

Beautiful Women

Nobody believes they're as old as they are, even when everybody else does. This is no foolishness but an insight into the fundamental reality. The other day, on the phone, I told her I enjoyed being stunned by her beauty. It was a confession of my desire to get lost in the physical. She said thanks, she needed that, after a bad week, I was stunned, again, by the disparity between my confessions and her admissions. I try to tell the story of my deepest inside and she tells the story of her outside.

This two by four I'm pulling from my head has a legend imprinted on it. It reveals the concession of my addictive nature that I am still a sucker for a pretty face. I confess my love to a lovely woman, and think that we are in love, because she doesn't tell me to stop. She says little, she barely replies.

My friend taught me a rule of thumb. He would ask beautiful women when they first knew they were beautiful. The later, the better. It was a sign of character not being curtailed at an early age, we asked a woman we both thought of as of questionable character, to put it kindly, she said, "Oh, I always knew."

This woman I've have given my affections along with my eyes doesn't believe in her beauty, to this day. Her father treated her like chopped liver, she says, yet she lives the life of an attractive woman. I don't know what to think. I know that I have believed in my attraction to her.

I once thought that great beauty was a possible talisman of great character, if the woman who had beauty had overcome it, character building, I thought, like overcoming great wealth or great natural talent, it might be, still, but it's not an indication of character only a potential possibility, I wanted her to have my cake and bake it too.

I lived for two years with a truly beautiful young women, I watched grown men, intelligent men of apparent character turn into blithering idiots in front of her, when she was a child her father's friends propositioned her in front of him and he condoned it, laughing, she became almost a deaf mute, she became a model, making a profession of her beauty, it was a technique for survival but not for character, I thought she had character, I saw some of it's indications, but I wanted it more than I saw it.

Women often suggest that men don't talk to them of anything meaningful, it's been my experience that if one does talk to such a woman in that way, the same women don't know how to respond, it's not in their experience, they have no more real desire to speak from character than they do to hear it.

Where No Fear Lives

I had the recurrent fear of another heart attack, I felt dizzy putting my groceries away, making dinner, I sat down for a minute, the dizziness passed, but not the fear, I remembered losing my balance a couple of times standing in the Farmers Market this morning. I was on my feet for hours, after a week painting a house, I may have put myself off balance, chatting with the woman

whose stall is next to mine, when she mentioned the stent a friend of hers had, I mentioned my three stents, I heard stents were good for seven years, mine are only four.

I remember thinking I hadn't felt the panic of insecurity in my body for a long time, and then tonight, I did, I remember thinking my life was going too well, I needed something to balance it out, as I knocked over a jar of brushes, piling my groceries on the kitchen table, it made me smile.

I remember working on a slanted metal roof, yesterday, slipping, sliding, rigging two parts of one ladder together with a rope to make a kind of perch, a walkway, so I could paint a second-story wall, just now, I got up to go to the restroom, I rose quickly and nearly bounded across the room, watching my movement to see how I was doing, I felt agile and balanced.

I have sore muscles in my chest, I wondered if it wasn't instead a pain in my heart, but I've been working these muscles for two weeks, and today was a day for me to feel the soreness, I haven't felt any stress, lately, doing the strenuous work I've been doing, instead, I've felt gradually stronger.

I thought about having to rush to the hospital, I wondered who I'd call, my friend is out of town for another day, then I thought of calling her, we haven't spoken for weeks, I finished editing a play I wrote years ago, I thought about sending it to her, she's been on my mind, lately.

Tomorrow, I expect to play soccer, no matter how imminent my catastrophe might be, I could go to the hospital from the game, it's only a few blocks, or I could have an attack on Monday, the anniversary of our national tragedy, and drive myself to the hospital in the distant city, it's a ridiculous idea.

How small are my fears, to have another heart attack, to suffer the loss of my desired beloved, to have to stop working, to lose income, to die, what are these fears compared to the fears of others, I have no corner on fear, I am not the only one to lose in this life, there's no remedy for these.

A man with a foreign accent marvels at my laptop, how compact it is, he says he has a larger one, too big, he gestures, he stands with his hands in his pockets, a show of non-aggression, he rocks on his heels, I'm happy for his friendliness, he came in with a bearded man, it reminds me of the war. So many people die, and nothing can be done, and when I die, nothing will be done to bring me back to this moment of fear and contemplation, whatever I leave behind can remind others I was once among the living. I don't want to die. That's the part that will die. I'm not dead. The part that will live on, this peaceful moment, forever here, where no fear lives.

Peace in War

A friendly man sat down next to me in Starbucks. We talked about laptop computers, he reminded me of my brother, we hit it off, he said he's the only Republican to sit next to a Democrat in the legislature, says he gets along with the Governor, who's a Democrat. I think my brother's a good guy, too, no matter what his conservative opinions and talk radio affections might be.

There was no moment of separation between me and this fellow, like the Israeli and the Palestinian in the movie I saw, last night. They got along great, like brothers in spirit, until one of them killed the other. It hardly matters which one did the killing, or which one did the dying, except in the wounding of us all.

I told the legislator I wasn't a Republican, he was going to have to lean on me. He laughed. The puzzlement between the characters in the movie is mine, too. Why do we kill each other? It seems we've been doing it for so long, we don't know how not to, as if there's an unchallenged virtue in it.

I don't think war changes the world, it only rearranges it, and then it settles back into the endless reality of war and waiting for war. War is never the last resort, except among those who are helpless, and even they dream of it as the first resort of their liberation. No one escapes this fantastic norm.

I was in the post office, the other day. There was a line of silent peace protesters outside. The stamp guy laughed at them. He said they had too much leisure time on their hands. "Who doesn't want peace?" he asked, rhetorically, and I thought, nobody wants peace who isn't willing to compromise it, almost instantly.

Everybody loves peace for themselves and accepts war to guarantee it. This is like loving financial solvency and accepting armed robbery as its guarantor. If you think I'm wrong, try opposing it, in the early days of any war promulgated by your own country.

In the movie, all the combatants were replaced by new combatants; more fervent and more determined than the ones they replaced. Simply because there's no war over here, doesn't mean we don't live in a reality of constant war. We only live in the private denial of it. How many wars have there been since the war to end all wars?

Expecting war to end war is like expecting disease to end disease, or hatred to end hatred, or ignorance to end ignorance. Even peace doesn't end war. What we call peace is only the cessation of war. Peace has never been a reality of its own. What is peace? Does anyone know what peace is? We laugh at people who stand up for peace.

If you think I'm a starry-eyed idealist, consider this; nothing is made real, until it is first thought real. Real peace has to become a reality in the way we think about it. When we truly love peace, enough to cherish it above war, we may begin to create the reality of peace. Right now, it has no reality of its own. It exists in opposition to war, or in the realm of idealism, and that means dismissal.

As long as we dismiss peace from our thinking as realistically unachievable, it will be unachievable, and we will continue to live in a war reality, forever.

A Presidential Response

“In response to the difficulties we face as a nation, I want to tell you what I’m doing about it. Let me make this very clear - there is no problem that can’t be bullshitted. As long as there are problems, and there are many, I will bullshit those problems. It’s my job as bullshitter in chief. It’s what I do. I do it for you, and I will not cease doing for you what I need to do to keep the bullshit coming. Thank you, and God bless America.” George W. Bush

The Autobiography of the Universe

My mother thought I ought to be the Second Coming. “That’s funny,” I said, “I haven’t GONE anywhere.” Anyone who describes himself as an enlightened master is speaking an oxymoron. There is no mastery in Being Itself. Being Itself is the only reality that is absolutely true for everyone. Who can call himself the master of what is and has always been true?

In India a while back, a true Enlightened Master gave me an ironic name. I told him I was still feeling some fear about speaking as he spoke. So he named me Fearless. Now there’s nothing to fear but fearlessness itself.

I just put a folded-up napkin under the leg of this table so I could write without spilling my coffee. When you meet The Buddha on the road, spill coffee on him. Imagine an invisible swan on the perfect pond of your heart. This is the way the mind gives itself up for love. What about sex? Will I ever have sex again? Let light make love to light. Where is the problem? When light recognizes light, be prepared to dance. I burn like the sun, in this only moment that is who I am.

I AM the autobiography of the universe. I AM the center of the universe. This center is everywhere, and its name is HERE. Here I am. Here you are. We are ALL the autobiography of the universe. I am just one who is inclined to speak about it. Does it do any good to speak about it? A lion who’s been masquerading as a goat can profit by keeping the company of other lions who recognize that they too have been mistaken for goats. Once upon a time, all the lions were forced to work in a batik factory. Then, one day, one of the lions ran out of the factory and was free. “I’m sick of that bleeding factory,” he said, “If I’m lion, I’m dyin’!”

There’s no other within the all. This love is like falling in nothing but love. In this love, I go out of my mind. My mind goes out of itself. I turn my invisible socks inside out. The emperor has no clothes, and his socks are especially beautiful. No guru, no form, no practices. I offer only this call to recognize yourself. My radio heart sings from universe to universe.

I have to stop writing now and use the bathroom. I’m back, and no time has passed. The reality of the illusion of time is also just the truth. What’s called spirituality has, at its root, nothing but reality. This reality cannot be known except by surrender to it, except in recognition of it. Be who you are. See what that is. This is the only thing we DON’T know that we know BETTER than everything we DO know. Laughter is the language of recognition. Stillness is the bed of this laughter. All at once, in moving, I am still. Breathe in, breathe out. Put down the pen. We recognize each other in being who we are.

Art as Healer

Many goodhearted and sincere people think that art functions as a healer, either for those who practice it or those who appreciate it, but art is not a healer.

In the presence of art as an activity, a sharing, observation, feeling, sensation, love, or recognition, the mind and body may enter a fine state that encourages healing but has no direct relation to it. In any deep association to the source of art, one can enter a state that needs no healing, a state beyond healing.

The same thing happens in true prayer or in true love of any kind; one drops into the awareness of one's own being, and that state needs no healing. If anything, that state is the healer.

The surrender to art, in making art or being in its presence, doesn't heal anyone or anything, but it enjoins the un-separate self, where healing is unnecessary. That brilliant leap into absolute health, at the highest and deepest level, makes healing less a question.

The call for healing asks a question that requires that healing remain a question. The answer to any question presupposes the presence of the question. In other words, as long as one thinks of art as a healer, the need for healing remains, and the need for healing can take the place of the deeper reality that occurs in art.

The state of one's unhurt and undamaged self, in the awareness of art, or any of the ways of creative surrender, takes precedence over the need for healing, and if healing is to occur, it can occur best in that state where healing is uncalled for.

When one prays for healing or when one makes art to heal, the surrender doesn't do the healing, but it puts one in a state where healing is no longer necessary. When that happens, the unhealed self may be forgotten, either temporarily or absolutely. Without attention going to the unhealed self, and with all of one's attention surrendered beyond the need for healing, a true healing may take place.

The place of the unhealed self is taken by the self that doesn't recognize illness or disease. In that moment, there is nothing to be healed; it has nothing to do with being healed, it recognizes itself before, during, and beyond healing. Whether healing occurs or not is irrelevant to art or the experience of it, but the attention one truly gives to art supersedes healing.

When such attention is given and taken, healing may be drawn to occur, in an unprovable osmosis of association. When one lets go of healing, one may let go of the need to be healed. All necessary steps must be taken in the business of healing, but art wants to forget the question and ignore the answer. What a surprise, then, when that which has no direct relevance to healing, acts as healing's finest atmosphere and ground.

Because healing occurs in the same moment as the recognition of art, they are often interpreted as identical, but it is the unhealed and the healed self that want to make that claim. The healed

self runs to the arms of the art it believes has embraced it, when those arms are open to nothing and to everything. That may finally be the requisite for all healing, and all art.

Doing art and appreciating art is good for the body, mind, and spirit. Whenever that happens, something like healing has already taken place, and that is a force to be reckoned with.

Life is a Poem Coming

A poet doesn't make a poem; something in him becomes a poem. (Basho)

I have been watching and listening. I've been trying to speak. I've been waiting to hear something said that I have never heard said. I heard the truth spoken by a man whose gift was to speak the absolute truth, but he was willing to use non-truths in his practice. I have concluded that absolute truth is freedom itself, and that relative truth is the path to that freedom. Deception, no matter how benign or entertaining it is, may be a tool in breaking the stranglehold of a particular illusion, but it continues the perpetuation of illusion, no matter what else it may accomplish.

If you sit transfixed by a movie that exposes the false image of a corrupt politician, you may have let go of one illusion, but what illusion has replaced it? And what method of hypnotism has kept you captive to accomplish this continuing illusion of reality?

To be free of illusion, to be no longer held captive by illusion, one must let go not only of this or that illusion; one must let go of the *field* of illusion. Can you be taught swimming in the desert? Sort of. And, if there's a prize for the best Saharan Backstroke, there may be great satisfaction in the effort. But what about water?

Someone once asked George Burns, "Isn't it a pity that the young comedians don't have places to fail, like you did in Vaudeville?" and he said, "All you learn in places like that is how to fail. You should get to the top as soon as possible." So I say, start where you are, in order to get to your *own* truth and to practice becoming conscious of your truth as soon as possible, on whatever level you discover your truth to be.

If I speak ultimate truth, and you are not ready to hear it, and I practice relative deception, and that's familiar to you, what is the lesson? Do you learn that truth belongs to a deceiver? If I tell you that parables may be a device for you to *think about* ultimate truth, does that ruin the parable for you? If you are not ready for ultimate truth, does it hurt you to be told that every other truth is only relatively true?

You and I are misidentified as separate beings, separate from each other, separate from any Supreme Being, separate from Being Itself. We are *not* separate in our true nature; in reality. It is real that we are not separate. This is what is real. We enjoy the illusion of our separation, even though believing it to be real is the source of *all* of our difficulties.

It is wise, within the illusion of separation, to see that the mechanical breaking of the illusion is false. Despots, murderers, rapists, abusers, meddlers, manipulators, deceivers, all break the illusion of separation, mechanically. These mental and physical attempts to control fundamental illusion are themselves false, based in the illusion of *personal* oneness. Those who manipulate the illusion of separateness conclude, consciously or unconsciously, that their own mental and physical reality is supreme, that everyone else is walking around in their illusion, except that they believe in their own illusion, even if they don't believe in anyone else's illusion.

This is the ultimate delusion, that the relative reality of *my* mind and *my* body is the field within which all other realities are subservient. This is how the absolute truth of the non-separate nature of all Being is interpreted by the illusory mind of any one being, often called the ego. It is strictly a misinterpretation of truth by a process that *cannot* know what it is interpreting to be true. It is an observed truth but not a known truth.

When the truth is known, there is no separateness in it to be exploited or to be taken as personal. The knowledge of ultimate truth cannot form into the words "I know." "I am" is more accurate. This is the ultimate truth that is known and experienced by every being. Even in denial of it, its truth remains. Even if I say "I am not", what is left but the field of being called "am?" When I say, "I am," I reveal something of the truth, but when I drop the "I", even more is revealed.

This is the step out of illusion into truth. It is to speak the truth, as one knows it to be true. If one starts with *any* truth, and strip the relative truth from it, what is revealed is a clearer and clearer recognition of truth itself. So I say, start with any truth and stay within the realm of truth and move, as you are ready, closer and closer to the core of the truth as you know it.

What is the function of any deception in this revelation, this unearthing of your ancient, buried, unchanged and undiminished self? Can we not enjoy this multi-layered realm of relative realities, this density of illusion? Of course, and one result of the recognition of truth is not the elimination of illusion but the freedom of no longer being held captive by it.

These days, you can go to Alcatraz and wander around. You can sit in the cells of notorious practitioners of the illusion of separation, and you don't have to stay there. You can come and go in this world of relative realities, if you know what is real. All you need is the key, and the key is always the truth.

Life is a poem coming. Just as a poet does not make a poem, so do we not make a life, but life becomes itself within us. I have heard a master say that poets have the greatest opportunity, to turn, and look, and see, at the moment of the poem's creation, the source. This is true for all of us. We all have this opportunity. Every moment is the moment of our creative beginning.

This moment is our opportunity to recognize what is being created as it is being created, the source of this creation, and the nature of this unseparate reality, the state of creative stillness from which we are never separate. The only thing that separates us from our inherent reality is our fascination with the thing created. We identify with the thing created. We identify with the thing that appears in the field of our being.

A mother gives birth to a child that has grown within her, as a part of her, and now the child appears to be separate from her. She declares herself mother, and the child is proof. This new identity depends on the separation of herself from herself. It also depends on the sense that no separation has occurred. Imagine the problems that come out of this incredibly beautiful confusion. Are the mother and child the same or different? They are misidentified as separate, but the *idea* that they are not separate is also inaccurate. At the moment of birth, the *idea* of duality is born, and the *idea* of oneness is born with it.

The poet who is conscious of the birth of the word (i.e., the world) is aware that he cannot claim to have created anything. It has appeared within him. Its form is completely its own. Its form belongs to itself. Its form is to be respected by other forms. Its source is unclaimable. The poet does not make the poem, and the poem does not belong to him. At the same time, the poem is inseparable from him, and he is inseparable from it.

The poet, the mother, and all of us cannot claim our identity in the thing created. Our true nature is to be found *in* the moment of creation, and it *is* the moment of creation. This moment of being is the only thing that does not change. This is the definition of the *real*. The Creator creates the creator creating. There. He's calling your name.

Do you want to put your attention on this world, or on some idea of the source of this world, or on the truth of your own reality, which is both *and* neither? This is the opportunity of reality. This is the time of discovering your true identity. This opportunity never knocks once. Instead, it *is* the frameless doorway without a door. It *is* open. It is openness itself. Come in.

So, who are you? You are present, even when it has been proven to you that nothing else is present. Even when you are aware that you yourself are not present, you are. Isn't this of interest to you? Isn't this worth exploring? Is this not astonishing? Each one of us is the doorway to this wonder and astonishment, that is, in itself, who we are. What we have here is a conversation among raindrops, as we fall to our death in the sea of our self.

Fame and Fortune

As an artist, I've rubbed elbows with many artists who have made their mark, but I've remained in relative obscurity. I've been called a genius, an aging reprobate, a Superman, and someone who would rather stay in 'my comfort' than put myself out in the world. On their face, these characteristics ought to have qualified me for success in the contrary world of artistic renown, but not so.

Fame and fortune may not have eluded me, as much as I've eluded them. Despite a long career as a poet, painter, playwright, and performing artist, I've managed to stay out of the limelight. At sixty-two, it feels like time to tell the story.

After being good student, an All-American swimmer, and star of the senior variety show, I went to a good college, where I showed further signs of accomplishment. In every field in which I excelled, there were contemporaries who passed me on the road to recognition. I won the painting prize in college, sharing it with another painter, after the head of the department said to the visiting judge, "Could you pick someone else? He's not even a major." I went to graduate

school in art, and then in creative writing, and as before, despite my successes, others have done far better than I in the world.

Accepted by my reputed elders as a poet, I was called one of the best in the San Francisco Bay Area. After my first one-man show as a satirist, a promoter said that no one could be as good as I was, after only two weeks. I was called the finest social satirist in the country.

“Remember me when you’re famous,” and, “Don’t forget us,” I heard, again and again. And yet, I’ve become one of those who never made it big. Someone once warned, “He’s too good to make it.” I heard that, with mixed feelings.

My rich uncle played bridge with John Wayne, so I asked him about a career in the movies. A former music major who gave it up for business, he said, “With your personality, you should go into sales, where untold wealth and unlimited success could be yours,” as it had been for him. I didn’t take his advice.

I harbored the notion that the world of art, literature, and theater, was a meritocracy, and value would be sought out, appreciated, and rewarded for its apparent worth. For the most part, I was wrong. The art world is a world like all others, governed by effort and associations.

And, I take no for an answer; with women, as well as with publishers. In some areas, I sometimes take yes for a no. I was offered the chance to run a big city poetry reading series, at a time when that would have put me in a position of influence. I turned it down. At the time, I said I wanted to find out if I could write a true poem on my own. And, I had other fish to fry. I was about to go on stage.

A man I know, who runs a bookstore in San Francisco, said I wrote the kind of poetry he came to the city looking for and never found. He offered me his bookstore to run. It was an opportunity for me to promote my own work, but I didn’t pursue it. Even though I love cities, I never moved to Paris, and I never moved to New York City. I did move to San Francisco, when I was accepted in a masters program in poetry.

Years later, I sat with an enlightened master in India, and as he was recognizing me, I contradicted his method. Rather than becoming his fair-haired boy, I defied him, in a way that was resolved in a lovely but decidedly humbling manner.

I’m sober and poor in a way that deflates some women’s dream of life with an artist. Just as women have left me because of my lack of money, I have left women who had money.

