reflects what I've learned and who I strive to be.

Standing upon the periphery of posterity, I know the footnotes I'll leave behind will invite curious readers to pause, ponder, and perhaps even smile. What may seem to be inconsequential markers to the untrained observer are, in fact, the stepping stones that trace the paths I took. My words, as the richest expressions of my being, are the only way I know how to realize immortality.

Therefore, you should make sure that your own footnotes aren't just mere annotations to be buried by the sands of time. Rather, you should make them significant markers contributing to the larger narrative of human history. To do so, you must live with intentionality, create with passion, and share with courage.

Every day, make deliberate choices aligning with your ultimate goal of leaving a legacy. This doesn't mean you have to make grand decisions at every turn, but rather, fully appreciate that your daily actions reflect your inner values and aspirations. Stay informed, be curious about the world, and engage with it in meaningful ways. This could be as simple as participating in community service, leading initiatives in your area of expertise, or even engaging in deep conversations that could spark innovation or social change. Whatever you decide to do, take note of it.

Whatever your field of work or interest might be—art, science, politics, education, et cetera—pour your heart into it. Create something that will benefit others and can survive the test of time. It doesn't have to change the world at large, but it should be something you believe in that can help others around you. Remember that passion is contagious; it can inspire others to think, to act, and to change. Also, be aware that your works don't have to be perfect; they just need to be sincere. Authenticity resonates with people more than polished superficiality.

Don't be afraid to share your ideas, works, or thoughts with the world. Use the platforms available to you—social media, blogs, community groups, or professional networks—to voice your opinions, showcase your work, and collaborate with like-minded folks. Understand that criticism is an inevitable part of this process, but it also serves as a valuable tool for growth and building resilience. Your courage to be visible is what will make you more than a footnote; it's what will etch your contributions into the memories and lives of those you impact.

Now, with the easy, practically instantaneous access of digital media, documenting your life's work and experiences has never been easier. Keep journals, build a website, record videos, or even write a book. Having a tangible or digital record of your journey and achievements will not only ensure that your story will endure, but also that it may continue to inspire and educate future generations.

Along the way, seek to build productive and fruitful relationships. Be generous with your knowledge and compassionate in your interactions. Mentor someone, or be mentored yourself. These relationships will amplify the reach of your work and solidify your own impact in others' narratives.

Most importantly, stay adaptable. The world changes constantly, and what makes a historical mark

today may be different tomorrow. Be willing to learn new things and to evolve. By staying on top of what's relevant, you ensure that your contributions continue to matter in the ever-changing landscape of society.

Remember, your aim isn't just to become more than a footnote in history. It's to be the main character in a chapter that helped shape a story worth telling. For every action we take and every move we make, a ripple is created, as a delicate feather may skim the surface of a placid lake. These ripples will allow our memory to be carried on, echoing our messages and very essence through the ages. By being a part of history's small details, we can allow our spirits to peacefully rest, knowing we contributed to a greater good in life.

So, though you nor I may ever claim a prominent place in history, we should still rejoice in the knowledge that we've left behind a trail of twinkling breadcrumbs. Better yet, by documenting our stories, we additionally leave behind a treasure trove of memories for others to behold, to cherish, and to wonder about.

Some Conflicting Ideals Of Value

As someone dedicated solely to the craft of writing, I find myself besieged by an eternal question: How do I deal with this perplexing system of value, which demands my participation, even as I strive to attain a utopian existence free from the shackles of capitalism? How can I reconcile these conflicting ideals?

Only in my mid-thirties did I finally answer the siren call of my aspirations, suddenly arriving at a distant haven where my dreams could in time flourish. Yet, even unfettered by the iron chains of capital, I still find myself at odds with the twisted web of a society that demands my allegiance to its economic creed.

I've traversed many bustling marketplaces, each of them roaring with the clamor of a thousand voices. Vendors hawk their wares, some more vociferously than others, bartering their tokens of value. The air is thick with the cash-scented aroma of materialistic desire, an intoxicating perfume that has bewitched the masses.