I seem to be living a posthumous existence. I see and feel all the energies and desires of my life, but I’m detached from them. In some way, that’s always been true. At every point of my life, where I could take part in the normal routine of desire and ambition, I’ve opted out, not in fear or weakness, but instinctively. One college friend, a writer, later with the New York Times, said I had one hand on the rug I was standing on, ready to pull it out from under me. He said, “Steve, you always blow your own cool.”

After my second one-man show, a friend said, “You belong on stage,” but, over the years, I’ve cleared my consciousness of the characteristics of a performer. I’ve sought to see if I could create something good, without depending on charisma, in poetry, in art, or even on stage. That same friend is a painter in Santa Fe, where he has worked himself into some prominence. He said, “If you’re good at your art, you’ll be successful, and if you aren’t, you won’t be.” I left him a copy of a book about our days in San Francisco. He wrote me, later, saying he liked the book and thought it ought to be published.

Another artist came to my studio and was astounded by the accumulated work, hundreds of framed paintings in several different genres. “It’s a treasure-trove,” she said, “some day, somebody is going to discover this gold mine.”

People wonder why I don’t have an agent. Actually, I’ve had half a dozen agents, none in a position to carry the day. A legendary writer’s granddaughter was my agent for six months. She tried, but I said she was a writer, not an agent. I let her go, but she would have gone, anyway. Besides, she was as poor as I was.

When I performed my second show, a friend, influential in California arts and government grants, came to see it. He praised me for not being like the scores of ambitious artists who came to him, seeking money and favor. “You’re out here, on the edge, doing real work,” he said, “I wish I could be more like you.”

So, would I like to be widely known and paid well for what I do? You bet. I got a letter, a while back, from an old friend I hadn’t spoken to in fifteen years, who was starting a press for under-published poets and writers. She wanted to do a book of mine. We put one together, and she published it. I was thrilled, and to this day, I cherish the book. I love to give it away to anyone who shows interest in it.

My angelic publisher didn’t like it that I changed my name. She thought my given name was well enough known to attract an audience, but I liked the new name. She complained that I don’t promote my own work enough, and she has a right to her complaint, but she confessed to sharing the same limitation.

Like my studio full of paintings, my books have been seen by only a few. I put several books on an Internet bookstore, but the Internet is a haystack of needles. Any particular needle is lost in the overflow. Occasionally, somebody goes looking for my books, and I sell a few.

I spent three years, putting all my work in publishable form, with color covers from my art, bindings, ISBN numbers, and copyrights. I went bankrupt in the process, but I have no more ‘what if’s.’ I did as much as I’m personally able to do, (given the habits of my life) to make thirty books available to people who might be interested. There are no books lying in envelopes or buried on my hard drive.

I’ve shown my paintings in a few venues, including one fine-arts gallery run by a friend. After years in business, he had to close his gallery, because he couldn’t sell real art to people who wanted decorations for their homes. He has suggested that part of my problem is my inherent

discontinuity. I jump from project to project, failing to leave a clear trail for others to follow. This is a characteristic I wouldn't change if I could, but I can see how it affects others.

I opened a gallery of my own, when I was 25, in my hometown in Illinois. A gallery owner, across the river, told me that people were only interested in paintings that went with the upholstery of their furniture. He said orange was in, that year. He said I was in the wrong town, but it's got nothing to do with location. In six months, I made \$65. I also made no effort to entice the unwilling and the uninterested, or the well off, to my door.

I would like my work to be of value to those who find value in it. During the run of my second one-man show, a concert oboist responded to it in such a way that I knew he got it. I don't mean he got it as one gets an esoteric reference, I mean he was open to the music of it, the music I hadn't even known I'd written.

When I performed my first show of characters, it had a devastating effect on my sense of self, until a friend said, "Before you did that show, you had a nice, safe, Steve Brooks persona. Everyone liked you. Then, you went out on stage, and you blew it to smithereens."

All successful self-promoters are persona promoters. If you don't have a promotable persona, you have nothing to promote, and you can't act as its promoter. People who are self-promoters find this limitation puzzling, but I don't. I can't retain information about how my car works either, even though I once put my motorcycle back together, after a thief ripped it apart, pulling the wiring loose like a fright wig. I can learn these ways of being, but I don't retain the energy to stay with it. I can stay with the making and completing of creative work, but I can't stay with the work of promoting it. I can stay with the work of making and completing a life, but I can't stay with the work of promoting it.

Gertrude Stein said there were two kinds of people, artists and salesmen. She said the lucky ones were both. She said Picasso was both. It doesn't seem to be in my genes to serve two masters, at once, or even serially.

A man, who builds houses for the rich, looked at my Zenictionary and said, "What are you going to do with your first million?" Despite sending the piece out, time and again, I haven't found a way to make a dime from it. I suppose if I were a more energetic promoter of my own work, anything might be possible, but not within the limitations of my way of being.

I've wondered about this question. When I was in my twenties, I rode to a party in a car with two older poets. I asked what life was like for poets after forty. They looked perplexed and stayed quiet on the subject. I went into the office of the Poetry Center at my grad school, and seeing the stacks of Masters theses, I asked the secretary, "Who are these people? Where are they, now?" She had no answer.

What's it like for a creative person who doesn't get rich and famous, or famously dead? We know what happened to the successful ones; they became known to us. What about the rest? What about the wise men who don't become gurus? What about the true artists who are never written up, never featured, never lionized? Do the good always rise to the top? I don't believe it. My sense is that the successful are probably good, some are great, but it isn't their talent or their

genius that guarantees their success. It seems to me that many are called, but few are chosen, and nobody truly knows the difference.

I asked another painter, when we were in our thirties, if it would be OK with him if the New York art world never heard of him. He answered with a bold and confident, "Hell, yes!" He didn't care about recognition. I don't know what happened to him. I have a sculptor friend who is the son of a famous painter, and he's also a poor self-promoter. He's not famous, although he makes work and sells it, but he does less and less work, these days, with less and less enthusiasm.

It's my contention that people need an introduction to any artist's work. Almost nobody can stand in front of a painting or listen to a poem with an open soul and name its value by the presence it occupies in his or her heart. Each of us needs an acceptable authority to introduce us to what we love, so it won't feel like a blind date that risks our life.

Life Magazine introduced the world to Jackson Pollock, and his place in American life was assured. It didn't assure his sobriety or his longevity, but his renown was guaranteed. He deserved the recognition, he'd already achieved it to a large degree, and maybe his greatness would have been accepted anyway, but I believe the degree of his recognition was ensured by the name he was given in the popular culture by an influential introducer. It's been said that the movie about Pollock's life has everything people love about movies, plus art, which almost nobody loves.

In a circle of people who read from others' work, a friend read some of my poems, along with some comparable poems by a famous, older poet. The easy conversation about the other poet's work, he said, had the sense of his fame behind it. My work was spoken of more tentatively. My friend prefers my work, so the anecdotal evidence is tainted, but the story is analogous.

Self-promoters introduce themselves with such a force of presence that it affects the presence of their art. As much as I know I'm capable of creating a presence that might positively introduce my work, I've been constitutionally disinclined to do that. My life's attention has gradually been shaken down, over the years, to the presence of being itself. The self-imposed presence of anyone or anything, as much as I enjoy it, attracts me most when it becomes the occasion for a more fundamental recognition.

I want the salesman to get out of the way of the art, and I want the art to get out of the way of the fucking universe. (I use the word fucking advisedly. It's a fucking universe, not a passive, sterile one.) This perspective of divine absence, the same as divine presence, is not a great sales tool. It's avoided by preachers, whatever their particular brand of worship. The message is often that we should worship the promoter and leave the faith alone.

I'm glad to be writing about this. I can feel it. When I was younger, I felt the limited energy of explanation and apology. This is different. This is the story of the way it is. In my younger years, I didn't trust my own beliefs. Since I now know what I believe, I know what I don't believe. I've been working to let go of my personal identity, so I could find out who I am, in the awareness of the inherent presence of creation.

For the longest time, I felt a sense of destiny, a will of the universe that stood in for my own personal will in the business of making a name for myself. I acted as if the universe had a will for me, but I didn't really believe it. I do believe the greatest Reality is inclined to work for the best possible fulfillment of everything that exists, but that doesn't mean there's a letter waiting for me at home that will enhance my personal status in the world.

It's said that existence will take away from you everything you don't need for your freedom, but I'm an artist, not a practitioner of any belief system. I'm in love with the blank page, the bare canvas, and the empty stage, because I'm in love with the open heart and the open mind.

True art is eminently without practical use. The best piece of art has no reason to exist. It exists because of the nature of existence. The most essential creative reality has been neglected in the practice of getting, keeping, and believing in real and imagined stuff.

I've always wondered why we don't get to learn the nuts and bolts of what engenders art in the first place. It's my speculative belief that the universe, including this artist, is creative, because it is. There's no good reason for us to be here, in the first place, along with these billions of years and billions of planets. Whatever existed, before, didn't necessarily require the addition of all this beauty and complexity, but here we are. It's our nature to be created and creative. It's in our nature that we love what we are, that we love what we become, and that we love what becomes from us.

There are enough jellyfish and cockroaches and painters and writers, not to mention performers and personalities. But we keep making more, and more keep getting made. It isn't the proliferation that's so wondrous; it's the nature of creation that amazes me. Creation certainly doesn't need a promoter. In fact, promoters distract us from the simple beauty of it all.

I didn't intend this to be a spiritual manifesto, although manifesto is an interesting word in this context, (i.e., a statement of what's clear and evident.) I mean only to say that the inherent nature of any arrow is not to be found in where it lands. I noticed, pretty early on, that in the creation of any work of art, I was less present as a personality than I'd been led to believe. In fact, in the most fulfilling moments of my creativity, I'm nowhere to be found. I always show up to take pleasure in the process, but it has become abundantly clear that I plagiarize when I sign my name to anything I do.

I don't mean to proselytize the presence of any god or any god's will. That mistake is as common as ego is. There is no rational, namable source. Outside of human genetic history, our so-called racial memory, there is no I, he, she, or it. I still continue to sign my name, and I still take kindly to words of appreciation for what bears my name. There is, after all, form to this formlessness, and it's good to have friends.

Going away from making a name for myself is not sour grapes, not a religious belief, and not cowardice or laziness. It's a real way of my being an artist, and it works for me. There may be artists better suited to carrying their name into the world on a grander scale than I've been able to

manage. Maybe I'm so ambitious in my greedy mind, that this is the only way I could have kept the sanity of my artful life. But I doubt that, too. I think, in the end, it just comes naturally.

John Keats said fame was like a wayward girl best attracted by indifference. I tried that, when I was a young poet, but heavy breathing, while one is feigning disinterest, is a dead giveaway. I suppose it could be assumed that since I've never hit it big, it's disingenuous to say I never wanted it in the first place. Two things are wrong with that argument. First, I'm not done yet. I have dozens of creative works that could be recognized. These things don't have an expiration date. Many have gotten better, over time. Second, what happened to me wasn't a loss of interest in success; it was an innate, expanding interest in the essence of who I am and what I do.

Twenty years ago, in a coffeehouse, I took out my pen and paper, and a friend said, "Do you know what you do? When you begin to write, you become spiritual." I didn't know that. I certainly didn't think I was a spiritual being. I thought I was a profane being with a talent for language and images. I thought spiritual was a word for believers and saints. It isn't, of course, it's a word for the substratum of our existence.

Is every work of art, by every artist, spiritual? Barely. Most art is a social product of the mind. There are several levels of art. Most art moves an image from one reality to another. Some art lifts us out of one reality to another reality. Some art changes the way we perceive reality. And some art transforms all reality to the awareness of our essential existence.

It might be suggested that I haven't made my mark because I'm too busy philosophizing about it. In fact, I spend most of my time thinking of absolutely nothing, with no desire to make meaning out of the practice. In this writing, I'm only codifying what I haven't been thinking about, in part, so I can stop thinking about it at all.

Don't these ideas sound similar, that is, not making meaning of nothing, and thinking about what I don't think about? It sounds comical to my ear, but one idea is about trying to make rational sense of the creative unknown, and the other idea is trying to make sense of the limitations of the world in order to be free of them. My freedom, as a man and as an artist, comes in letting go of old habits that don't work and staying with what works. Stillness works. Stillness is my master, as a man and as an artist.

So, do I reject success in favor of a monastic life of isolation? No, I don't. I would welcome success, as long as I stay in the ready access to my soul - the entrance to the Oracle's Cave.

I'm not afraid of losing my soul. My soul is un-lose-able. I'm not even afraid of losing access to my soul. I've been at this long enough to know my soul self is accessible in a moment's notice. (Not **at** a moment's notice, but **in** the notice of the moment.) My soul self never goes away, because it's inseparably who I am, and everything I do that approaches real art, comes from it.

I'm not even afraid of losing ready access to my soul. My attention is on readiness, not on being afraid to lose it. I keep ready by staying in the awareness of the spirit, and I don't distract my attention with a lot of smoke and mirrors.

A friend says that only ten percent of the population is interested in this perspective. I had the idea, early on, that the figure was closer to a hundred percent, because the inherent reality is universal, but the more I became intent on that inherent reality; the more precipitously the percentage has dropped.

My story is inevitably the story of my poetry, writing, and painting, and even any performing I might do. A painting of a naked figure, a landscape, or an abstract of color and line, reflects the awareness this writing contains, but I can't be the judge of how that affects anyone else's eyes and ears. Does it make me more or less accessible? I don't know. Maybe a good promoter could bridge the gap, if there is a gap, but I'm not that person.

This writing gets out in front of me what's been circulating in the pipes for a long time, and I've seen this before, in other concerns. Once these concerns are made visible, the thinking about them is set free, and so am I. I'm free to get rich and famous and have fun doing it. I'm just as free to labor in obscurity. The worth of my work has already fulfilled itself in my life, and whatever becomes of it is free of my direction.

Finally, it's the nature of these art forms that they are communicative. It's bothered me that more people haven't experienced my work. I've been able to reach a select audience, simply by making things and giving them away. That's a happy part of my life, but I still believe a better life for my work would be a wider distribution.

There's a reality I call mob brilliance. A large number of people can experience a work of art, to everyone's individual advantage. The group works on its members with a charisma, a promoter's presence, and a sense of shared experience, that opens the door for its members to receive what might otherwise be overlooked. In the expression, "Where two or more of you are gathered in my name, there I will be," the **I** is the presence of being in which everything thrives. In groups of people, there is the potential for each one to come into a greater awareness than one might, on his or her own.

Although I have a special fondness for forms of the body; they are best informed by the spirit. I speak what I am to whoever can hear it. I've been concerned about who that might be; one or two people, only a few, here and there. But when I speak to mob brilliance, I speak to the wholeness of the parts.

What's that got to do with the wider life of my creative work? Nothing that I can point to or make happen. It's a Zen reality. The presence of creative being occurs in the thing created, and the presence of creative being occurs in the reception of the thing created. The sound of no difference between them is the absence of promotion, talking to itself.

The eventual fulfillment of my work, in every way possible, is beyond my control, but I'd love to see it occur, if I could. My one regret is about work that involves other people. One of my books was illustrated by another artist, and because of her contribution, I regret my lack of success in selling that book. On the other hand, I illustrated a book for a woman in Paris, and I haven't heard from her for ten years.

My experience has taught me to be more explicit about my way of living. That's my intention in writing this. I'm at peace, inherently, and I'm at peace the same way that others are at work. I accept the price I pay for it. All is well.

No More Masters

"Unless you believe in Original Sin, there is almost no other meaning that can be attached to his (Hitler's) behavior, except to say that he was working out his personal problems."

"...what Germany once did not only to others but to itself, and need not have done if democracy had held together."

Clive James "Blaming the Germans" The New Yorker, April 22, 1996

My sense of Original Sin is the willful act of Adam and Eve to defy God, and my sense of Satan is as the dark angel who rebelled against God and was granted dominion over the earth, and these two go hand in hand. The defiant will of man is all the leverage Satan needs to enter and create Hitlers and Hitlerites. This is a lovely explanation, but it doesn't wash.

This is, as Clive James describes in an historical context, predicting the past. It is the purview of all mythological religion. What we call evil is the domination, abuse, control, torture, deprivation, and/or murder of one or more human beings by one or more human beings. This is human behavior that thrives in the unfettered belief that we are separate from our eternal reality, often called God.

As Adam and Eve began to think of themselves as separate from God, they let loose the human mind to do, by itself, the work that is best left to the heart. I speak of the heart as the center of one's being, not the emotions. The mind has been left to do the work that is best left to our eternal awareness, or, in religious language, to God. The mind, left to its own devices, acts in service to the body. The body is born, lives, and dies. The mind, in service to the body, will try to keep the body alive as long as possible. The inherent nature of mind is thought, including emotion, and thoughts are born, live and die. The mind in service to the body is a prescription for disaster. When one temporal reality is in service to another temporal reality, it will live in fear and seek to dominate, or accommodate, any real or perceived threat to its existence, even to insane proportion, or what we call evil.

Only when the mind is in service to Being Itself, absolute truth, eternal self, the essential reality, God, is it then free to make good decisions about itself and the body. Otherwise, we are at the mercy of civilized order of one sort or another, which is faulty at best, or at worst, we are victimized by the limitations of the designers of our social order. A man, dependent on his own limited and damaged thoughts and fear of death will speak to others who live in the same reality, and his message will be received, if it promises freedom, in the language that mind understands, i.e., the control of, and elimination of, any real or perceived threat.

We have met the enemy, and he is us, but we continue to believe the inspiration for this enemy is external. It is not. It is our own denial of our true nature as being itself and our preposterous belief in the illusion of our own self-identified transient personal will. In the acceptance of

everyone's identical essential nature as Being Itself, how can we even begin to fear and seek to destroy others? Only by believing that we are somehow separate from God, that is, our essential reality, do we then put ourselves under the influence of our belief in the separation from others, the fear of others, and the hatred of others.

Adam and Eve had, as we all have, the opportunity to recognize that they were not separate from God. In that recognition, the apple is only an apple. Enjoy. In the foolish but forgivable notion that to have had a thought of separateness is proof of separateness, the door was open for Hitler and me and you to dwell on, and to dwell in, the illusion of separation.

The illusion of separation, called Original Sin, in relationship with the body, is fear of death, and the fear of death is a killer. It is the fertile ground of one human being seeking domination of another. The illusion of our thinking that we are separate from God is not what has created the incredible, wondrous world we live in, and ought not be given credit for it. It is not thought and emotion that have failed us, but the belief that they are ours to own and ours to surrender to. The surrender to these processes is the mistake of our fascination with them.

The surrender of the German people to Hitler shows the desire of human beings to know the relief and the joy of surrender itself, but surrender to the innate eternal truth of our being, the kingdom within, is the only surrender that won't get us all killed by fear and hatred of others, be they Jews, feudal landlords, people who wear glasses, or any other group of human beings.

We live in the illusion of separation from our innate selves, from our eternal truth, which we are and have in common with everyone else. In that illusion, our minds rush to solve the problem of the illusion by mastering it. We yearn to surrender the charade of mind, and almost any surrender will appeal to us, to abusive lovers, to good lovers, to abusive leaders, to good leaders, to abusive ideas, to good ideas. We can recognize that the virtue of surrender is in the nature of surrender and not in any object of our desire to surrender.

Our addiction to the surrender to others matches our addiction to controlling others. Neither is a solution. This misplaced surrender is the source of Clive James confusion and the cause of our ongoing struggle to live with each other. Calling this Original Sin or a personal problem in psychology or claiming that democracy will solve it is not looking deep enough at the reality of our being here. What we call evil is evil enough to merit the name, but not the source. If you leave your pet dog in the house without supervision, it will shit on the rug and tear up the furniture and howl the night away. Still, the dog is not evil in its inherent nature. The human mind is similarly limited in its unsupervised state. Civilization is the fence, the leash, the bowl and the bone. The difference is that we human beings can recognize the source of being that defines our true nature and be guided by it.

The gift of the awareness of one's essential nature makes surrender effortless. Without at least a glimpse of one's true self, we are all living in the darkness of doubt. We live in the illusion of separation. All of us, in our deepest selves, know the inescapable truth of inherent being, and we are drawn to anyone who speaks in compatible and resonant language, but we can be misled by the same inclination to hear the unchanging truth.

In the belief that we are separate from eternal truth, we put ourselves in debt to masters. Masters of truth are only masters of the obvious, inherent reality. Their uniqueness is only in their rarity. What is more common are masters of the darkness of our doubt, the darkness of our fear, the darkness of our belief in our separation from ourselves, from each other, from God, from Being Itself. These masters are everywhere. The nature of the world requires mastery of separation. When one lives in awareness of the un-separate truth, there is nothing to fear and nothing to master. When one lives in separation, there is everything to fear and everything to master.

Every one of us becomes a master of separation or we apprentice ourselves to a master, to a vast array of masters, to systems of mastery. Even the masters who propose systems of awareness, of light, of religion, tend to be masters of darkness. The only way to master the dark is to turn on the light. The only way to turn on the light is to recognize that the light is already on. In light, there is no dark. No one can change the awareness of another. If our belief in darkness is blocking our awareness of light, we cannot be persuaded by the belief of another to recognize the light. If our belief is in light as a stay against the dark, we are still held in thrall by belief, and not freed by truth.

This is not a debate. It is not a war. The sun does not compete with shadow. Everywhere light goes looking, it cannot find the dark. The inherent truth is inherent and true. Everything else is the illusion of separation, and it invites masters and the mastery of illusion.

There is no master of inherent truth and no need for such. All masters and all mastery are limited. Once we recognize the limitation of all forms of mastery, we can see that some masters are useful in pointing our attention in the right direction. All true arrows point in to the heart of the heart, and each of us is the archer and the target.

Welcome to Heaven

Welcome to Heaven. This is it. No more waiting for Godot. I am Godot. You are Godot. One of us, both of us, all of us, is. We are here in Eternity.

You are sitting in a theater in Heaven. I am standing on a stage in Heaven. We are all already dead. Who we are is dead. Who we really are is in Heaven, and this is it.

You think I'm kidding. This is really Heaven. I'm really a soul, and so are you. But you may think we have to be dead to be in Heaven. Who said we had to be dead to be in Heaven? What would be the point of that? Do you seem dead to you?

I'm going to use a lot of phrases that you are familiar with, and they're going to be ridiculous in this context, such as, "We have all the time in the world."

Let's take a few years, a moment between years, and think about where we are.

I have your questions on these cards.

We need to accept who we are and where we are.

As someone who's been here a bit longer, I have no voluntary memory, so I need to have a few visual aids, or I'm completely spontaneous. I know that when I speak, I am literally speaking in the past, a kind of dead language, but I'll do it so that we can communicate in this rather crude way.

Take a moment between years, or decades, or whatever. This is absurd, since there is no time here.

Oh, I forgot to tell you. My name is Abhaya. It means fearless, which is silly, since there is absolutely nothing to fear here.

Take a look down at yourself. None of this you see is actually here. It's occurring because you believe it is. Don't worry. These ancient habits take a little while to get over. No problem. You have eternity to see through these old ideas.

It's up to you want to get up out of your seat and wander around. I can't stop you, but I recommend you become clear about who you are, and where you are, before you do. Your movement will be so more enjoyable.

I live many lifetimes, and I can speak in many voices, if you'd like a demonstration of the absurdity of clinging to any one of them, including the one you see before you.

Everything I say is only occurring in your thoughts, so, of course, I can't make a mistake here, and neither can you, so, relax.

I imagine this all seems strange and new. No problem. Take as long as you want. There's no hurry. There's no time at all.

You already have an advantage over other newcomers. You are already conscious of this discussion.

Here's the way this thinking process works. Every thought that occurs, comes into existence outside of the moment of eternity. Heaven, where you are right now, is between thoughts, and is always true. When you have a thought, you are still holding onto the past, or you are projecting a future from these past thoughts. Future? Here in Heaven? Every thought, if you hold onto it, keeps you out of heaven. Now, thoughts can occur in Heaven, but they are relics of a bygone era, each and every one of them. Are we having fun, yet?

Actually, it can get a little irritating, to construct your aware-ness, like this, over and over. I myself experience thinking as a slight headache. This isn't a real problem, since even my head is a thought, a feeling, an idea, an image. I don't hang onto the headache, so it doesn't really hurt.

Am I going too fast for you? This can get a little abstract, but consider the source.

Am I an angel? Yes and no. I am whatever you imagine me to be. I'm not really here, except in your conscious awareness.

Let me say a few words about awareness. Have you ever noticed that nothing exists outside your own awareness? This consciousness that defines your personal identity can seem like a prison. A small room but it also the staging area of this entire universe. I'm sorry. I'm slipping into existence speak.

I don't mean to confuse the issue. The state of your being is real. Everything is real. Everything that occurs within your very real identity is this eternal being, is by the very nature of your reality, real.

Look, (bang on desk) this is real. This room is real. These bodies are real. Reality can't include anything that isn't real. All I'm saying is that the thinking about it is a separate issue. And even then, it's only separate if it acts separate from this reality.

I'll take a little time here, how little I can only imagine, to talk about history, memory, past, life, and death. Everything that once seemed so important.

You may be wondering where all your friends and relatives are. Well, they are outside this room. You know that. You also know that if you feel their presence then they are present. The same goes for historical figures.

Some of you may not realize where you are, just yet. It's my job to clean things up a bit, to ease the transition from having a human mind to having an eternal awareness.

In Heaven, I have a ready recall of any thought I've ever had, but I don't hold onto thoughts, so my awareness is open, no thoughts are held, none are kept up front, they are let go of. This may surprise you, but it's no problem, except in the old way when we try to construct some understanding. We try as humans to make a coherent package out of this infinite reality. It's an admirable attempt but of course, it's futile.

Heaven operates outside the rules and patterns of the world, but the world is still within the way of Heaven.

Here in Heaven, we don't recognize evil. Evil is a thing of the past. All the forms of evil are separate from this.

(Pick up a chair and bang it on the stage) BANG! Didn't think there'd be loud noises in Heaven, did you?

Did you think Heaven was some sort of eternal pool party. This is your Heaven. This is exactly what you imagine it to be.

For this to work for you, you're going to have to make some adjustments.

No past and no future. No time. No other place but this. Turn your attention from form to presence to see heaven.

Who are you? What are you? Where are you?

There are those among you who do not see what has happened to you.

It's nice to see you. Later on, even this will be unnecessary.

First, a moment of silence to acknowledge how you feel about being here, are you apprehensive, fearful, grateful? A moment to recognize where you are and what you feel in this moment of realization.

I've been chosen to speak to you, apparently. We have all been called, but I have been chosen to speak.

You'll soon discover that your desires are useless here. You are not separate from anyone or anything, so there's just no need to desire anything.

As you get into the flow of things here, you many continue to see yourself and others as separate beings. This is a continu-ation of perception brought with you from your life on earth. This is for your protection, as you come to understand what unity means to you. Don't be alarmed. It is merely a visual reality.

We've all been living in refugee camps under assumed names, and no here we are, free.

There is no one talking to you, and you are not here in this auditorium, listening and watching, but you are here. Here is what you are, and always have been. This isn't about to change.

In the meantime, enjoy the show. Perhaps I can demonstrate what I mean by not being here by introducing myself again in character.

Seeing in the light takes some getting used to, just as seeing in the dark used to.

I feel a little awkward in this form. It seems very familiar, but consider where we are, it's been only a short time to be in this form.

You may think this is all something of my doing, that you are only sitting in a theater, watching a man talk, but let's look at that, for a minute.

Has anything ever occurred beyond your awareness? Who is at the true center of this reality? Where is this reality taking place? Inside your awareness, each of you is the center of the universe, and that has always been true for you.

All these centers of the universe in one place. This must be heaven.

If everyone you have ever known has taken place in your awareness, what does that make you?

Look at someone. You see someone. Someone across the room you don't know and may never know, all you know is an image of a person, but you honor that image because you can imagine more and you know you are more.

There is no time here, so we're not in any hurry. No waiting. No rushing.

I don't have to ask you if you're present, since you can't really be anything but present. There's no other place here, either. You are here and now, and here is now, and now is here.

Are you really looking at me, or are you looking at the presence of me. I'm like a drop of food dye in a vat of water. Suddenly you notice the water.

To see where this coming from comes from, to see where this being here comes from.

The world has scenery and props. So does hell.

I wrote down some of your questions, as we were beginning.

Are you still here?

This is your Heaven. This is up to you.

What is occurring right now is entirely within your awareness. This is like a dream. Everything in this dream is you. I am you talking to you. Everything I have to say is occurring to you, even as I speak. Even as you speak. I am the introducer to the Heaven of your soul, as you see it in your mind.

You are here, now, and I am speaking to you about Heaven. You paid good money, so to speak, to hear this. Even more important, you *paid* your time to come here, to be here, to be welcomed to Heaven. I welcome you. You welcome yourself to Heaven.

If you hear anything that is contrary to what you imagine Heaven would be, well, here you are becoming aware of the contrary within yourself.

You didn't know you had it in you to be so contrary. Believe me, you have it within you. You have it ALL within you. Within you is everything you are conscious of.

You want to see some contraries you didn't know you had?

You have been trying to solve the puzzle of your life. You know what happens to a puzzle when it's been solved. It isn't a puzzle anymore.

You are not a puzzle in Heaven. If you are still trying to figure it out, it's only because you've been in the puzzle solving business so long, you aren't used to not puzzling.

I'm a big man. I take up a lot of room, space, I'm present. I'm a big presence. Now where am I? I'm inside your awareness. Who is bigger than I am? I'm big, and I'm inside your aware-ness. How big are you? Bigger than me.

Are you waiting for God to put in an appearance? In order to see God, you are going to have to let go of the way you have of seeing.

God is all there is, here now. You are going to have to stop looking for something familiar and recognize the presence that is as great as your presence, as great as your awareness, as great as everything that is.

This is Heaven, if you see it for what it is. If you know it's heaven, but you can't see it, you're in a kind of limbo. If you don't see it, and you think you're trapped in a body, and there is no Heaven, this is a kind of hell.

This is a time for us to practice, to figure out how to stay in the awareness of Heaven.

two-door story

For those of you who have been here before.

This is not a symposium on Heaven, even though I will talk for a while.

Heaven is the awareness of Heaven. If you're not aware of where you are, this introduction can be useful.

This is Eternity. It didn't start when you got here, and it won't end when (if) you leave here, and return to a worldly existence.

I'm your host. My name is irrelevant, non-existent. I am no one, nobody. You can call me the one, the one who speaks, the speaker. Speaker. Speaks. Speak.

Wear a white coat, white shirt, jeans.

Well, here we are, in Heaven, and now nothing changes, forever. Everything that was once important to us is now meaningless. There's no use for ambition, or fear, desire, ownership, protection, kindness, anger, confusion, business, appearances, disease, wealth. It's all pointless and meaningless.

There's nothing here but endless love, joy, peace, serenity, fulfillment, security, emptiness, nothing here but pure being. Pure as the driven snow. And no snow.

When Is A Pen Not A Pen?

Leaving the house tonight, I thought, “What if a pen was not a pen?” ie, what if the instrument of art was something different? At first, I imagined a pen with a busted tip that flowed oddly, like two tips at once. Like ink spreads from a busted tip. Then I imagined some unknown possibility. I began to imagine a new kind of art making, of image making. No specific image came. I asked myself why we create images with line-making instruments. My style of ouija painting is a jumble of lines and colors. Seurat did dots. I thought, People are really like balloons that have auras, unending balloons, layers of ballooning.

I looked at the cafe tonight to see if I could see the being presence instead of the individuals. I thought, Plants seem connected to plantness, to the earth, because they don’t move independently, but do humans truly move independently?

I used to get into a lot of trouble because I occasionally acted as if there was no difference between me and others, particularly women, but also men. When I first got complaints about it, I thought it was sexual, and

I thought it was me having boundary issues, like a sociopathic nerosis. Now I maintain strict boundaries with individuals, but nothing has changed in my sense of the ultimate artificiality of boundaries, no matter how graciously we honor them.

So, does one paint such a thing, and if one does, how does one do it? People are not phantasmagorical blobs of interflowing protoplasm. I’m talking about painting the being exchange, the dialog that is the soliloquy of being, the being to being conversation that goes on constantly. It has no boundaries because it has no other in it, but the appearance of it is somewhere between individualness and oneness.

Not Everyone is Everyone’s Soulmate

I’m thinking of halos, and I’m resisting the image of energy bodies, because energy has form. The image came of color. Color here is color there. I’m imagining the intuition of presence, and how to paint it. It could be depth of color in a tableau of forms. But, it isn’t like there’s heat here and heat there. The “heat” spots of Being are connected, no matter how far apart they appear. How to paint it?

But heat and energy are just another form language. Being has no language, but it speaks in all these languages. Line, color, shape, movement, heat, energy. The only way to paint Being is to paint from Being. It is to take form, not to use form or discard form. And the only way to paint from being is to paint, to let being be the painter, to be being being the painter.

Being comes into form as far as it does when it does in the way that it does. A room full of beings is a room of Being in form, more or less of form, and more or less of Being, as it will. The recognition of the degree of the presence of Being is not apparent in the loudness of language (color, heat, mass, shape, energy, movement, etc.)

The presence of form is not the presence of being but only, occasionally, represents it. The portrayal of the presence of being is either symbolic (in forms exaggerated or designated: like halos, auras) or it is in the presence of Being that DOES the portraying. In other words, if I want to portray the varied degrees of presence of Being in a roomful of people, then I have to be willing to live in varied degrees of being, and that's a problem.

It means that I have to be less present, here and there, now and then, or I have to recognize less and more presence, and be willing to spend time with less and more presence of Being. This is a surer route to success in the world, and to spiritual dissatisfaction. It parallels my experience in the world. I think, When does it become impossible to live in tune with less and more degrees of presence of Being?

And the answer is the same. The only way to live from Being is to live. Residency in Being is all that is required to solve these so-called problems, and then form will become from it, as it will.

Stranger in a Strange Land

I live as a stranger in a strange land. I have always been conscious of my consciousness. I have never not been conscious of my presence, of my being present as a consciousness. I thought I was egotistical and self-centered. I found ways out of my occasionally disturbing self-consciousness, out of always being conscious of my being, my presence; my life. I drank to excess, and I took to mindless distractions; in sports, in sex, in watching TV and movies, but they were apparent as temporary trances, and the only relief came not when I went out of myself, but when I went deeper into myself, at the deepest moment of my own being. It is suggested that one devote oneself to others as a freedom from self, but that doesn't affect my consciousness. When I am with others, I am only conscious of their presence as well as mine, not as a substitute or replacement for self-consciousness. This constant witnessing of the life of my life has never ended, it's never been supplanted by anything else, for any length of time, and has only been relieved by awareness of the emptiness that underscores everything I experience as thought and feeling.

Come Here

Without quite knowing it, I have been trying to get free of institutional spirituality ever since I became conscious of myself as an un-separate spiritual being, when I was 16 or 17. I had been president of the Junior Methodist Youth Fellowship, and the only adult whose job I could identify with was the preacher, but I couldn't identify with the form of his, or my, or anyone else's spirituality. How could there be a form to the formless? I knew my own being was formlessly bound by Being Itself. I knew it because I had looked at it, and that's what I saw.

When I met a teacher in India, recently, (in '92) I met another who reflected that vision. Formlessness reflected by formlessness. No big deal. But even he tolerated, if not depended on, form to legitimize his message. OK, but within his slight accommodation with organized spirituality, I saw him speak the simple truth of self as being-recognition, which is the freedom of awareness. He said, "Come here." He invited all to come into the moment of presence that is the truth of Being Itself. I haven't seen anyone before or since offer that step off into knowledge

of the eternal unknown. As Mark Twain said of the weather, “Everyone talks about it, but no one does anything about it.” I saw a man who didn’t just talk about the meaning and source of all life, but he did something about it.

We all know that we’re alive. We are all conscious of the mystery. We all believe in something called reality. We are all lovers in some way or other. We all have the tools to find out what we call the meaning of life. This discovery is not available in any form, but it can be invited to occur. I am inviting you to the occasion of discovery. There can be no form to this discovery. No guru, no religion, no practices, no preacher, no cost, no form, only a kind of poetry; a promise of the opening of narrow form into formlessness.

That teacher in India spoke the simple words of his teacher, who said, “Be as you are.”
Yes, and come as you are. Come to Here, As You Are.

The Tiger’s Stripes

Even enlightenment doesn’t change the tiger’s stripes. Twenty years ago, a fellow poet said to me, “You know more than you’re telling.” I took that to heart. I have been compelled to tell the truth as far as I know it, ever since. Telling the truth has compelled me to discover the truth, as far as it was possible to go, finally, to recognizing that I am the truth I’ve been seeking to reveal. I am to seek, to speak, to discover, to recognize, in order to be the truth that is the reality of my being.

Sounds like suicide for a poet, don’t you think? The ultimate result of stepping into the truth is leaving behind any need for language. We learn to speak because we think something is missing; food, love, recognition. What if there is no sense of lack? What if there is nothing missing? Nothing to do? Nowhere to go? No fear and no desire? Why would anyone feel any need to speak? When silence and stillness are discovered, like gold beneath the floorboards, does it even make sense to proclaim it? Do the rich run around telling everyone how rich they are? Well, maybe the nouveau riche.

The search doesn’t teach what happens after the discovery. The end of searching doesn’t end one’s life. There is a need to tell what one has discovered other than the habitual search for what is missing. There is another fulfillment. It is in the life of a tiger to continue as a tiger even when he has discovered that his true nature is Being Itself.

Since this is true for all of us, I am inclined to call for a gathering of the tribes, but I cannot speak beyond my own experience. I know that my inclination to speak the truth has continued past any need for discovering the truth. Now I am inclined to speak in truth instead of in pursuit of truth. I am curious to discover how that occurs. This is the gift of being human, to begin to speak in the truth and not merely as an extension of wants, needs, and desires.

The habitual injunction is that the journey is the destination; so don’t expect to arrive. This is like saying the confusion is the clarity, so don’t expect clarity. The confusion is only confusing the clarity that has always been, and always will be, clear. The journey is only circling the destination. The destination is the constant. Every journey ends up here. I have always come

here. After many, many miles, I have come here. After years and years, I have come here, which I can also call now.

Since I'm no longer trying to get here, it doesn't change the fact that here I am. To begin to speak as the voice of "here" instead of the voice of "trying to get here" is the subject for today. So, here at the end of the journey, I discover I have never gone anywhere. And I discover I have only come here to arrive here to be here.

A Gun in the Ocean

Cut a drop of water open, slice it like a watermelon, grip the halves and rip it apart, tear it in two, expose its pulp, this is as far as I get in improvisation, feeding on the cells of the imagination from within. Instead, I look at the sun on a wooden wall, the sunlighted wall, neither the sun nor the wall, a cop comes in, wearing his full uniform. When you put a gun on your hip, you separate yourself from others. Writing poetry is fishing in a lake, in the ocean, in a barrel, in a puddle, in a tear, in a drop of water, fishing for whatever takes the bait when there is no line, no pole, no fisherman, imagination thinks it rips the center out, when it dives into itself. In the middle of the sun on the wall is my meditation, my unseparated drop of self, useless as a gun in the ocean.

The Mythology of Self

The most challenging part of the relationship I am now in is that it makes it even more difficult for me to mythologize myself. My mother began this habit for me, and I continued it, unconsciously, until I graduated from college and got married, when I went into a kind of limbo of self-thought, struggling merely to get along. Then, when I entered graduate school in poetry and joined the community of mythologizers in San Francisco in the 70s, and especially after I left my wife, I began the process of struggling with the habit that was instilled in me by my mother, not to mention the society I was born into. As soon as the possibilities for even greater self-mythologizing became apparent to me, I began to rebel against it, telling myself to "tell the truth." While I was writing my first autobiography, I said that, as much as Henry Miller had mythologized his life, and, as much as I loved Miller, I didn't want to do that. I began to fight the thoughts of self, but not the feeling.

I've been fighting the illusion of the self ever since, but living alone, it's always been easy for me to slip into, not so much the active practice of self-mythology, but the feeling of it. Living alone, I could easily fall into a comfortable sense of being blessed, in the way the saved feel blessed, even allowing that everyone else might feel the same way, even thing everyone else should feel the same way. Those who have "a personal savior" get to feel blessed, even knowing they are not unique. I felt something like that, but without some other as my savior to make me feel blessed. By blessed, I mean the sense of feeling fully and completely welcomed into the arms of the universe. This mental comfort zone is antithetical to my awareness, but it fits my private fantasies. Living with this woman is a rich antidote. She is one who has never for a single moment in her life held a fantasy about herself.

With her, I am prohibited by my conscious awareness, from living a fantasy, but my private fantasies seek their solace, not as a dream life or a life of public ambition, but in the feeling of

living in the mythology of my own reality. Reality is not mythology and mythology is not reality, but my mind can seem capable of melding the two, if I give it free rein. That's less easy in her company, and it's less easy in my own company, when I am conscious of my own awareness. I have been struggling with this mix of reality and mythology for many years. I know that I live in the awareness of my reality in a human mind. I have been conditioned by my circumstances, as a child and as a man, to think and feel as a human who has been trained to believe in this practice and this feeling. I have worked to clear out the mythologies that are imposed on me from others, and I have worked to clear out the mythologizing that occurs in myself about myself, but I have come to realize that this situation, with this demythologizing woman, shows me there is still work to be done, bringing reality to bear in every moment of my life, whether I am with her, or by myself. She is a mirror in which I cannot fantasize, even in the most perniciously benign feelings of my mind.