I wander through these mazes crowded with well-intentioned consumers, deal-seeking tire kickers, and profit-minded hustlers more out of curiosity than

anything else. As much information as I may glean for amateur sociological and economic research, my heart still feels heavy with the knowledge that my utopian vision lies just beyond the horizon, tantalizingly out of reach.

Within this capitalist framework of commerce, I'm compelled to seek my sustenance, to ply my trade in exchange for little metallic coins and colorful strips of paper which hold such sway over the hearts of humankind. It's such a cruel irony that I must participate in this system of fiat currency, this competition for transient material wealth, in order to attain the means to escape its thrall. As long as I continue to purchase anything sold commercially, I remain a captive of the very system I seek to transcend.

On quiet Vermont evenings, taking refuge within the inner sanctum of the prose machine between my ears, I contemplate the nature of the capitalist beast. I envision a world where value isn't measured in the cold, hard metal of currency, but rather in the warmth of human connection and the richness of our shared experiences. In this brave new world, we'd all be free to pursue our passions, to create and to inspire, without the specter of financial ruin looming overhead.

Yet, I must confront the harsh reality that this utopian haven of freedom and creativity can't be

borne upon the wings of mere dreams alone. If this ideal realm is to be realized, it requires a foundation, a scaffolding upon which we can all build our collective aspirations.

I've come to understand that my role within this system of value is not that of a passive bystander, but rather an active participant. Reluctantly, I must engage with the capitalist beast, to wrestle from it the means to bring my creative vision to life. I must harness the tools of the market, the ingenuity of commerce, and the power of wealth to forge a path toward a brighter future.

I must do what I can to prevent myself from being a prisoner of my own desires, a character flaw which I've struggled with up to this day. Knowing my own shortcomings, I still stride forth, a warrior of words and a dreamer of a greater destiny, navigating the twisted corridors of this system rarely rooted in true intrinsic value. Yes, I wield the currency of the realm, not as a weapon of oppression, but as a tool to carve out a space for my pursuits. As I'm no longer a slave to hidden puppet masters of capitalism, I work to forge the key that can unlock the gates to a world beyond the confines of obsessive materialism.

In my work, I must consistently maintain a delicate balance between the tangible and the ethereal, in hopes I may yet find the answer to my eternal questions. Perhaps, one day, I shall gaze

upon the verdant fields seeded with the aspirations of my utopian vision. Sadly, I fear such a thing will never be a living, breathing reality that exists outside the cold calculations of the capitalist framework. It all may remain a distant dream for me, but one worth dreaming.

This article was inspired by a passage from a Culture Study interview with Irene of History + Industry.

When Luna Glares At Me, I Listen

When I awoke early in the morning to briefly relieve myself, I began staring out the window at one of the brightest full moons I've ever seen. This activity wasn't particularly good for the eyes. So, I found myself having to rest them for a few minutes as I recovered from the surprising level of glare on my sleepy vision.

For that brief moment of staring up at Luna, I couldn't help as if I feel she was trying to tell me something. Scientifically speaking, this would sound absolutely ridiculous; it's all just a matter of the angle at which our wonderful satellite reflects Sol's rays. The Master of our Sky is most certainly still there, just out of view for a few hours at a time.

But Luna was telling me something this morning, as if to say, even when you can't see me, I'm still here, shining for you. There's, of course, an odd duality to that statement; Sol and Luna take turns reminding us of their ancient presence. But, the great paradox for we little somewhat more evolved mammals is that sometimes Luna shines brighter in the night than Sol in the daytime.

Perhaps I felt a bit more reflective than usual, after gaining closure from a very recent trip to Maine. I watched so much of my childhood, the best moments of it, quite literally lying in ruin, as the gloom of an unexpected April shower set the scene all too perfectly. It shouldn't have been so unexpected; the nature of clouds in our uncertain times has grown ever more capricious. But I needed a sign that there is still something bright out there to guide my wounded soul.