The other antidote that I have discovered is the one that relieves her and me of responsibility in this area of my consciousness. I found the most profound sense of belonging in my awareness that lives without attachment to thought or feeling. That is, beyond my life as a person, beyond my life of circumstance, my inherited reality as a human being, there is solace in knowing the reality of the most fundamental of who I am, who we all are. I am an instance of life itself in this transient body/mind. There is a reality in the center of my turbulence. I am at peace in this reality. However, I am also a human being living a human life of thoughts and feelings, and allowing that to exist along with the awareness that this life is easily seen as illusion is a challenge. Mythologizing myself seems to match the awareness of life itself without name or personality, but it does not. It is the mind's version of reality. The mind wants to create something of this life that can match the reality, but it cannot. And it doesn't need to. I am fine and living with her lets me and encourages me to let this transient reality be, without trying to fantasy it into something it is not. It is all good.

A Good Night's Sleep

The great problem, in thinking, is thinking about one's death. Consciousness of death is an ongoing problem. Death itself is not so great a problem. If it is a problem, it is a problem, in itself, that is solved by its very nature. So let's tackle this problem. The deliberate acceptance of death, or the pursuit of death seems to be a simple way of coming to terms with consciousness of death. Fear of death is avoided in the pursuit of death as a desired goal. Suicide seems to co-opt the fear of death. Another answer is some construct of life-after-death. All the variations of life-after-death prolong life, if only in the imagination, and that seems to satisfy many people.

A philosophical acceptance or a naturalistic acceptance seems to work for many. Another method is the recognition that thinking itself is the problem. Without thinking, there is no problem with the consciousness of death. One may subvert thought, divert it, channel it, convert it, or minimize its occurrence. There are those who believe they can, through some means, stave off death or make it less likely. Still, no one, short of the supernatural, has succeeded at ending death as a human experience. Then there is the awareness of the ineffectual nature of thought. If thinking of death is a problem, and death is certain, then thinking is the area on which one might best concentrate. It is in my thinking, that this problem occurs, and apparently, only there. It is

my thinking that affects and defines this problem. Most of the solutions for this problem are thinking answers.

One thinks of suicide, one thinks of an after-life, one thinks of controlling death, one thinks of controlling thought, but when consciousness is itself the ground in which the problem is generated, then using the thinking mind to solve the problem of thought seems counter-intuitive and counter-productive. Acceptance seems to be an effective state of awareness that doesn't engender more thinking about it. What if we as individuals and we as societies worked to effect acceptance of death, not as a prelude to a higher or lower state of being, but as a reality, with no alternative, beyond the practical, and death became another part of our existence, no more to be thought of than sleeping or eating?

We might have thinking of death in the same way we think of mattresses and diet, but not with fear or dreams of escape. We don't imagine living without food or sleep, because we fear eating and sleeping. Those who do fear eating and sleeping are seen as aberrant. And so should those of us who fear dying. Acceptance begins at home, but it doesn't have to stop there. Public discussions of death need not be tinged with fear, we do not fear talking about going out to dinner, and we do not fear thinking of having a good night's sleep.

The Audience Speaks

A play, as it is being enacted, is interrupted by audience members who can't hear what the actors are saying so they shout out, "What?" "What did you say?" and the actors repeat what they say to the satisfaction of the hard-of-hearing. Then, other audience members interact with the play by asking questions and offering words of commentary or advice, which the actors respond to, as if it's a normal part of their performance.

The actors are on the right side of the stage, the audience is on the left. The viewing audience, of guests to the play, sit in the dark beyond the staged play and audience. What happens if the "real" audience begins to interrupt or enter the dialog? The performing actors and audience might incorporate the interplay, or alternately, shush the viewing audience.

"You are very good-looking. I can't see you. You're in the dark. Your politics make everything you say suspect. Your anonymity make me discount everything you say.

The Myth of the Individual

One of these days, I thought, I ought to write about the myth of the individual, and then I thought about the myth of a personal god, the myth of a god, the myth of gods, and I felt some renewed sympathy for my fellow human beings. Having gotten used to the idea of the self as a unique entity, in a vast universe of other easily discernible objects, it's not much of a leap to believe in a god, once the ground rules of the game are accepted, there is not end to it.

I still struggle with the idea that I am a unique entity, in a vast universe full of other unique entities, when I know, at least intellectually, that this is a myth, I still love the idea of it, I also hate the idea of dying, and disappearing back into the soup. I don't hate it when it happens to me,

at night, asleep, dead to the world, and I certainly don't hate it when I fall deep into conscious awareness, going as far as I can, in the shortest possible time, into my own disappearance as a thinking, feeling consciousness in a particular body.

In other words, I'm only bothered by the myth of my uniqueness, when I am caught up in the general game of thinking and feeling, and I feel the negative effects of it, and my awareness is triggered, somehow to come alive in my reality. Then I want to blow the whistle on it, but the game is ubiquitous and persuasive, and then I feel sympathetic for everyone else and for myself, I have never effectively been able to stay at home on one side or another of the division between illusion and reality. I have been fighting all my life as a writer to move past the idea that conflict and resolution are the meat and potatoes of all art, and now I am struggling with this one, most basic, conflict and resolution question, what is real, what is not real?

It is the same question I asked in my first one-man show, on stage, in San Francisco, in 1975, 38 years ago, when I was 33, What is real, what is not real? The only true resolution to this question is, Both.

Illusion is real within reality, just as reality without illusion is illusion. I am a real illusion, God is a real illusion, I look at the cars passing in the street, and as soon as I see them, they are gone, what I just witnessed no longer exists, I went to a play last night, and the play as it occurred last night no longer exists, the performances are gone.

True, the performers are still around, but not for long, and not forever. Even if the play was a movie, it would only be the artifact of illusion.

I complain in my mind about my lover, who is not one to think about these things. I am. The truth is that I am more addicted to illusion than she is.

She lives less in the illusion of this illusory reality. I live in the illusion of its exposure, as if in my exposing the illusion of my reality, I am made more real.

I am perhaps more attuned to the consciousness of awareness, but only when I let go of my addiction to the illusion, which she does not carry.

To Stop Thinking and Remain Aware

I came to be able to stop the human-trained habit of *thinking* and pay attention to the subsequently freed and empty state of consciousness, at the same time, in the same ongoing moment, naturally and also deliberately, *when I was alone*, but I found it difficult to do in the company of others, especially in a relationship with an intimate, but that is my goal, in this life, to be able to live thought-free but not thoughtless, to be able to pay attention in awareness and in relationship at the same time.

This has proven to be a difficult challenge, but not impossible. We are what we are, and both states of consciousness are true, so it is my desire to let both of these true things be true at the same time.

I watched a teacher function in this manner, but it seems the easiest way to continue this way of being is to assume the role of one who is known for functioning in this way, that is, to act as a teacher or wise one and be known for that. That softens the challenge to act in relationship while living in awareness, but it doesn't work for everyone, and I am less and less inclined to imagine functioning in that role. I think it is imperative upon us to discover the best possible way to live and function in this world, in a fully engaged way, while remaining in the consciousness of the innate gift of awareness.

Nisargadatta claimed the true guru 'will constantly bring you back to the fact of your inherent perfection and encourage you to seek within. He knows you need nothing, not even him, and is never tired of reminding you. Nisargadatta also proclaimed that spiritual seeking itself is part of the problem, because searching outside yourself is ultimately alienating. So what does the spiritual teacher do in such a situation? Ironically, the ideal spiritual teacher must frustrate the operation of seeking itself, and somehow help dissolve the whole relationship into liberation.

Movie Star Life

I'm reading the book I wrote about my mother, almost ten years ago, and I've been troubled by what I said and did about a woman who appeared at that time, someone I imagined marrying, but didn't.

It was a time of stress and revelation, I just felt a new revelation about myself, in reflection, at the dinner table, hours after editing past the middle of the book, earlier today. I thought, "I have always been the movie star of my own life."

That role is fading from my acting it, even to the point where I can't remember the way I thought it, just an hour ago. "I am the star of my own movie", is one version. My life is like a movie and I am its star, and that makes everyone else I have ever met a star in the same ongoing movie." This is true. I have unconsciously thought of my life as a movie, in which I am the star, and consequently, I have seen everyone I've ever met in the same light. For as long as I know them, and forever after, they are stars in my movie.

This woman I met, as soon as I became interested in her, became a star in my movie, as was my mother, my brother, people on the street, an optometrist, a barista, on and on, the list of actors in my movie life is long and I have honored everyone on it, as I do the actors in the thousands of movies I've seen and thought about.

I react to every scene, both dramatic and ordinary as if it is a scene in my movie, even to the point of my being invisible in the movie, not as director or moviegoer but as camera.

I am the camera and the main actor, with both being essential and incidental at the same time. It is the image of life as a movie that is essential and not any part of its reality, I am the witness to both the making of the movie and to the acting of the movie, it is the way of seeing that makes it a movie and not some glamour of production or fame or importance.

Nothing in this movie is less essential than anything else, it is the movie that matters, and then everything in the movie matters to the characters who appear, but today, in reading the book and in thinking about myself in relation to the woman I witnessed appearing in the movie of my life, I felt the delusion of the illusion, there is no movie,

I am not a star, no one is a star in my movie, there is nothing in life to make my life into this dream, except that it is illusion like a movie, it will end, it will burn up like celluloid, all of its participants will vanish, even when the movie continues to be seen.

I think this conceit of being the star of one's own movie is not new, but it has struck me as unique, because I have been living it, without ever thinking it, I have woken up on my own movie. I have thought of this as a way of dramatizing this reality for all human beings, but I have not, until tonight, recognized that it is not something I might say to show the illusion of being human, it is the pattern of my living in my own mind and eyes.

The Greatest Threat

The greatest threat to our nation is organized political Christianity. The church began years ago electing political Christians to school boards, working at the grassroots level. The Tea Parties are Christian in a loose alliance with Libertarians who are anti-government. Political Christians aren't anti-government, however. They want the government to be run on religious ideals. This is the culture war, but it resembles the way the Taliban won their culture war, by taking over the government and running Afghanistan as a religious state. Religious fundamentalists running our government is the spoken and unspoken goal of the right-wing movement in America.

Glenn Beck alludes to the secret Mormon plan to come to the rescue of the country. Sarah Palin is a fundamentalist, as is Sharron Angle. The spoken plan of the tea parties is to return America to Constitutional principals, but that is a front for taking America back to the tribal law of the Bible. The rewriting of the story of the Founding Fathers is part of this path to fundamentalist religion running America. Karl Rove is on record as wanting to use the Christian Right to further his party's political aims, but the Christian Right has expanded its role as the Republican base to become the force for its own agenda. Christine O'Donnell says the separation of church and state is not in the First Amendment, believing that the way the amendment reads doesn't disallow the church from taking over the government.

If the Christian Church runs the government, every law it makes will be Christian law. I believe that everyone has the right to believe whatever he or she wishes to believe and run his or her life accordingly. I believe that religious leaders ought to be separate from the practice of civil society, to be free to speak to people's hearts and ethical being. This is the virtue of religion; it is beyond the daily business of life. It is meant to speak to our very being, not to the structure of our society. That religion works best which governs least.

This Silent Being

I went to an AA meeting, last night, to celebrate my 25 years of sobriety. The meeting was chaired by the woman I was in love with for a couple of years, a couple of years ago. One of her

friends made a joke about her current boyfriend, he seemed to make the point to me, sitting across the table. At least, that's how it felt.

I just finished reading a new book of short stories, written by the woman I have spent a lot of time with, since that last relationship faded to nothing. This woman tells honest stories of the pain in people's lives. In the next to last story, the character refers to a male friend who is 16 years older than she is, saying that he hasn't had much tragedy in his life, only his old mother had died, in the natural course of things. I am 16 years older than my friend, although, at 51, she is not a young woman. I am impatient with her kind of story. I don't care about the focus of such stories, as much as I appreciate her compassionate and skilled storytelling.

I am exhausted. I feel depressed. My usual *joie de vivre* is lacking. I did a couple of small paintings the last few days, but there was no joy in it. I have time to write, these days, but I've had no desire and no inclination to write. I wrote a new book of poems on the elemental realities of our world, last month, and I've been editing previously written material for the last year. The last couple of days, I've been writing my brother in response to his stress-inducing screeds about the dark forces at work in the world. It's as unhappy as listening to an insistent evangelist. The discourse with my brother caught my attention, but it didn't make me feel any better.

I spoke positively and well at the meeting last night, and my old infatuation and I exchanged knowing and caring glances. The man sitting next to me said he wanted to drink whiskey and attack some people, and he wasn't kidding. He was as close to being a dangerous man as I have seen in quite a while. I thanked him for speaking. His life has been a litany of abuses he can't seem to redress, without drinking, drugging and fighting.

I started teaching, again, last week, and both classes were among the best I have ever held. The respect and engagement with the students was terrific. My health is good, six months after my second heart attack, and I sleep well, but I have no recourse in my human heart to invent a happier self. In other words, I cannot imagine any way to make my life feel as good as it did when I was living as a romantic, in the heart, in the mind, in the spirit. I have done this to myself. I have welcomed this being done to me. This is a change I have sought, and I still welcome it.

The woman I've been seeing is a friend, not a lover, although we kiss and hold each other with affection. She's off this weekend with her son, another man, another woman and her two dogs, skiing in the Cascade Mountains. She is an outdoors person, and I am not. She is a morning person, and I am not. She is a full-time faculty member, and I am not. She is a happy householder, and I am not. She does not appeal to the patterns of my desire, but I am not living in desire, anyway, so she is disappointed in that part of our relationship, but she is a good friend, and we have been good for each other. It would be nice if I were attracted to her and her desires for home and hearth, but I am not. I let go of the intentions of my spirit in earlier relationships, but I'm no longer doing that. This woman is caring of the way I am being, but it doesn't make us companions in the way I still imagine companions might be.

Besides that, I have discovered in the letting go of desire, a self that doesn't crave companionship, and I have discovered a self that is at peace in itself. Along with that quiet joy, I've also discovered the depression that accompanies loss in my heart. I am no longer living in

the heart of a romantic, and my heart feels the absence. When I reside in my inherent awareness in being, I'm as joyful as I've ever been, in or out of any relationship, but this nagging depression is similar to what happens to people who give up any addiction. I know better than take this depression for real, it is the voice of my romantic self, wanting to be back in charge. I just looked out the window at a fence post and winter trees against a snow covered field and the etched scene was restorative.

A woman I know from the apartment complex where I live, a woman who fancies herself an artist and likes to act as if we are art buddies, just came up to me in this café and said she wanted to check her email on my laptop. I said I was working on something. "Save it!" she said, full in the confidence of her brazenness. I said, "Such insistence demands that I do as you say." I thought she might react to that, but she didn't. I saved this writing, cleared the desktop and handed her the computer. She got busy and stayed busy for ten minutes. Her husband came up, in a very friendly way, told me about his new cell phone, and asked me about my computer. I finally said, "Jan, I have work to do." She said, "Oh, I was...." I said to her and her husband, "If you change seats with me, you two can talk together." "No, I don't want to talk," she said, and they cheerfully excused themselves and hit the road.

I am the main character in my fictive life. I have no more interest in writing fiction, and my poetry is so deeply intimate, it loses its personal character. I feel as if I've isolated myself the way my brother in Illinois has isolated himself, except that I have a close friend here, another I talk to on a regular basis, a class I teach, a café full of friendly people, and I'm connected, online, to hundreds of past and current friends. My brother lives alone and goes out once a week, with no desire to talk to anyone. He desperately wants me to tell him he is right in believing that the lawyers stole our parents home and killed our father's spirit, thus killing him.

I don't tell him what he want to hear, and he is furious at me. I don't put it past lawyers to do such things, but my other brother, who was there at the time doesn't agree with that scenario, and I don't either, from what I've heard and seen of our parents and the way they did business. My brother also wants me to agree with him that J. Edgar Hoover had Ernest Hemingway killed for his support of Fidel Castro, but I believe Hemingway was a man in control, who was losing control, who took back control by taking his own life. I don't put it past Hoover to kill people for political motives, but I wasn't there, so I can't give my brother the endorsement he desires.

He has written 4500 pages on the subject, and I would rather he told me something about himself, but he doesn't care to do that. He is not introspective, and I am, to a fault. I am also introspective to a success. I know the answer to my depression, to the absence of my romanticism, is to drop into the moment of being that defines who I really am, beneath my personal self, and be free. Having said that, I just did it. It just occurred to me. I sat in the silent being of my spirit, and I was free.

I think I have just written the introduction to another treatise on this subject; the freedom of the spirit, with no personality, no concern, no social construct, no religion or politics, no good and evil, and no isolation from anyone or anything. As soon as I recognize the silent being of my spirit, by becoming the silent being of my spirit, I lose all these plagues of thought and feeling, and I am free to be with everyone and anyone. My brother says he has nothing to say on any

other subject but the one that consumes him, and I am the same. I can talk about anything, I can read about anything, but I have nothing to say on any other subject than the one that consumes me. I am this silent being.

TWO

Today, I got an email from my other brother that cements our caring for each other. We agree about our difficult brother, and I got to hear my youngest brother, who is very intelligent, but who doesn't spend much time showing it, show it. I was glad to see it.

I taught my third class of the new quarter, and it was a revelation. This class, unlike every other class I've taught, ten other times over three years, is being held in a small room. All the students are shoulder-to-shoulder back to front, front to back, and I am close to them. As a result, a kind of intimacy has been created. In the first three classes, such enthusiasm has occurred I was nearly overwhelmed. After today, I thought I am becoming a great teacher. The class was alive with engagement. I told my friend on the phone that I thought I might be becoming a great teacher, and he said I had said that before. It's true, I have, but before it was about my ability as a teacher, but this was about the students becoming great students as much as it was about me becoming a great teacher. Then I spoke to my office mate, in the building where I'd been teaching, and she agreed with the sense of intimacy, saying that the classrooms in that building are like barns, that there was so much room between students, so much distance between teacher and student, everybody felt isolated. By contrast, I realize now I have been teaching across a gulf that has evaporated. Sometimes, things are that simple. On the other hand, I experienced what it is to feel the success of real teaching.

My friend on the phone also suggested that my depression might be the weather of early January, dark and cold, after months of dark and cold. Sometimes, things are that simple. My woman friend stopped by to visit, after her skiing trip, after her son went back to college after being with her for a week, and she was still under the cloud of a head cold. She wanted to beg off getting together later tonight, to take a bath, and go to bed. I don't feel the same debilitating depression I have felt for a week.

I don't think I want to write another of these journalese books, but I may, anyway. It is a format I enjoy. I don't want to go back to editing, but I may, the book called *Altered Egos* deserves it. It is a book of ersatz biographies of 133 famous and infamous dead and living people, and since I had written one about Socrates, I read it to the class today, since we were studying Socrates and the Sophists. One of my more engaging student, the only English major, quoted from the story as if it was factual, even after I had said it was a work of my imagination. I pointed that out to him and thanked him for the compliment. He asked me how I knew about Socrates. I told him I had probably looked him up on Wikipedia. And then, I said, I am nearly 68 years old, and my mind is crammed full of relevant and irrelevant information, from which I can draw factual and fictional information. Just like my brother.

THREE

I slept nine hours last night, and most of it seemed to be concerned with an image in a dream I had early in the night. I dreamt I held my lover and kissed her. The woman in the dream seemed to be the woman I am friends with, but not exactly. The kiss was so affecting that everything was changed after that. I felt committed to her, in a way I haven't felt to this point in our friendship. This morning, I dreamed I was standing in a kitchen in a house looking outside at the scenery. It was our house and I was happy in it. These images have proven to be disturbing, as satisfying as they were in my dreams. She and I had kidded around, the night before, about getting married. It was ten pm, and she was tired, and I was feeling energized. She is a morning person and I am a night person. She said I could be alone at night, and she could be alone in the morning. As writers, we both like our alone time. I said no, it doesn't work like that. She laughed, "Even if it works, that doesn't mean we should do it."

The Romance of Ego

I used to walk through my life in love with it. I was in love with my own life. I was happy to discover such a happy way to live. I enjoyed every minute, regardless of my circumstances, because I was in love with my life, not with the particulars of it. Whatever came was loved, whether it was lovable or not. I was in love with my life, but what about life itself? What about life, not my life? My life was a defining of life. Did I love life, without it being thought of as mine? Did I love myself, without my being thought of as a self? This was the romance of Ego. It colored everything I could imagine as being within my self. What if I didn't do that? What if I took myself out of the equation? Was I in love with life? Was life itself sufficient for my love, or did I need to make it personal to me? This is the Romance of Ego.

You See Yourself

When you experience yourself in the world, you feel connected to the world through your senses. You see, you hear, you touch, you feel what touches you, you smell, you taste. You see pain in others, and you feel pain in yourself, so you think you feel the pain of others, but you do not. If you felt the pain of others, there would be no solace, no peace, no break from constant pain. You feel the pain of others, only in your ability to match the pain of others. It is not the same pain. This experience of empathy is self-experienced. In fact, your sense of others is entirely self-experienced. You know nothing of the world except what you experience in your own mind and body.

When you realize that it is impossible for you to experience the reality of any other being, you think that you are confined to your own mind and body, that no matter how well you imagine or believe that you experience the world around you, you are limited to your own mind and your own body. These contrary beliefs demonstrate the ability of the mind to experience union with what seems the same and with what seems different, and to experience separation from what seems the same and with what seems different. These experiences themselves occur and are contained in the same reality that experiences their opposite. If you are both united and separate and neither united nor separate, what is the consistent reality of who you are? Who are you?

These apparent divisions cannot be who you are, since they occur in who you are. You are neither separate nor united with what you are not.

The experience of the world and the one who experiences of the world are not who you are. Only in this recognition, can you begin to know who you are. Only in this realm of not knowing can you begin to know who you are. The knower and the known are divisions of the indivisible. Only the indivisible can be the consistent reality of who you are. You may have thought yourself to be the center of the universe. You may have wondered why the only consciousness available to you, in direct experience, is yours. If yours is the only constant reality that you are privy to, you must be the only consciousness in the world, yet you see other people acting as if they believe the same thing. Is everyone the center of the universe? Why not? What if that is true? The indivisible cannot be divided into parts. If there is only one reality that is consistently true, then you and everyone else must be the center of it. How can this center be everywhere at once? How can it not?

If the Universe is limitless and endless, then every part of it is its center. No matter where you turn, you are the center of your consciousness. Nothing can enter your consciousness that is not then at its center. You are the center of your reality. To be the center of your personal reality is to be self-centered, but when you realize that your personal center is limited in its dimensions, and you begin to recognize that the reality you are the center of is unlimited, then you cannot believe this self-centered personality is true to your unlimited being. You are not who you have thought you were. That thinking was contradictory and contradicted by self-centered experience, but when you begin to recognize the

The Effect of Dreams

A car parked in place of a building's entrance, just off Broadway and Columbus in San Francisco, was my home, I showed it to some people, one was my lover, she wanted to know why I wanted to marry her, I don't remember the answer but I remember some confusion about it, something like desire, but for what, her or marriage?

No I in They

For those who work to right the wrongs of the world, in your own life or in the life of us all, you have chosen, or it has been chosen for you, the most difficult challenge, comparable to changing the minds of bigots and murderers. For those who work to protect the unprotected from those who would do them harm, in your own life or in the life of us all, you have chosen, or it has been chosen for you, the next most difficult challenge, comparable to preserving the fine point of the soul. These challenges are constant and unyielding in their constancy.

There are those who say we should relinquish thinking of ourselves and think only of others. They might say that there is no *I* in *they*, but *they* is the power granted to an impersonal other, by a now even more personal self, who feels or fears the power of the other, and loses the power of being itself, found beneath the self and not in its being ignored.

The other is a construct, of the mind of a heightened self, meant to save itself from abuse. The I that sees clearly, sees the I in everything, until the universal becomes personal, with no *I* or *they* to be found in its seeing. The *I*, that is clear who it is, sees the power of the other, the power of *they*, as it is exercised by the I of self-centered others, and refuses to join the charade.

Why Do I Write?

1. I write to look far off into things that are very close.
2. I write to stop talking to persons, to begin talking to people, not *the* people, a construct of stentorian pronouncements, but to peopleness; the greater than one, that lives in everyone.
3. I write to listen and talk at the same time, without interrupting anyone or anything.
4. I write to speak, without all the noise of talk.
5. I write to draw words on a page, or with this computer, to dance words with my fingers.
6. I write to find out what I know, in what I don't know.
7. I write to sit in stillness, and be occupied at the same time.
8. I write to be in nothing and everything in the same moment.
9. I write to entertain the possibilities.
10. I write because language is our second miracle, after the miracle of our existence.
11. I write to change the world in my thinking.
12. I write to pass on something I found in our vast communal awareness.
13. I write to tell a good story.
14. I write, like playing sports, where the chance is always there, that I might make a great play, and then the thrill of execution can occur at the same moment as the play occurs, and one becomes play and player, simultaneously.
15. I write to play.
16. I write to talk to those who talk to me, when I read their words.
17. I write to find out what my blood has been thinking.
18. I write because some compulsions are like living and breathing.

19. I write to give form to the formless, appearance to the unseen.
20. I write to rename the names of the unnameable.
21. I write to hear the truth that is known by its disguises.
22. I write to give voice to the silent, the still, and the unheard.
23. I write to hear if fiction can speak poetically.
24. I write to hear truth play a part in its own fulfillment.
25. I write to say what I see when I don't know what I'm seeing.
26. I write to do what I'm told, when I don't know who's telling me.
27. I write when what I'm about to write seems barely out of reach.
28. I write to laugh at the joy of unexpected creation.
29. I write to find out what I'm feeling.
30. I write to put two and two apart.
31. I write to conjure images I can't imagine.
32. I write to listen.
33. I write to find out who I am in this reality.
34. I write to see who I am in my imagination.
35. I write to practice perfection to a fault.
36. I write to improve my syntax.
37. I write to destroy syntax.
38. I write to say what seems impermissible.
39. I write
40. I write

Short Takes on the Politics of the Day

"I say that human activity has no effect on the climate, but then I haven't been a human for very long."

"There are thousands of reputable studies about the human effects of climate change. I've ignored all that evidence, and I heard a guy on Fox say it wasn't true, anyway, so I don't believe in it."

"'Cap and Trade' is bad. Capping pollution emissions is bad, and trade is bad. I am a conservative capitalist so, naturally, I don't like trade, and I don't wear caps."

"George Bush lowered the bar so far that people finally realize that anybody can be President. You can be a C student and still be President. I mean, why bother go to school, at all. You can get all the experience you need, trying to get a job, losing a job, running your car into a tree.... That's all you need."

"The President and his wife had a three-hour Christmas Show at the White House, and, one time, I swear I saw it, President Obama blinked. That's the way those Muslim Extremists signal their deceit, you know."

"When we hire someone, put him in uniform, train him, and send him into battle, if he kills some of those we call our enemy, we give him the Congressional Medal of Honor. If another man decides to do the same thing on his own, we call him mass murderer, psychotic, evil, and the scourge of humanity."

It's not such a leap of consciousness to believe that whatever the country says is OK must be all right for the individual. If, as a nation, we can kill the guilty and innocent at will - with justification, of course - isn't it reasonable to assume that psychotic and neurotic individuals think they can do the same thing - with some twisted justification of their own, of course. And what do we imagine happens in the minds and hearts of the people we enlist to do our killing for us, no matter the righteousness of their and our justification? This is the season of peace on earth, good will to all. It is a time of forgiveness and understanding, not for the ill we do, but for the misguided will in which we do it."

The Girl in the Cafe

There's a young woman, a girl, setting her watch and listening, next to a table of three young woman, girls, who are talking like friends. The watch girl has a physical disability that's not apparent most of the time. I've seen her often in this café, she's not unattractive, she reminds me of my ex-wife at the same age. She's spending way too much time adjusting her watch, she glances, hopefully, hopelessly, toward the girls next to her, not at them, but across their table. I suspect she's bright, and they are not as bright, but she would love to be one in their company.

It will not happen; she knows that. Her desire to be a part of such a circle of common caring will pass, as it has many times before, but it will not go away. Now, she's become intent on a private

thought. It's a shallow thought that she cannot bask in. She may be conversing, in absentia, with the near table. Now, her resolve has returned. She seems calm, again. There is some sort of a resolve in her unresolvable reality.

Thinking of Dying

I'm not afraid of dying, dying happens. I'm afraid of thinking about dying, this is the dying that plagues our minds. I'm less afraid of pain, and pain occurs before we die. Not knowing how to think of death is our problem with death. We know how to think about pain, but we don't know how to think about death.

Those, who are habitually suicidal, have solved the problem of thinking about death, they've turned their thinking into a reliable consistency. They've entered into the trance of death. Because they desire death, they have no more difficulty thinking of it, their problem has become desire, and its distracting energy.

All the constructs of thought and feeling we've devised to help us think about death, to give our thinking a reliable consistency, an answer to an unanswerable question, put us in a trance of death. Even the ways of thinking that promise salvation and eternal reward after death, are a trance that turns open thinking into a closed system of reliable consistency.

But what of death itself? What do we do with the thought of death that doesn't close the mind to the reality? Is our only answer a fixation on death, positive or negative, that closes the awareness of it, as a reality in our lives? Accepting that death is the end to the mind that thinks of death, as it thinks of everything else, can we look at death dispassionately, as the reality we live with, without seeking or rejecting it, without looking for some passage beyond it, so we can keep believing that this thinking mind, that we highly cherish, will not die? Can we live with the death of the mind, the consciousness, the personality of thought?

One must look to the nature of thought to see if it's the reliable avenue for us to live, in our clearest and wisest consciousness. We are the only creatures on Earth who have the gift of self-awareness. Other creatures may be as intelligent as we are, in many ways, but none has this self-sight. Other creatures think, in the same way that we think, in order to solve the problems of survival and the continuation of the species, but none is contemplative. Except for us. This is our great fortune, to be able to live and think and feel, and, to be conscious of our thinking selves, in this unique way.

Other creatures are not conscious of their own death. They are conscious of the various threats to their living, but they don't contemplate death, as we are capable of doing. And in our contemplation of death, we find ourselves afraid. This fear is not the same as the fearfulness that other creatures seem to experience when they confront the dangers in their lives. Their fear is immediate and physical, in direct response to danger. It's only our experience with fear that leads us to call this intense state of alert and racing pulse that we witness in other creatures, fear.

Our fear is experienced in direct danger, as well, and in that sense, we're the same as all other creatures. But we also experience the fear of death, at a distance from it, when it's not a threat to

our immediate wellbeing. Even in immediate crisis, we experience fear as a mental/emotional state in tandem with our innate physical response to danger. We *think about* danger. We *think about* death. Other creatures merely react to the imminence of death, and they do it, often, with a sense of resolve, to fight, to flee, and to die, if it comes to that.

It's often said of a dying person, that he/she fought his/her death, heroically. Even when the fight is useless and meaningless, it is praised, because we're creatures who believe we have a thinking relationship with death. We believe we can out-think death, through positive thinking, through directed prayer, through solutions devised by thought. The idea that we surrender to death is anathema to us. It implies we've given up the fight, when the fight is thought to be worthy. *Do not go gentle into that good night*, because the night is not really good. Stories are told of those, caught in the jaws of death, in a rip-tide, or an irreversible fall, etc., who surrender to the experience and live. Still, these stories are not taken as advice for our behavior, but as miracles, as if another force has taken over and done the thinking for us, in the nick of time. It's rarely assumed that this overtaking force is nothing other than our own wiser being, short-circuiting the fear and panic, *the fight*, and bringing us in line with the innate wisdom of all creatures.

Still, we are thinking creatures, and telling us to stop thinking is no use, we love our thinking selves, and for good reason. The mind is like a beloved pet dog. A man without companionship is often happy to have his dog by his side, when all else fails. The mind is like a strong, loyal, beautiful, loving dog, who's always there and ready to do whatever it takes to keep us alive. But, like any dog, left to its own devices, it will bark all night, tear up the furniture, and shit in the middle of the living room floor. My dog is not myself. I love my dog, but I am still not my dog.

This reasoning is all well and good, but what of dying? What of the mind? Why are we afraid of dying? The function of the mind is to keep the body alive, for as long as possible, in as good a condition as possible. So is the mind of all other creatures, but they do not obsess about dying. We, like all creatures, are determined to stay alive for as long, as well, as we can, but we have another characteristic. We consider death.

This is a peculiar characteristic of the mind. It cannot comprehend death. It can understand the death of others, because it can witness the death of others. They were here, and now they're gone. Yet, this obvious reality is poorly translated to one's own still-living mind. When we look at a corpse, we accept that it is an empty vessel; that it's not alive, that it's not thinking and feeling, but when we imagine our own corpse, we can't accept the same clarity. This mind, the one that I seem to be inside of, the one that has dominion over my body, as far as I can tell, how can it die?

We populate the world, alongside its living population, with leftover minds, the dead, the undying, the spirits of the dead, the souls that come and go, the ones that remain, the eternal beings, the generations that came before, it seems to give us some solace in this question of what happens to the mind of a dead person.

It helps to look at the way our human life on Earth has gone so far. We came to consciousness at some point, after being without consciousness before then. Some say this was by divine intervention. The thinking mind was placed in the human creature. Those who speak of divine

intervention suggest that the only true salvation is to return to the time before consciousness, as if consciousness is a corruption. What if it's only an occurrence, in an otherwise continuous reality? We're creatures who've been able to live alongside ourselves, conscious of our existence, unlike any other creatures, and in this parallel existence, in this relatively new occurrence of thought, living beyond the thinking of all other creatures, we experience a sense of separation.

Death is the clearest end to the separation of ourselves from our own existence. The mind is the proprietor of this sense of separation. It cherishes its own qualities. The occurrence of a separate thought leads to that thought's infatuation with its own qualities. We've fallen in love with our own ability to imagine ourselves separate from our existence. We scorn surrender. Surrender means the death of thinking, or so we think. It sounds fishy to a thinking mind. And if dying is the ultimate surrender, it must be wrong.

Death is something to fear in the mind, especially if fear is one of the cherished qualities of the mind. We believe in our fear. It is one of the hallmarks of our separation. A person who's unafraid is thought to be not quite human. Anger is an overlay of fear. Ambition is one of fear's servants, so is belonging, and all the accoutrement of community and nationhood. Competition and failure are byproducts of fear. These things, that we praise ourselves for, are byproduct of fear, masquerading as virtues.

Fear is a function of staying alive. All fear is fear of dying, in ever increasingly subtle forms. Staying alive takes the form of what shirt to wear, who to talk to, how we think of ourselves, and every time we think we have made a right decision in all the areas of our lives, we feel safe, for a moment or two. We buffer ourselves from death by wearing beautiful clothing and getting a good education, joining a gang and watching the most popular movies. Most of us are so protected from death that we don't believe it will ever occur in our own lives. Some of our choices are vital in keeping us alive; what we eat, who we associate with, how we acquire clothing and shelter, etc., but everything is related to this life-long endeavor.

Like all other creatures, we are willing to die to protect the life of someone close to us, a buddy in a foxhole, a neighbor, a family member, and the life of the species, but we are the only ones who can contemplate these things.

A funny thing happened to us, on the way to becoming sentient beings. Something happened to our minds, when we began to be conscious of our thinking, Ag and Eg, Adam and Eve, if you will, one or the other, but finally both, were transformed from creatures who had a functional mind that worked in tandem, if not in unison, with their physical being. Then, suddenly, or over a million years, the human mind took on a life of its own, like an alien invasion, but more accurately, Ag and Eg became gradually, suddenly, aware of an ability, to be able to think of themselves, apart from the functional, unconscious thinking they'd done before.

These earliest humans were conscious *in* their behavior, but they weren't conscious *of* their behavior, and one day, they became conscious, not just as behaving creatures, but as creatures conscious of their existence, they moved from living in existence, but to living in the awareness of existence. This shocking leap is a moment that's not been dramatized, even though it's the

moment that transforms us all, and we haven't recovered from it. We're in thrall to this happenstance. It's truly been an unbroken curse. Ever since we started to think, we've struggled to make sense of it. This blessing in the lives of the first humans, is the same blessing in our lives, we are no different. The moment that began their innocent wonder is the moment that begins ours, it never changes, it never diminishes. The power of that wonder is not in what it witnesses, but in its very nature.

We've struggled to convert the curse to a blessing, by using the very instrument of the curse to free us from it. Everything that happens to all creatures; happens to us, and then there is this, on top of everything else, the curse of our self-awareness, and we have fallen in love with it. With this cursed blessing, we've constructed one civilization on top of another, always with the prospect of destroying what we build, just as recklessly, just as miraculously, as if there is no alternative, we've codified the life and death struggle of our pre-conscious existence.

In addition to the impressive structure of our projected intelligence and the horrific murder of our own kind, we've yet to come to terms with the way our vaunted self-awareness has become a plague of unhappiness, confusion, fear, and conflict, our solutions are kept within our thinking. There's no return to the primal unconscious, we are what we are, we can be aware of ourselves as creatures with a tool, as tool users, but we also define ourselves as the tool itself. In this identity, we define ourselves into all the shortcomings of the tool and its use, or we can live in our blessings.

We became aware of ourselves, we became aware of our consciousness, we became aware of our intelligence, we became addicted to the yield of our invention. We love our creativity, our thinking and the thinking about ourselves. We became possessed by ourselves in this limitation. Everything that's risen from this sudden augmentation of consciousness has overwhelmed the simple reality of its presence. A creature, otherwise similar to all other creatures, has become aware of its existence, and the further workings of that reality do not surpass that original awareness.

The sudden augmentation of awareness is, in itself, the location of our freedom from its excesses and limitation. The I, that we define ourselves as, is an approximation of this awareness. The I of this awareness is what claims to be the creature it seems to inhabit, and the I of this awareness is what claims to be the product of its use. I is the namesake of this awareness, when this awareness is nothing that is born or dies. This awareness is an ineffable occurrence, indescribable, beyond words, overwhelming, deep, and imprecise. Something occurs, and we become as beings of awareness, and therein follows the curse.

We are conscious, in this awareness, of our awareness, we identify ourselves as beings of this awareness, and yet we identify ourselves as something it is not, as a creature of awareness itself, or we identify ourselves as a creature to be freed from the limitations of this awareness. I am not a man of awareness, I am not a creature with awareness, I am not to be freed from this man or this creature, I am not what has occurred to me as a result of my physical being, I am not what has occurred to me as a conscious being, I am only an identification with these things.

I, itself, is a product of this sudden awareness, an attempt to link this sudden knowing with this creature who now sees itself as the place of its awareness, this awareness is without name or physical shape, and it is my freedom. The moment of sudden awareness is neither a creature nor an I. Whenever I divest myself of the I that claims me and the body that claims me, I find myself in this sudden awareness that has no claim on anything. This awareness is the occurrence that satisfies my identification. It only is, and it doesn't ask for more. It doesn't seek to be free, it is freedom.

Letter to my Niece

Dear Jessica,

There is no advice; there is only experience. The best and the worst thing about being a writer, or an artist of any kind, is that you must find your own way. Unless you just want to be successful. If you find your own way, you will succeed. You will succeed in the best way that human beings ever succeed, but you may never be successful.

It can be a useful focus to want to become well known and well paid, the same way that God is a focal point in eternity. Any target will keep your mind occupied, while your intentions do what they will.

I can't tell you how to become well known and well paid. Those goals have nothing to do with discovering your creative magnetic north.

Being creative is not inimical to being successful. In my experience, my creative self, my muse, if you will, doesn't care what I do with my functional life. Creative energy will find a way to become manifest, and some things seem to help, but there's no rule. Your practical mind will want to put food on the table and pay the bills. Don't begrudge your practical mind. Let it have it's work. If you're lucky, your practical mind can help you become successful, even as you succeed, but even if it doesn't become partner to your creative self, if you are a real artist, things may work out, anyway.

A strong, creative intention will find a way. There's no need to become criminal, unless that's your worldly inclination. Some artists are criminal, and some criminals manage to make art, but remember that the kind of ground you plant your seeds in, will affect their outcome.

So far, I have not been successful, but I have succeeded in making the things my innate intentions wanted to make. With fifty books, a thousand paintings, three one man shows for the stage, I have found a life that is fulfilling. I've sold books and paintings and performed on stage. All these things happened because I did what I felt compelled to do. That compelling energy, which is not the same as compulsion, has never failed me. Compelling energy picks and chooses its place and time. Compulsive energy isn't as discriminating and leaves no time for regeneration or rest. Compelling energy knows how to play. Compulsion doesn't.

I have always had every intention of bringing my work to the world, and I automatically expected the world to reward me for the effort. The old joke goes that if you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans.

The core intention of wanting to get my work out in the world is that creativity is a communication of some sort, no matter how broad or peculiar it seems. I have come to appreciate the many different ways that that can occur. I often give my books away, and I also don't believe I own the schedule for the communication of anything I do.

We don't pray to get God's attention on us, we pray to get our attention on God. We write for the ear of another not to get their attention, but to get our attention on them. I have long had a reader in mind, for so long that I've forgotten who my reader is, but once upon a time I imagined the perfect reader, and I spoke to that one. Once I imagined that reader, I never had to imagine him or her, again.

The problem with imagining the perfect reader is how few of them there actually are. The antidote to that is editing as if I am the perfect reader. Even as a wise, loving, adventurous, intelligent, kind, energetic reader, I don't want to struggle to take in what I'm reading. So, as my own editor/reader I want to make my words clear. I want my words to strike a chord, not strike at it.