As I nurse my sleepy eyes penning these scattered thoughts into my mobile word processor, I try to reconcile this brief moment of inspiration with some of the extremely vivid and bizarre dreams I've had lately. Some are night terrors which I can't begin to describe once I've awakened. Yet others have a sickly sweetness and innocence to them; just before I awoke, I was caring for a baby cow. She was such a perfect little creature, and I was determined to never let her go. This little one was not bound for a dairy barn or a dinner plate, but for a permanent grazing home in my backyard.

That unusual dream state combined with the screaming brightness of Luna in those gray but promising moments an hour before dawn has got me thinking a bit more than I should at this early hour. I'm fretting about the progress I'm making with myself as I approach my fourth decade in this mortal shell. I don't take much pride any more in anything, although more

recently I've derived considerably more satisfaction from my own words than ever before. There are concerns which plague both my wife and I that we have very little control over, yet will define the prosperity of our recent future. These words I compose in the coming days are what I can control, and they may be our saving grace.

The great irony of a dream in which I care for an innocent infant bovine is that I can no longer consume any of her byproducts without severe physical distress. I don't know how this allergy emerged, but this deathly allergy to dairy and beef came upon me like a specter slowly creeping and almost extinguished me in my ignorance of its grip.

My ravaged immune system betrays me a little more each day; ironically, the very part of my physical being that's supposed to protect me from harm is hampering my quality of life. It's likely for the best; I wish no harm on the beautiful bovines or clever domestic pigs, and to consume dairy or beef means their suffering or death. Pork products merely leave me queasy, so I choose to pass on them, too. I seem to have no such compunctions about poultry or seafood. When properly raised and prepared they don't make me ill. It's a compromise I must make for my own nourishment.

Whatever I must do to sustain myself presently and for the next few decades I hope to labor over my

wordcraft will be done. I see my gifts as tools bestowed on me by the heavens for a great yet hidden purpose; I love to think that it will be my solemn duty to remind those intelligent minds obscured by the darker sides of human nature that Luna is still watching over you in the night.

Sol, however obscured by increasingly angry clouds, is still shining up above to brighten your view. It will be billions of years before our bright Master burns no longer, but each of us have but an infinitesimal fraction of His lifespan in which to shine before we extinguish our fragile mortal filaments.

As Luna makes a shy smile, retreating slowly into the dawn, I recognize that there is no science to explain what I just experienced, but something much greater. These metaphysical musings must take on greater meaning than the sum of their disparate parts. They must come together into a whole experience which you as my reader must frame in your own unique way.

We must each do our part to respect the lives we touch in the course of our continued struggle to survive in a dying world. After all, at the end, the Almighty Judge of Divine Light will have seen all we do, say, and even think. Then, our souls will either be bound to eternal suffering or rise to a greater unknowable glory. Yet, all we need to do is properly

listen when Luna screams and the angry clouds
release their seemingly endless tears.

About The Author

Amelia Phoenix Desertsong is a prolific poet whose passion for weaving words into captivating verse has spanned over two decades. Born and raised on the South Shore of the Boston metro in Massachusetts, Amelia's love for the written word was ignited by her obsession with all sorts of literature.

Her keen eye for beauty and appreciation for the natural world are deeply ingrained in her poetry, as she masterfully captures the essence of the human experience through her evocative writing. Amelia began her poetic journey in her late teens, as she penned her first verses in the margins of her school notebooks. Over the years, her collection of poems grew, drawing inspiration from the likes of Emily Dickinson, Maya Angelou, and Langston Hughes, as well as her own life experiences.

A deeply introspective writer, Amelia's first published book was a collection of her poetry reflecting her personal growth, spiritual journey, and a profound understanding of the complexities of the human heart. Her debut poetry collection, titled "Take My Hand and Lead Me Through the Fire" spans over 125 poems in various styles, a testament to her unwavering dedication to her craft.

From powerful free verse to her more common essay forms, Amelia's writing showcases her diverse and profound talent, seamlessly weaving emotion and thought into each line.

Amelia lives in Vermont with her wife Emily, where they enjoy frequent road trips exploring the small town life and historic places of Northern New England. She's a trading card game enthusiast, veteran Pokemon trainer, voracious reader, and an extreme nerd.



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To learn more about Amelia and her life and writing, her blog can be found at ThePhoenixDesertsong.com