Since I'm living in the source of my words, I can trust the source to be there and be true, when I come across words that don't ring true. They must ring true to the source, and I live in the source. I can write true to the source, and I can edit true to the source.

Having learned some fundamentals of language by living as a human being in the world, I can also rely on that practical education to help me guide my words from source to clarity. There is energy and intelligence in the source that I, as an artist, live in. I can pretend that something outside of me is motivating me, and for the most part, that pretense is an effective device.

For example, I fell in love and wrote a book of love poems, the first book of love poems I'd ever written, but the woman I wrote to and about barely acknowledged the connection, even though we continued a torrid love affair for several years. I had to notice that I was writing in the source of those poems, before I met her, and I have continued in that source since, but for a while, I believed she was motivating my poems. No harm, no foul. The true poet of those poems couldn't have cared less. All he was about was making poems in the source of poetry, the same source as the source of love.

The duality of being the one who succeeds and being the one who wants to be successful is only detrimental if you refuse to acknowledge one for the other. You may be one who succeeds, while having a personal passion for failure or success. Whatever your worldly path, if you find you are a real artist, your determination to succeed will find a way.

If you allow your worldly life to denigrate your creative life, you will fail at both. If your creative self denigrates your worldly self, you have lost touch with who you are, and perhaps you're not a real artist. The worst a real artist will manage to be, toward the world, while

continuing to be an artist, is indifferent. Any serious amount of negativity toward the world makes me wonder if a real artist is present. In any truly creative life, there is such a core of grace, or simple happiness, that a negative attitude is either due to a destructive childhood, rotten luck, or dangerous habits.

One bad habit is the belief that a certain kind of personality may help make an artist successful. There may be some truth in that belief, but I suspect it comes when being successful in the world outweighs succeeding as an artist.

Hay Day

I was helping her load hay in the barn for the horses for the winter. She was upset that the poles holding up the roof of the barn were improperly held in place. She went in the house to call the man who lived on the property before I did, the man who had once owned the place. He works in maintenance at the university, and he's a real handy fellow. I tried to be handy, too, but it's not the role I play in this life. I sanded and stained the barn and painted all the other buildings on the property, I tore down a fence, I removed the canopy over the front of the house, singlehandedly, one day, I regularly helped Nan reassemble and move the pasture sprinkler system, until I was able to do it myself, I mowed the fields, I helped with the animals.

And the list went on. I was her right-hand man, her renter, her lover, the man who replaced the guy who lived there, before. She was often frustrated and irritated by my inability to match her need for a man who could give her what she needed. I felt and heard that frustration in her anger, which would pass, as she expressed it. The free expression of her emotions was a bylaw in the lexicon of her behavior.

The first time I got angry with her, came when she snapped at me over the use of the television remote. I didn't use it properly and it made a loud noise. She said something sharp and negative. I reacted in anger and pulled my chair away, as I felt my anger rise. I said I couldn't allow anyone to speak to me that way. I thought I was setting a clear boundary. I failed. She said her sharp tongue was a legacy from her father, and I should learn to tell her how I felt before I got angry about it.

I've always agreed with that idea, and I've tried to be in the moment with my reactions to her and others. I have had a tendency, over the years, to suffer the words of others, knowing I could take it in stride, knowing it wasn't necessarily about me, thinking I could respond in another way, that I could overlook the way others might have of speaking, but that day, I wanted to draw a line. I knew, even in my raised voice, what I intended. She said, over the months, that I was hijacked, that I needed to be calmer, keep my voice down, and not get angry. It frightened her, she said.

This pattern of her saying things out of frustration and my response to it continued. Most of the time, I accepted the idea that she was a grieving woman whose emotional states were not about me, were driven by the pain in her heart, and I tried to disengage from taking them personally. But they would continue, often on a daily basis. My desire to be considerate, coupled with my

bad habit of not speaking up when I felt denigrated, allowed her to talk to me in ways I didn't like, and kept me from responding in the moment.

I did speak to her, often and clearly, about how I felt about it, thinking there was progress in our relationship. I was wrong. Weeks would go by without major incident, and then another confrontation would occur. She said I became angry with her whenever she was having the hardest time in her grief, whenever she was vulnerable, ill, or in grief.

She said I attacked her when she was down. Coincidentally, it would come after several days of difficulty for her and for me, too. I would suffer the time, knowing she was going through an episode of grieving. She was clear with me that my experience kept from understanding what she was experiencing, and I agreed with her that my daughter had not died, and I did not know what she was feeling. I also said, once, early on, that if my son died, I wouldn't grieve the way she did. She took that as an insult, that I was saying I didn't like the way she grieved, and that I wanted her to stop being who she was. I thought her grieving was overweening and self-indulgent, but I kept my mouth shut, watched and listened, and tried to understand her way.

After eight months, feeling like I was on trial in her company, feeling more often like a renter than a lover, questioning my own ability to accept and understand another, I was equally frustrated. She said, early on, that I had no empathy, that I was self-centered, that it was "all about me."

I continued stacking the hay bales in the barn, and she came back to say that there wasn't anything to be done about the roof struts. I moved to make the strut by the hay more secure, and she tried to take control of the situation. I backed off, as I often did, when I wasn't sure of my role. It was her farm, her barn, her horses, her hay. I had some ideas for fixing the strut, but Nan is a strong woman with good ideas of her own and an inclination to lead, no matter what the situation.

I was able, over the months, to assert myself in many areas of the ranch's business, but I respected her interest in being an independent woman, she had been living on the ranch for a year before I showed up, and I had little experience in the same work. Still, we were both first-born children, and I'm used to taking care of business, too. I've run my own business for thirty years, and I can solve and handle things others might not imagine I could.

I'm a creative man, a poet, an artist, and my life as a man has been dictated by my creativity. When I was of draft age, during the early years of the Viet Nam War, I thought of joining the Marines, just to show those bastards that I could be as much of a man as they were. I didn't do that, and I passed the war with deferments, as a teacher, husband, father, etc.

I was not an athlete as a boy, and my father and brothers were. Then I was discovered as a swimmer and became captain and all-American. But my sport was swimming, a soft sport. Then I played soccer in college and became captain, but it was soccer, always a suspect sport among some.

When I drank, I was told I had a bad habit of picking out the biggest, baddest guy in any bar and getting in his face. I had a couple of occasions, more sane than that, that showed me I could depend on myself if push came to shove, in any situation, but I was never a fighter.

And I didn't dominate women the way other men seemed to. I lost a girlfriend to another man, also a friend, who was more macho than I was. I had a girlfriend who thought I wasn't rough enough with her, since that had been her experience with most of the men in her life. She knew better, but still she felt it. And so did I.

I've been asking myself this question since I was a boy. Am I a real man? I'm a poet, and poets are the standard for mocking men who are not "real" men. I'm a big guy, six feet tall, over two hundred pounds, and I'm strong. I've never shown fear in any situation where my strength was called on to defend either myself, or others. But the questions have lingered. My father, even bigger than I am, was unable to stand up to my mother, and I saw that. I became a crusader for standing up for myself, over the years, and I showed, again and again, that I was capable of that. Still, I carried in me, the question of my manhood.

Nan became frustrated with the strut and with me in a subservient role, and she said, in a deriding voice, "Just once, I wish you would act like a real man."

It triggered a sense of my integrity being humiliated, by someone who professed her love for me and her desire to spend her life with me, asking me if I wanted to marry her, as I said I did, when I first moved to the ranch. I had spend nine months trying to measure up to the demands of the situation, not just to her demands, but to her demanding reality, not just to her challenging character, but to the challenge of living with her. I thought I could do it. I thought I needed to do it. I wanted to do it. It was important to me. And it was broken in that instant.

I stormed away from her. I had a stick in my hand. I looked at the stick, and I knew it was dangerous for me to be holding it. I threw it away. She wanted me to act more like a man. She wanted a take-charge guy. I wanted to act like a man. I wanted to be a take-charge guy. I wanted her to see me and accept me for those things, and I wanted her to see me and accept me for who I am.

I told her to go in the house. She didn't move. She stood by the tailgate of the borrowed pickup truck. I told her to go in the house. I would finish loading the hay. I was at a loss. I was angry as I have never been angry. I was angry at her, and I was angry at the indirect and backhanded insults to my character that I had always carried in my memory and in my sense of myself. I walked back toward the house. I began to think of leaving. I thought about leaving, that minute, getting in my truck and driving away. I walked across the corral toward my room. Then, I thought my leaving would be another sign of my weakness, my not being a man, my not taking charge.

I circled around, I walked up the road, I climbed the fence behind the barn, and shouted at her to go back to the house. She didn't move. I wanted to take charge of the situation. It was deeper than that. I took charge of the situation, the way a real man would. I told her to go back to the house, but she didn't. She stayed by the truck. I walked up to her, now several minutes after this

all began, and I repeated that she should go back to the house. I would finish the hay. That was my plan and my demand. I demanded that she leave, that she go back to the house. She didn't.

I was next to her and I put both of my hands on the front of her shirt and sweatshirt, her jacket, I can't remember what she was wearing, but I grabbed her by the front of her shirt with both hands to move her toward the house. She dropped to the ground. Later, she would say I threw her to the ground, but that's not true. I was trying to get her to leave my presence, and she wouldn't go. Later, she would say she thought I was going to kill her. I had no such intent, but she did nothing to get away from me, during ten minutes of me telling her to do just that. So much for being a take-charge guy.

I regret that this incident took place. I would prefer if I were a wise, calm, strong, take-charge, real man with every situation within my control, so that I didn't get angry or tell any other person what to do, in any way that brought fear or harm to them. On the other hand, I know that I had no intention of doing harm to her, and I know that, other than putting my hands on her shirt, I didn't touch her.

We continued to live together for several more months, during which time we saw a therapist, with whom she did not talk about that day. She says I left her, when I moved off the ranch. My feeling is that on that day, our relationship was over. She tried to joke with me about me being "a real man," as if the remark should have had no weight. The incident became more than those words. It became the scene of the change in my sense of her and of myself. I had always thought it was about her grieving the death of her daughter, until I read some things she wrote, ten years before, when her life was relatively prosperous for her, and she was the same.

I also was glad that I stood up for myself, even if I could have done it better, even if I could have done it years before she and I met. This is something for me to be clear about in my own heart. I am the man I am. And that's the man I am in this world.

I agree that the language of any other person cannot have so much weight that I am affected by it, in any way that is harmful to them or to myself. My angry words to her were taken by her as abusive, but her words to me were not taken as abusive. She has decided, recently, to warn another woman about my abuse, as she sees it. At the same time, she has wanted to see me and be with me.

After this incident, I stopped acting and thinking about her approval for my life and how I live it. I seemed to have stopped acting and thinking about anybody's approval of my life and how I live it. I wasn't as conscious of this reaction in my behavior before this incident occurred, and for that, I'm grateful that it occurred.

The Flowering

There's a young woman in Florida, right now, who's the center of a legal dispute over her life and death. She suffered inevitable brain damage a dozen years ago and has been living on feeding tubes ever since. Her body still looks like the body of a conscious woman, except she doesn't speak or show any other signs of consciousness. All her movements are autonomic, as

far as I can tell. Her parents want her to remain on life support and get therapy, in the hopes, I presume, that she'll recover and return to being the daughter they love and remember.

As I watch my mother, I'm seeing something similar. My mother lives in a world of restricted consciousness. Sometimes, she seems like a clumsy imitation of the woman who once inhabited her body, and other times she seems almost the same. I believe I'm watching a human being who will never again function at the level of consciousness she once enjoyed. I don't want to pull her breathing tubes and shut down her life support, but I'm being shown the truth about the mind and the body. They are both transient.

The young woman in Florida is gone from consciousness. Her body functions poorly on its own, and her mind functions like a double A battery in a 747. Yet, her parents see the distorted but familiar shape of her face, and they fantasize her presence.

Debility drains us all of personality, and we mistake personality for essence. We want to believe the family dog is smiling at us. Am I being heartless and crass, unfeeling and uncaring? I'm sure I am, in the eyes of those who believe Heaven will be a family reunion of charming and loving personalities.

I've felt and acted like a friend and companion to my mother, and she has stared back at me, uncomprehending. My mother is slipping out of her life, and it's painful to watch. When she says something that's familiar in style and tone, it's not a sign that she's present, but that the machinery of her mind is still functioning, the wheels are turning, the synapses are jumping, if only a little.

I suspect that long-time health care workers are familiar with this inevitability, and some family members accuse them of not being good to Uncle Joe. Uncle Joe is not present to complain, but we still want to believe he's about to become his old self.

We want to believe, for our own sake, because we don't want to believe that our lives are so easily disassembled. Our lives can vanish before us, even as we continue to inhabit a shell of our worldly self.

The electric heart of our being is not personal, and the incredible luck to be able to witness its presence in the spirit in our lives ought to be the center of our recognition, but we turn away from the sun and hold our thoughts on dying flowers.

My mother has been a magnificent flowering, and the essence of her beauty is without beginning and without end. Her petals are falling, and my fingers can't reunite them. We can let our own petals fall as they may, if we think of the blinding light that gave them their color.

Sex Friend

It struck me again last night, when I came across a picture of you, how much I thought of you as a true friend and, AT THE SAME TIME, how erotic your mouth, breasts, and pussy were to me. There was no hesitation in my desire for you sexually because YOU WERE MY FRIEND. The

sense of freedom in the heart, as it freed my body, still strikes me as remarkable. Unfortunately, I never believed you felt the same way. I knew I was your friend, but your sexuality seemed submissive at best. When I no longer trusted you, I lost desire for your body, the same body that I thought was so erotic, in and of itself. Then I understood that my enjoyment of my desire for your breasts was dependent on our friendship.

My opinion was that your lifelong experiences as a sex-object meant that I should squelch my erotic pleasure and that you had no way to express any desire of your own. You told me that your usual experience with men as aggressors made me seem a poor lover. Well, it made you seem a poor lover, too.

I needed to be loved and desired, so that my own love and desire could be set free. It seemed to me that the more I desired you physically, the more it perpetuated an old imbalance. That was extremely frustrating to me; since I with someone with whom I was friends and with whom I could feel safe, and with whom I could feel my sexuality unencumbered.

It seems as if you had the male mind-set, wanting me to be rough and aggressive, and you to be passive and submissive, and I had the female mind-set, wanting to feel safe to set my sexuality free. My liking you and my desire for you made me feel free in the early weeks of our lovemaking, but eventually, as my overweening energy subsided, I began to notice the imbalance between us, and I no longer felt free with you. It was confusing to me for a long time.

It's clear to me now, especially after watching it for the last seven years, that my male desire, as highly eroticized as it may be, cannot be the driving force in my relationships. I need to feel at ease, accepted. Even so, my erotic nature cannot be denied. I need to feel desired, so that all desire is a mutual opening to mutual enjoyment of the physical.

Of course, in true recognition, without boundaries, desire loses focus on objects and becomes the creative, loving will of being itself. Only when there are boundaries, do objects appear, objects of desire and objects of fear.

I'm glad to finally get this said, for what its worth.

The Model

I'm often struck, when I'm painting, to see something remarkable take place entirely beyond my willing it. There's a kind of pride to it, a child's pride, to be so lucky, to have something happen in my life that is so beautiful. A child discovers a small bird nearby and bursts into wonder at the new thing in his eyes. "Look at what's happened in my life," he seems to say. The power of the human mind to appropriate all these miracles of existence is equally amazing to witness.

At the end of one session, the model says to me, "This drawing, may I have it?" I'm reluctant to let go of something I've only had for such a short time. Someone else is claiming the bird that has lit on my arm. "Sure," I say, "You can have it."

It's a tough moment. I want her to have it. I want to have it, myself. But I DO have it. It's mine, more than it can ever be anyone else's, no matter how briefly it's been in my hands. It's come through my hands, through my eyes, through my spirit. It's the evidence of a moment.

There's been an old idea, floating across my mind about drawing from the nude. The old idea is that some aggressive sexuality is part of it. Once again, I discover that my true experience is not the same as the one my mind would make of it. It's not a sexual voyeurism, not an aggression. My witnessing, my seeing, is a constantly changing, evolving recognition of moments of visual truth often called beauty.

The model is a living being, and her energy vitalizes what the artist, also a living being, recognizes. It's an exchange, a cooperation, a partnership. It's a kind of love that's mistaken for its sexual imitation, desire.

In my heart, I neither love nor desire the model. In my heart, what I love and desire is the moment of creative awareness. I love and desire the action it gives birth to and nurtures. That moment and its recognition can be engendered, endlessly, in the heart, but not in the mind that imagines it otherwise. Reluctantly, happily, I give her the drawing. I open my hand and let the bird fly.

My Imagined Ad for a Mate

I'm a gifted artist/poet/writer/humorist, young-looking 57, with grown children, athletic, handsome, mature, with an ageless heart and timeless spirit. I'm looking for a woman who is too much for most people, not in overbearing conceit, but in simple fact. She is a woman for whom the simple beauty of existence outshines her considerable virtues, physical, mental, and spiritual, and her awareness directs her life.

Mature and childlike, wise and beautiful, sensual and joyful, her attention is on the moment of being itself, and the world is its endlessly delightful manifestation. For her, the sharing of the moment is natural, but few others are ready for or capable of the same recognition, so she has learned to be discreet in her associations. Only the recognition of absolute reality and of the relative realities within it, that we find we have in common, will open wide this unclosed door.

I am a remarkable man who welcomes, more than seeks, an extraordinary woman. We are a match made in heaven, when no heaven exists. You are attractive, and you enjoy the feelings of desire, but you are not controlled by them. Your soft breasts are the equivalent of affectionate delight in the sensual. You are in great shape, because there's no reason not to be. You're wealthy, or you're so rich that wealth doesn't matter. You are beautiful, and/or others think you are. You are not old but seem so, not young but seem so. At ease among others, you are not bound by ties, even the ones you cherish.

You are deeply aware, in your experience, of the presence of nothingness, not the nothingness that is the absence of something, but the nothingness that is the presence of everything. You find immediate joy in the transient beauty of everything that is. You are a garden, whose beauty and fertility all can see, but which is governed by an inner growth beyond control or cultivation. You

are not threatened by my creativity, strength, and charisma, but at peace in your own. If you are not this woman, but you know of her, I would appreciate your mention of this to her. If you are she, I await the effortlessness of our meeting.

P.S. My innate sense of humor enjoys the contrast between this absurd proposal and its true heart.

A Big Guy

He was a big guy, maybe 250 pounds, with a square face. He was a man who didn't seem like he had a father. I could imagine that he was a father, but he didn't seem like anyone's son.

When he spoke, he was soft-spoken, and he told a story about driving with his father. His dad was mad at him about how he answered or didn't answer the cell-phone, so he grabbed it and tossed it in the backseat, and the son was angry and hurt. He didn't know how to respond, so he prayed. He asked for God's will, "God, please take of this for me," he said, and he let go of it.

Later, I ran into him in the grocery store, and he said hi. He told me he heard an awful sound in his truck, he couldn't figure out what it was until he turned on the heater, and there it was. I told him about the weird smells that occasionally come out of my car's heater, and he said, "Well, you have a good night," and I said, "You, too."

Being in Charge

We assume that the people who are in charge of things are setting an example for the rest of us. But they're only being a certain type of people, and their archetype is limited, and when we take it to be our model, we lose out on other ways of being. Those, who genuinely and kindly ignore those who are in charge, as being a model for one's behavior, are more in charge of themselves, than are those who are in charge of everyone.

OJ's Jury

When Johnnie Cochran, or any lawyer, says to a predominantly African-American, poor White, or Latino jury, "The cops have lied. This Black man has been framed," it is like saying the sky is blue, the ocean is deep. No one from that community would be surprised by the probability of a corrupt and venal police force. Until that is no longer a fair presumption, it must be proven otherwise. That's the work of the day. In the meantime, our White middle-class shock at the exoneration of a murderer can serve to demonstrate how absolutely essential this fundamental reform has become.

Mark Fuhrman, Dennis Fung, Philip Vanatter, Colin Yamauchi, et al, are, in part, responsible for the Simpson verdict by not performing their jobs with impeccable care. The American people are complicit by holding the belief that a defense attorney can and must do ANYTHING to get his client off.

Everyone accused is guaranteed a defense, but no one is guaranteed freedom by any means necessary. This is a commonly held corruption of justice. Justice does not guarantee that one should be able to get away with whatever one wants. This is not immoral or amoral. It is, instead, a corrupt morality. It is now common in America to believe, with a fervent conviction that we are all obliged to do whatever we have to do to look out for our own self-interest. This is not casual. It is a belief system with wide-ranging repercussions. As in, "Go, O.J.!"

The answer is not political, and it is not religious. We have seen how those too have been corrupted by "any means necessary." Only the recognition of the innate virtue of all beings can begin to clear away this idolatry of me and mine over you and yours.

Polarities of Grace

A man in a wheelchair, his body distorted by crippling disease, tries to seal the plastic lid of his coffee cup. He flings his weak and bent hands with practiced skill, unsuccessfully, until his aide pops the lid in place, and he can drink from a straw. His awkward grace only barely approximates the ease of others, but his failure is narrow and like a daring dance of diminishment. A small girl eyes his situation with a cool calculation of new information, and then she plays with her sister a game of fall and catch that depends on their nascent, natural agility. These polarities of grace are my nurture.

The Spiral of Life

Life repeats itself, endlessly, but it doesn't repeat itself in the same way. If we're lucky, and if we're conscious, sometimes even if we're not conscious, we come to the same place of consciousness, a sort of déjà vu of awareness, and we see with brighter eyes, with clearer eyes, what we've seen before. It might be better to say we see with wider eyes, not brighter eyes. The brightness of our vision may be the same from cycle to cycle, but something opens us to a wider vision in this progress toward awareness that is beyond our habitual limitations.

The Weight of Romanticism

I'm in my first year of recovery from romanticism. They say you shouldn't make any major changes during the first year of recovery. I've been aware of the attachment to and the addiction of romanticism for a long time. I lived drunk on romanticism and then as a dry drunk for years. Many practicing alcoholics can tell you all about their addiction, but stopping is the only genuine break from its influence. Romanticism is not an easy thing to give up. Everybody loves romance. More people drink from the well of romanticism than drink alcohol. I still feel the pull of romanticism, even though I've lost the obsession.

The same thing happened when I quit drinking. The mind repeats itself in habitual thought, even though the obsession has lifted. It wasn't until I was in my fourth year of sobriety that I felt a completely new life coursing through my veins. It's sometimes difficult having friends who are still romantics. They admit it, almost with pride, the same way drinkers feel proud of being drinkers. It's a popular way to live. In their presence, I feel the absence of romanticism. Donald Yi once said, "Every time we give something up, we feel a new burst of freedom." Yes, and one

feels the weight of its absence. Absence has a way of occupying one's attention with more weight than the thing itself. Romanticism wore lightly on my shoulders, or so I thought, until I took it off.

On the Job

I went to work, this morning, and I got paid. Amazing. I'm always amazed when I get paid for exercising my body. Of course, if I didn't get paid, I wouldn't be so amazed. When I got to the job site, there was a note from the woman that I hold off staining the back deck. Yesterday, I stained the front deck. I didn't like the way it looked, and I thought she might be about to complain about that, maybe not pay me for doing shoddy work. I called the paint store and got an explanation for why the stain was shiny. It was designed to penetrate the wood, and since the deck had been stained before, the stain couldn't get to the wood, unless I had sanded it to bare wood, which would have been a prohibitively expensive job. The new stain on top of old stain left the oils on the surface, and the oils were shiny. Time and sunshine will dull the surface, eventually.

When the woman showed up, an hour later, in her running shorts, with another teacher, a writer-friend of mine, she only wanted to be reassured about why the stain didn't cover the bare spots the way solid-body paint would. Semi-transparent stain has almost no tint. I went to the paint store and got more stain and finished the back deck. I said I would be back on Monday to put the furniture back on the two decks and check if anything had been missed. Then she said, "Should I pay you now?" "If you want to," I said, and she handed me a check she'd already written. I drove away in renewed amazement.

When the back deck went well, despite the cloud cover and gusting winds, I said, "Thank you Jesus." I often say that. I say, "Thank you Jesus," because there is no Jesus. He doesn't exist, if he ever did. Saying, "Thank you Jesus," is my way of feeling gratitude with no recipient for the feeling. I could say, "Thank you, Existence," but that seems too deliberately non-specific. Gratitude, as a feeling, as a thought in the mind, needs a specific reference point to function as a completed feeling or as a completed thought in the mind. I could thank my dead ancestors or the god of the volcano or the sun god or Roger the Carrot God.

On the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, years ago, among hundreds of questions, one set of questions asked if the test-taker believed his or her life was being controlled by a power greater than him or herself. If he or she answered, "Yes, God," they were deemed sane, but if they answered, "Yes, Roger the Carrot God," they were ready for the loony bin. I suppose I could say, "Thank you Roger," but I don't want to push the limits of any eavesdropping loony-bin staff members who might be passing within earshot. I don't say it outloud, anyway, but you never know with these psychologically astute types. It's fun to say, "Thank you Jesus," and if Jesus were listening, I'm sure he'd get a pleasant chuckle out of it.

My purpose is to express and feel gratitude, when it occurs. I don't believe Jesus or anyone or anything is responsible for the paint, the weather this morning, or the check being delivered in a timely fashion. It often seems as if there's a confluence of good energy and good events in my life, and I'm grateful for that, but I don't believe there is a orchestrating, manipulating,

organizing force who doles out good times and bad to specific people at specific times. Even karma is only the way things occur. My brother is notoriously apprehensive about the constant negative flow of events in his life, and yet, he's had an amazingly rich and rewarding life. His karma contradicts his attitude. Oh, well. To each his own.

I was at an Oakland A's baseball game, years ago. There were 30,000 people in attendance, screaming at the top of their lungs for the batter from the other team to strike out. Instead, he hit a homerun. I thought, "If 30,000 people can't affect the outcome of an event with their hopes, dreams, prayers, wishes, demands, and desires, all aimed in the same direction, what chance does any of us have in influencing our lives, moment to moment, event to event. We don't, but we can influence how we witness our lives. We can be at peace, moment-to-moment, event to event, and that's a great life, if you ask me.

Toke that Barge

I moved around town, yesterday, taking care of business, and when it came time to write, I posted a new page on my blog. It took two hours, and I realized it was in the frame of mind of one who takes care of business. It was good work, but it was in a framed mind. I was not thinking as a poet. I was thinking as a thinker. The same thing is true today. I moved around town taking pictures of a deck I have agreed to stain, going to the paint store, talking to the guys there about it; talking to my friend about driving to Yakima so she can look at a new vehicle to trade her truck for. All business. It's an old habit of mind. It's an old habit of mine. As my mother said, I'm a doer, and I grew up in the Midwest where the work ethic is in the water. Going to work solves all problems. Having a job, going to work, being a doer, is living to solve problems, and the mind is content to be so occupied. To be a poet is to un-occupy the mind. Work is the marijuana of the masses. Toke that barge. Sniff that bale.

The Nearness of Grace

I watched a movie about a homeless man who was a concert quality cellist but whose schizophrenia drove him, or pulled him, away from being a student at Julliard and from being a successful performer in any normal setting. He was overheard playing on the street in L.A. by a writer who took an interest in his story. The writer's newspaper columns about the man led to a book, then a movie; *The Soloist*, starring Jamie Foxx as the musician and Robert Downey, Jr., as the columnist. In the movie, the assumption is carried that it is a loss to the musician, Nathaniel Anthony Ayers, and to the world, that he isn't able to become a concert musician, considering his obvious abilities.

The columnist, Steve Lopez, asks what it is he feels as he witnesses the music of this remarkable man, who everyone thinks is tragically thwarted, and Lopez's friend and ex-wife says, "It's grace." Ayers refuses to perform anywhere but in the street, where he says, he can hear the applause of the doves and the pigeons, a reference to the sound of their wings, I imagine. No one in the movie suggests that Ayers might actually be better off, and the world might be better off for it, by his playing on the street and not in a concert hall.

When I was in the ashram of the notorious guru, Osho Rajneesh, I painted, every day in the open

air studio provided by the ashram. Osho had been absent from this plane of reality, so to speak, for the previous two years, and I was not a disciple of his, but I was impressed by his scholarship and his wisdom. I read several of his books and, one day, in the ashram newspaper, I read his opinion of artists doing creative work. He said he thought it was all right, as long it was done for the love of it and not for any other motive. I was happy to read that. Another artist came in the studio, one day, and thrilled the others with the story of his sale of a painting for thousands of rupees (a couple hundred dollars) and I thought it curious that Osho's words on the subject weren't discussed. Of course, the painter may have painted for the love of it, and someone may have offered him money for the painting.

My mother, a Methodist in Illinois, was so good at giving book reviews at her church women's book circle that other organizations asked her to give her reviews for them, and they would pay her, they said. She turned them down, saying she could only do it for the glory of God and not for money. I wondered about that, thinking she might have only been shy about being recognized outside her little circle, but my mother was not a shy woman.

I recognized something in myself in these three people, as different as any three people can be, or so one might imagine. I've been distinctly inadequate in the promotion and sales of my own creative work. I take heart in Nathaniel Ayers wanting to play his music on the street into the air for the birds to hear. I like connecting with other people when they read my writing and see my art. Even when I was on stage in San Francisco and Seattle, performing one-man shows, I was happy to share the experience of being creative, artistic, imaginative, whatever you want to call it, but I've never been much good at turning that impulse into a profession for reward.

I think it is the nearness of grace to the natural expression of life that compels me. I'm not a schizophrenic, I'm not religious, I'm not a guru, but I recognize something in these people that I share. I believe it is the protection of the nearness of grace in the choices we make about how we live our lives.

The Profession of Poetry

Can I write on this computer the way I used to write with a pen on paper? The computer feels like writing in air, like writing in thought itself. Writing on paper feels like scratching in the dirt or painting on a wall. I sit in the same chair, I course the same blood, I look with the same eyes. My fingers tap on a white board of tiled rows. There are metaphors for everything we do. This writing is a kind of meditation. I sit in service to a warm-blooded dream. I paint the love I have for my own existence. I anticipate nothing occurring. I address myself to wonder, before it's become anything named or seen. Then I write, and the result is a parade of streamers after the parade has passed. I refer to what has no reference. I define what has no definition. I write a love poem to someone I love, and my love is untouched by its witness. You are a witness to the witness. Your presence is the lover in his or her own warm-blooded dream. We talk with each other like this, so our dream can discover its common reality.

In order to write poetry, one must become a poet. One becomes a poet by discovering that one is already a poet. One stays a poet by rediscovering one's being a poet, each new day. This discovery requires one to dig a hole around oneself until one falls in on oneself. This is one

profession where, when one finds oneself in a hole, one should not stop digging, but dig even deeper.

One becomes known as a poet by writing poetry. It seems to be a writer's profession, considering that it's the writing of a poet that's known and studied. However, poetry is one profession that exists without any necessary evidence of its practice or its product. This is why other things are referred to as poetry, pure poetry, even poetry in motion, when poetry is thought of as an expression of contemplation and reflection, like prayer and meditation. One can be a pray-er without speaking a prayer, a meditator without entering a meditation. Poetry is ascribed to the essence of things. Poetry occurs in the non-appearance of things. To be a poet is to be in the place of the non-appearance of things.

What one may speak, in that place, may be called poetry. Or, it may not. The poet may be at a loss to write the poetry of his poetic being. He may write descriptions of the indescribable, poetic essays in consciousness. He may try to speak the unspeakable and end up speaking more in effort than fulfillment. It's been said that ideas don't belong in poems, but once a thought separates itself from wonder, it enters the world of idea. Obscuring the presence of idea with language doesn't not change its reality or end its presence. Thought is idea, and poetry is the idea of no idea.

Nowadays, when I begin to read other people's poetry, I grow tired before I've gotten very far. I'm compelled to the manifest and not the manifestation. Occasionally, a poem I read will become manifest in the midst of its manifestation. It doesn't matter who I'm reading, my old standbys are the same as contemporary discoveries. A man in a wheelchair, his body distorted by crippling disease, tries to seal the plastic lid of his coffee cup. He flings his weak and bent hands with practiced skill, unsuccessfully, until his aide pops the lid in place, and he can drink from a straw. His awkward grace only barely approximates the ease of others, but his failure is narrow and like a daring dance of diminishment. A small girl eyes his situation with a cool calculation of new information, and then she plays with her sister a game of fall and catch that depends on their nascent, natural agility. These polarities of grace are my nurture.

When I Drink Alone

I notice that when I'm alone, I drop into a deeper happiness than I do when I'm with other people, including those I love. This is nothing about me, it is the revelation of human happiness, the happiness of being. The natural state of being at peace with oneself is deeper than being in any state of relationship with others. That doesn't diminish relationship with others. Being at peace with oneself is the foundation of all happy relationships.

This deeper happiness in self is the foundation for being with others. It's what allowed me to connect with others. I can connect with others in a way that comes from paying attention, but it comes even more from being at peace in oneself. Then that same part in others is reachable. One's peace resonates with the peace in others. The more one is in touch with that peace in oneself, the more one is able to be in touch with the peace in others. Or, as George Thorogood once said, "When I drink alone, I prefer to be by myself."

A Beautiful Home

I watched a teacher in India speak to hundreds of people in the moment of his existence. He seemed to pay no attention to the past or the future, even to the recent past. He seemed forgetful. He seemed not to remember people. Then the intelligence in his awareness would crackle with brilliance. His consciousness would call up details of people and events with startling alacrity and sharpness. It became apparent that his neglect of the thinking that's rooted in time made him not less able to remember but better able to remember, when the moment asked for it. He was at the mercy of the moment. The moment was his master. He became a master by surrendering his mastery to the superior awareness of the moment of his own being.

As a boy, I was often "off in the clouds," as my parents said. I accepted their judgment as accurate. I didn't know any other arena of judging behavior than theirs and the people around them, and they were all of a single mind. The social mind of thought and feeling had decided that those of us who don't pay attention to the behavior of time, to the chronology of events, to the stories of our lives, to the narrative stream of consciousness, are "absent-minded, lost in thought, a dreamer," or someone to be "brought back to reality." "Steve, Steve, Stephen, wake up and pass the salt!"

Black Elk was lucky, as a boy having visions, to have parents who, even though they didn't understand what was happening to their son, called the shaman, and the shaman recognized what was happening to the boy, because it was not unfamiliar to his experience. I see, now, that my inclination to "stare off into space" was an inclination to return to the source, born of my inherent nature. I know people close to me whose inclination in any circumstance that occurs as a challenge to their awareness, start talking, filling the space with words, born of feelings, born of thinking. My deepest inclination is to go to stillness, but I've learned to compete in the language production reaction to life.

When I got married, I had to literally learn to speak, and I did. I learned in college and in marriage to articulate my feelings and my thoughts. I'm not autistic. I was always articulate enough to please my parents, my friends, and my schools. I discovered I had a facility for articulation/ I became as good at it as anyone. Being a poet is, in a sense, overcoming silence with language, but in a deeper sense, it is the articulation of stillness. That's what I take it to be. Being a visual artist comes easier to me, but I've been compelled to articulate the stillness that I find at the heart of everything.

That tendency to be still, that I experience as a kid, was not a failure to interact with others, it was the attention to the source that's never left me. Poetry opened that attention for me. The associations I've made with others like me in what's called the realm of the spiritual, and the artistic, has furthered the development of that attention. When I was a kid, I imagine, it would've been possible for someone who recognized what I was experiencing to help me recognize it, too, but there was no one. I was on a tiny island of particular attention in a sea of general ignorance. Ignorance is a lack of knowledge. I had the same lack of knowledge. Knowledge should do to ignorance what light does to shadow, but ignorance becomes deliberate, in the lives of the habitual, and in the habitual of our lives.

I have a beautiful mind. Sometimes, I have a brilliant mind. Sometimes, I have an ignorant mind. It helps me to think of my mind as beautiful. It takes the emphasis off myself as being the mind itself. I recognize that I'm a being of awareness that has a beautiful mind. I can see the beauty. It isn't personal. I'm not saying I'm beautiful. I can see my mind, and it is beautiful. I am no more my mind than I am this body. I will add to this, though, that on Sunday, when I was playing soccer, and my body was functioning well, I was very happy about it. The health of my body and the health of my mind are great sources of happiness.

My mind has always been inherently beautiful, in its natural state, but it became a place of mixed realities. As a boozing poet, I could see the unchanging voice of the inherent self in my poetry, and I could hear the deteriorating voice of the personal self. I've worked to get my mind back to its natural beauty. It's taken as much time and discipline as if I were training my body for the Olympics. The conditions for both are the same; their natural state is wonder, and it is wonderful. The body is full of wonder, and so is the mind, in their natural state. Allowing the natural state of a healthy being to thrive is essential to recognizing wonder in oneself, and joy is the natural expression of wonder in the body and the mind.

I've had two heart attacks, and I have an aging body, and there is beauty in this body. I am not saying I'm beautiful. That's the kind of judgment that ignores the beauty of being in a body. I have a beautiful mind, and I have a beautiful body. Attachments in the mind and attachments in the body obscure the beauty of one's inherent being. Letting go of attachments isn't a discipline to become socially or spiritually acceptable. Letting go of attachments is the road back home, and we all come from the same beautiful home.

Ancient Abhaya

Many years ago, it occurred to me, during a discussion of the human soul, that I didn't have a soul. I wasn't a human with a soul. I was soul itself. The human part of me was the lesser part, a part within the whole. This is not an uncommon thought, but it commonly remains a thought. We're used to the idea that we are spirit, soul, being, and that idea remains the expression of our experience. Indeed, it remains our experience. To live in the idea of being soul, of being spirit, is as close as we come to recognition. We think of ourselves as spiritual beings in a human body, but it remains a thought, and the dynamic doesn't change. We continue to think of ourselves as thinking beings with a wise understanding of our greater reality.

The challenge to thinking of myself as a spiritual being is to be a spiritual being and let go of my identification as a thinking human. This is similar to what food addicts have to do. In order to let go of their addiction, they can't simply stop eating. They have to eat. How does one begin to recognize oneself as being itself and not continue to recognize oneself as a thinking human being? One does both, because both are true. The lesser reality is more addicting. The problem that food addicts have is in their relationship to food, not in the food. The problem thinking-addicts have is not in being a thinking human being, it's in their relationship with that identity.

Do I cling to this identity? No, I don't cling to it. Still, it has a stickiness of its own, called habit. And when everyone around you is carrying the same addiction, it's difficult to let go. But it can

be done. This writing sounds intellectual. What I really want to talk about is the moment of letting go, in the moment of recognition. I've had the idea, for a long time, of the first human beings who recognized that they were living in an awareness that wasn't definitional.

Imagine this. An ancient human being is at peace, for some reason, probably several reasons. He (or she) is fed, safe, healthy, and unafraid. Fear is the greatest obscurer of awareness, therefore of recognition. If one is in fear, nothing else can take precedence. An ancient human being, the first, was not afraid, long enough, to let go of the watchfulness that probably characterized all beings, at the time. Let's call our human being Abhaya, because Abhaya means fearless (and, just for the fun of it). Abhaya is about to be the first of a kind. He's healthy, full-grown and at peace. Inside one moment, as he surveys his surroundings, with which he is completely familiar and at ease, something occurs in his mind, in his consciousness, that's never occurred before. He sees himself for the being he is and not the man he is.

He's used to seeing his hands, feet, genitals, body, arms, legs, maybe even his reflection in still water. He's learned to communicate with others about the nature of their surroundings. He knows about survival, providing shelter, having babies, caring for his family and neighbors, warding off predators, finding food, etc. He knows about birth and death. He talks about people he knows and people he's seen. One day, in a moment of peace, his mind becomes larger than his experience. How that happens nobody knows, because it's never happened before. He knows that something new has happened. He becomes conscious of himself, but not in his physical or social world. He becomes conscious of himself as consciousness itself.

This is new. This has never happened before. He's been a thinking human being for a long time, and he's good at it. Then, one day, he becomes a consciously aware being, and in that instant, he's transformed. He's remarkably conscious. He gets it that he is who he is, in his world, and he gets it that he's conscious of himself. He is himself, he's conscious of himself, and he finally becomes conscious that he's conscious. It's never happened before. It's like being struck awake. At this point, he can become the first priest and make a structure of thought of his consciousness. He can shut himself down and act as if it was a fever that came and went. He can keep his mouth shut until he finds another human being with the same look of recognition in his or her eyes. He can wander off into the forest, desert, jungle, or ocean, in order to stay in his consciousness without interruption. He can die from the sheer amazement of it all. He can leave the occasion to someone else to make something of it.

This moment of recognition un-defines who he is, from then on, and no matter how he defines himself back into the social order of his companions, he's been changed. He becomes a poet, a dreamer, a priest, a preacher, a teacher, a leader, a crazy man, a threat or the first harbinger of salvation, not from the world, but from the narrow definition of life as struggle and fear. But what is that moment of recognition?

My mind wants to go there, but it can't. It's not a moment of thought. Otherwise, it would be as common as eating. It has become common, as a thought of salvation. It's become common, as the sense of existence that we attribute to religion and religious leaders, as if they are the ones capable of it, and we aren't, or they're more capable of it, and we're less capable of it. Ancient Abhaya proves that's not true. He was the first, when there was no one to tell him how to be in

awareness. He became aware in his own consciousness. You can say that God came to him, but he had no god. There was no god in his world. He was at peace in himself. He was the gateway to his own awareness. He came to himself. He became himself.

I'm convinced this is how available the same revelation, the same recognition, the same awareness is, to everyone. How does it happen? No one knows. But it happens. We've descended from this sort of human being for so long that we've built up a massive library, or webrary, if you will. It's become almost academic, but the moment of recognition is exactly the same as it was for our hero, way back at the dawn of time. I'm fascinated by this ancient Abhaya guy, and I have been, for a long time. He's the key to the whole business of letting go of thought as an addiction, not letting go of thought as a useful tool, not letting go of thought as a pleasure, but letting go of thought as a definition of one's identity, and that is the key to become true to who one is, in the deepest reality of one's own being. One thinks of identity, one recognizes who one is. Ancient Abhaya was there when it was simple, when it simply occurred.

Redundant to the Reality

My friend has begun talking about losing our connection. What interests me is life without connection, to find what remains, when we don't build or depend on our connections? The other day, I opened up "A Prisoner's Cave in Heaven" and found this:

Rumi in the Amazon

A small tribe in the Amazon has no language for anything abstract. They live their entire lives in the physical present. They never adapted to the ways of anyone else's thinking. Some analysts think the tribe might be the only truly stupid people ever discovered. Missionaries cannot interest them in the life of a dead man that no one's ever met. They don't plant crops or store up provisions for the future. Everything they do is seen and described in the present. Anyone who leaves their sight simply walks out of their experience.

A boy carves a replica of a newly arrived seaplane. He's excited, and the model is well made, but in a few days, it's been discarded, and no more models are made. It has no more significance. What kind of artist can this be? What kind of people are these? All the worship and wonder that we codify in detail is near to hand to them and as present as the real. We're amazed with our abstractions, the glory of our civilization. In reading Dr. Seuss, we neglect our children. In reading Shakespeare, we neglect each other. In reading the past and future, we neglect our origin. I'm another practitioner of this neglect. Rumi used to decry the foolishness of his words, as if he might be saying, "Don't read my poems. Be as you are."

But Rumi continued to write poems. After every warning he made about the distraction of his poetry from the very thing they addressed, he kept writing. Even stupid people, like we are, can lay aside the poem, and dance, and we can dance inside the poem, even as we write it, even as we read it, even as we remember it, even as we forget it ever existed. I try to think I'm unhappy. I try to think I should settle into the life of a householder. I rode my bike past a mailbox with an address on it. It was 1004, the address of my best friend when I was in grade school. I imagined

being the father of that family, working and raising his family in a small town in Nebraska, and I imagined his discontent, telling his wife, “I can’t do this,” as I told my wife, in San Francisco, one of the greatest cities on earth. I wondered about the discontent to live an ordinary life. I remember my happiness at the end of “Resurrection”. Ellen Burstyn, playing a psychiatrist who becomes a popular healer, is shown working in a small gas station in a small town in the middle of the desert, practicing her healing, with no fanfare and no recognition, on a small boy who is passing through with his family. I loved that scene of quiet emancipation. I took it for an example. Yet, here I am, still wanting to do something more public, something on a grand scale, after all these years. As content as I am in my heart, I’m discontent in my mind. This may only be “the way things is”, as one old drunk says to Mickey Rourke, playing the poet Henry Chinaski (Charles Bukowski) in “Barfly,” another movie I took for iconic.

I want my mind free of all relationships. The fact that I want it free indicates that it’s not free. But the mind is never free from these attachments. That’s what the mind does. It’s just “the way things is”. One cannot free the mind of itself, one can only let go of one’s dependence on the mind. One can’t free the mind of its nature, any more than one can talk a drunk into being sober while he’s still drunk. One can take thought out of the mind by living a life of constant meditation, or one can free oneself from depending on the mind for one’s salvation. Let the mind be as it is, and be free. I say these things, and it works. I call the mind on itself, and it works. I want to believe I’m a failure at enlightenment, but this too is a misdirection of the mind. I am enlightened, I’ve always been enlightened. I also live in a body and I have a mind that continues to live out its function. The mind cannot become enlightened in itself. I’m unenlightened when I depend on the mind and the body for consciousness.

I hear myself saying that if I were Mr. Adams in McCook, Nebraska, on West 4th St., I could’ve stayed in that life and still have been free, but I have a mind that wants to remain focused on its ambitions. It wants to be the mind that I’ve inherited in the body that I’ve inherited. I can say to this mind, “I can’t do this,” but it will continue as it is, no matter what I say. The answer, of course, is the same answer I return to, every time. I can let go of my relationship with my own mind, and be free, instantaneously. This is like being with a woman, and being free by remaining in no relationship with her. This is not a rejection of the woman, or of the mind, but it is freedom from attachment to a relationship with either one.

My friend asked me about sitting on my small deck with its great view of Manastash Ridge in order to write. I prefer this café, even though the deck is pleasant and the view is wonderful. It occurred to me, after I stopped asking why I don’t stay home, that I come out because people like me. I feel good in their presence. I’m lucky to have this feeling and to feel it whenever I’m in a group of strangers. I’m not sure where I got the feeling, but it’s part of why I sit in a very public café to do my creative work. This has been true for most of my adult life. I don’t do it to be seen or praised. Baristas who I’ve known for many months have asked me what I do. They never knew I write. Being on a computer is a common site these days. It carries no sense of what one is doing.

I’ve said that I feed off the energy of people, but maybe it’s truer that I feed off this sense of good feeling as a kind of base acceptance. Whenever I feel abandoned in public, it’s because I feel abandoned in myself. I don’t look for acceptance; I merely take it in. I feel it in myself, so I

feel it in the presence of others. When I sitting with Papaji, after he had invited me to join him in front of others, I turned to look out at the large group. He said, "Don't be afraid, they are your friends." I said, spontaneously, grinning at the large L-shaped room full of seekers from all over the world, "I'm not afraid. I ... love ... them." The last words came out slowly, disintegrating in the air. "I love them" seemed redundant to the reality. Relationship is the narrowing of the acceptance of love to an attachment to the other, it's the same inside one's own mind, as well. I look at my own mind, and I say, "I ... love ... them," and the words are redundant to the reality.

This is the ambition of my spirit. My mind only imitates it with ambitions of its own. I want mind to follow spirit. As long as the mind is in tune with the spirit, it's in tune with its highest self. The mind can be a good and happy servant, when it no longer serves its own purposes, or when it recognizes that it's own purposes are secondary to the whole.

A Frankenstein's Monster of Airy Transfusion

I still haven't been clear about what I discovered in the air between beings that entrances me. My mind doesn't want to go there. It's the place of the disappearance of the mind. It's the place that becomes what we call love. I listened to a story by Anton Chekov, read on the radio, in which he talks about the perplexing nature of love and declares it unknowable. He throws up his hands. His is a kind of rejoicing in failure. He was a wonderful writer, walking around the elephant of love, describing it in marvelous detail. To go into the unknowable nature of love would be to become the elephant and lose his career as its chronicler. When the blood of the air between beings becomes what we think of as love, it becomes a fourth thing born of the third thing. The fourth thing is relationship, and it consumes the third thing until it's no longer present. We like to think the fourth thing of relationship preserves the third thing of the presence between two beings, but that presence cannot be preserved. It's like trying to transform the blood of the air into a creation of one's making, a kind of Frankenstein's monster of airy transfusion.

The Moment of Present Reality

I posted the story of creating a "Frankenstein's monster of airy transfusion" online, and one poet's response was about the "fifth thing", as she called it, from her own experience, of being in relationship with someone, like her fellow poet husband, for forty years, and discovering something enduring. It's the discovery of what remains. It's true in our individual lives, and it's true with those who've been together for a long time. She said the fifth thing wasn't "ethereal" as what I had described. I wrote her than even in a long-term relationship, the moment is still the moment. I said I didn't mean to refer to anything ethereal, which I take to mean the mind's version of the present moment.

People persist in thinking of me as a philosophical, spiritual, abstract, ethereal thinker, when what I mean to describe is the very real moment of present reality. In fact, this is the only reality that can be proven to exist. Everything else is abstracted from this moment. Even our physical reality is a snapshot of slow motion combinations of molecules in space. We tend to think of the molecules as real and not the space between them. The same is true of thought. It's the space between thoughts that's real. I've said all this, before, many times, as have many others, but we love our illusions of substance. I think of the Easter Island statues. We stand in front of the

mega-glyphs of the island and our minds open to the presence we're part of and always have been. What also intrigues us about the statues occurs in our imagination of the people who created them. We abstract the statues into a culture we imagine in our memories, overlaying the present moment with what we call its history. I love these illusions as much as the next, and that's why I persist in telling myself to remember the real.

Papaji said to me, "No one has ever been able to describe this, but don't stop trying." I don't think I'll ever be able to describe the moment of present reality. It's indescribable, and, beside that, description is the perfect example of leaving home. I can't describe this moment of present reality without referring to everything around it, but there's another ambition in my description. It is to clear up the perception of what is called real. The relative reality of the nearness to the real is also poorly described. I see monks talking about their focus, and it dissolves in laughter, or it devolves into religious and spiritual formulations. The moment of present reality belongs to us all of us, not just to monks, yogis and gurus, simply because we all belong to it.

Trapped in Freedom

What would I do if I found myself on a spaceship hurtling toward outer space with no way to change direction and no communication with Earth or any other being in the Universe? It's the same question I asked myself in an unfinished drama called "Movie Star". The most famous film star in the world takes himself to an inaccessible cabin in the woods and then is snowed in for the winter. He's alone, without his public and with all communication cut off to everyone else. The only thing that clues the audience in to who he might be is the name "Movie Star". In the 80s, I worked on another drama called "Open the Door, Richard", about a guy who can't leave his room, no matter how hard he tries. This theme of being stranded, separate from all other human life interests me, not in my fascination with movie stars, astronauts, or agoraphobics, but in the question of what it means to be conscious in one's own reality.

Every one of us is alone in his or her consciousness. No matter how many people we're surrounded by, we cannot enter into their consciousness, and they cannot enter into ours, except by the projection of our thoughts in language. As close as we imagine we might be to each other, there's an unbridgeable gap. And yet, in the absence of thought, there occurs the recognition that we are all of the same being that only our conscious minds keep us separate. We imagine separation, out of the nature of our minds to imagine it, and then we imagine connection, fashioned by the same instrument of separation. The awful fear of being lost in space, trapped in a snowstorm, or isolated in a fearful mind, are all products of the thinking mind.

When I was a kid, about the same time I discovered I was completely at home in nothingness, I became aware I was trapped in my mind. But when I let go of the thought, I was free. Both realities were interesting, but the reality of the mind has a more immediate appeal, because that's where everyone lives. We give the other reality to religion, and go on our way. But the other reality is the more compelling, finally, because it is the more fundamentally true. I made of my mind an instrument of escape, not from the world around me, but from the world of thought. I drank, I created work of my imagination, and I fell in love, constantly. All of these states seemed to mimic freedom, but they didn't grant freedom. Someone said, "You're the freest man I've ever met," and I said, "Then how come I don't feel free?"

Then, gradually, in a life shed of attachments, I experienced real freedom, in the opening to poetry, in the moment of present reality, in the presence of a teacher, in the presence of my own being, in the awareness of being itself. This awareness has resonated back across my life in the recognition of its occurrence, here and there, from time to time, in the undercurrent of all times, in the innate nature of what remains.

Ramana Maharshi had no guru, no formal teaching, and his only master was Arunachala, a mountain. He was the source of his awareness. It is the model I recognize, because it's the model I followed. I write, in part, to tell the story of an ordinary man caught up in the unfolding of his consciousness in and toward awareness. I was not born to a great tradition of awareness.

I was not taught by any great teacher, until I was fifty, and then it was to hear another man speak what I knew to be true in myself. I trust this path, because everything I say has been tested in my untutored self. I am the source of my own awareness. I couldn't imagine any greater reality than the discovery that what is true for all is true for every one. I am one of everyone.

And yet, the more this becomes true in my self, the more I find myself in a minority of beings. The men in my stories are in this curious dilemma. As they become separated from everyone else, they're confronted with the reality that there is no separation, just as I saw, felt, and knew as a boy, who found himself trapped in his own mind and set free in his awareness.

Methods of the Mind

I'm in the café, sitting in anticipation of my friend Ted's arrival. He's passing through from Seattle to Eastern Washington. Ted was there for both of my myocardial infarctions. He drove me to the hospital for the second round of stents. Anticipation is a state of mind that colors all activities into being inappropriate to the expected, unfulfilled moment of arrival. It's not a state of being present, as one might believe. One is not present to the moment but present to the fulfillment of the moment. It's a state of heightened senses, but the senses are colored by the unreality of what has not happened. All this over a friendly visit.

This casts light on my sense of being, before I write a poem, when there's no anticipation of what's to come. That state is fully a sense of what is, empty of what might come to be. I don't sit in anticipation of what I might think, feel, or say. I sit in the presence of what is, without name, shape, or form. My experience is that something delightful often comes to me in that state, but that state is not a prelude or a preparation for some other thought, feeling, or action, even though my experience might say it is.

This sheds light on what prayer is for. Prayer is ideally, and simply, a state of the presence of being itself. It doesn't work as preparation for expectations. One might say that it doesn't work to ask one's higher reality for something, it only works to open oneself to the presence of one's higher reality and be at peace with oneself. Having said that, I feel better, even thinking about Ted's imminent arrival. Ted is an hour past when I thought he might show up, and the stress of waiting has dissipated.

I used to be annoyed, waiting for others. I was inclined to be on time, and I would devise ways of thinking to deal with it; resentment, forgiveness, dismissal, distraction, preoccupation, the fertile imagination of reasons, both rational and irrational, but I know about my own peace, so what's the use of those reactions? Being at peace in one's self is not a state of mind, reached by methods of the mind. There may be method to madness, but there is no method in peace.

After writing this note, my mind, stubborn creature that it is, went back into anticipation. I chatted with my son, thinking I might wash the car with him, in hopes of it raining. I caught myself doing that, and dropped the method, once again. Dropping method is a lovely activity because of what occurs when the mind is methodless. It was a brief chat with my son. He's working and too busy to wash the car, anyway.

A Thing of Absent Thought

As time passed, I noticed I was feeling a degree of anxiety. This is another state of mind that comes up like one's own personal weather. I'm not an anxious person in my demeanor or in my awareness, but I am, in my habitual personality. Pictures of me as a young boy show me almost wringing my hands in concern for the state of the world around me, or in the thought of a long life ahead, or in my concern for the state of contemporary photography in that moment. Who knows?

Anxiety is one of the more insidious states of mind. It seems to have a good report, as if it's noble and justified. It is, if you believe it's an appropriate response to the history of the human race, but if you believe it's like speeding, to get to your destination before you run out of gas, it's useless. A calm and assertive self is better than having an anxious mind. Having a calm and assertive spirit for one's master is like having a dog that trusts its master instead of trying to become a master itself. A calm and submissive mind is no less capable of reacting to any real threat, but it doesn't take every passing leaf or leg as a threat to be chewed into submission.

We're so at odds with the idea of submission that we miss the choice of source that defines it. Submission to one's own peace still seems dodgy to a skeptical mind, but submission to anger, anxiety, and any other negative state of mind, as temporarily satisfying as they might seem to be, are not nearly as fulfilling of one's higher reality, or as ultimately successful. American Indian warriors are reputed to have coined the phrase, "This is a good day to die," a kind of submission or surrender that engendered a state of peace in the midst of war, making those warriors no less capable of acts of heroism. In fact, it freed them from distractions to their purpose.

Peace, as the source of a warrior's strength. Amazing. My anxiety is now a thing of absent thought. I am at peace. I am in peace. I am peace itself. Now we can see if this is a result of my writing these things, or if this writing is an occurrence out of my peaceful being. Recognizing one's inherent peace is equivalent to one's inherent peace recognizing itself. Someone said that people pray to get their higher reality's attention. I say any true prayer isn't prayed to get one's higher reality's attention but to get one's attention on one's higher reality. One's reality is always present and always ready to be recognized. At that point, there is no higher reality, there's only what is.

My Very Being

I think it'd be good to write some poetry, for a change, but I've never written poetry as the result of a decision. I heard a woman interviewed on the radio saying she painted the songs she heard on the radio. I like that. I took the plastic off two new canvasses, the other day, but that's the sum of it, so far. Reading a friend's poetry, remembering the fertile mind that looks on circumstance and begins to speak in leaps of imagery, I felt the presence of a desire to be that person, as I have been in the past. It's the way I imagine my son as a painter, after he was done with painting. It's clear that if he had stayed in that place, he could have produced a body of work worthy of interest, but he didn't do that, so far. My best path to creativity is the empty mind and the open heart. This is the state of non-relationship I'm always drawn back to.

We assume that a man is an artist because he discovered he's capable of producing art, but I discovered that the state of my being, from which emerges what we call art, is what keeps me thinking of myself as an artist. I discovered, in my thirties, that when I said, "I am a poet," I felt free to be as I am in my very being. I like that idea. My very being, as if my being could be my very being, a state of being even more than being. My very being.

It occurs to me to think of a woman who's been interested in me, and to realize that I'm not interested in her, to a degree, simply because of her interest in me. And then I think of her being interested in her very being. Then I imagine myself more interested in her. I wonder about the notion of others being interesting to us when they're not interested in us. We might assume that such an attraction is to those who are unavailable because they're interested in someone else, but what if their interest in their very being is what draws their attention, and ours. What if the interest in their very being was the most appealing state in another human being? What if their interest in their very being is what makes them attractive? What kind of world would that be?

This Frenzy of Fear

The big debate in the country right now is about health care, but that's a red herring. The real debate is about the new president and the direction he's taking the country. The far right fears he's taking the country to the far left, in extremis, leading to social collapse or social domination. The far right fears a black president, so it questions his birth, that is, his right to be president. How we want to live as a nation is a good debate, but this one, like most public debates, is being framed as good vs. evil, and that's the end of the debate. There's no debate with god or the devil, they are absolutes, equally loved and hated.

These attacks on our President are founded in an ideology that seems to draw from longstanding fears about government and the character of Black men and Democrats. It is cobbled together out of belief in the sanctity of capitalism as a kind of cure-all, despite evidence to the contrary, and the fear of change, especially the change from a white male dominated social order to one of greater racial complexity and the rise of women to positions of leadership. The supremacy of personal righteousness, held by Christian believers in their own sanctity, not in the values of the Bible, where Jesus was a communitarian who sought separation from the state, have reinforced these hyperbolic fears.

Jesus was killed in fear of his being a revolutionary to the state and a threat to the established spiritual community to which he was a committed member. He called upon his disciples to leave their families, to turn the other cheek when struck, to look after the poor, to be skeptical of the pursuit of wealth, and to treat their enemies as themselves. I don't see these principles evident in this current frenzy of fear. Much of this anger seems to arise from those who fear an apocalypse of single-party control, the kind of hegemony our President's predecessor did everything in his power to facilitate.

This President was elected by a greater margin than his predecessor and is a vocal opponent of that kind of government rule. The resurfacing of states' rights sentiment, in the call for secession and the nullification of laws passed by the elected representatives of United States of America, echoes the old Confederacy, a century and a half after the War Between the States, and, once again, demonstrates the limits of war as a solution in resolving deeply held beliefs. It seems as if those who proudly waved the flag during the last administration, now speak as if America is their mortal enemy.

President Roosevelt said, during a time of war, that the only thing we had to fear was fear itself. It is the fruits of fear that threaten us now. Our President has invited his opponents to the table, and they have acted as if the table was the abyss of their greatest fears. These are not the acts of courageous men and women but the bullying of the fearful and the frightened. I hope and anticipate that the fear will subside as time passes, as the President continues to serve as another example of being one of us, chosen by us, to be our representative in the world. He is who we are. He has spoken and demonstrated his desire to be the President of all the people. If we don't like who we are, we can come to accept ourselves, by looking in the mirror, not the narrow mirror of our fear, but the wide mirror of our reality.

The Success of Peace

My friend and I are still trying to define our relationship. She asked me why I tried to kiss her in a different way, last week. I said I was trying to see if there was a way I might be sexual or sensual with her, but it didn't work. We talked about the source of wanting to be sexual, that it could come from purely physical impulses. Then I found myself speaking about why I hadn't been able to write any poetry this last year. I was exaggerating, because I have written some, but the sense of myself as a poet has changed. I recalled how, after I stopped drinking in '85, I didn't write for two years. I said, at the time, that if I never wrote again, it was OK with me - I didn't want to die from booze.

A way of being had died, and I had to let it die. My being a poet had been entangled with my being a drinker. The same sort of thing has been happening to me, lately. A year ago, I let go of my way of life as a passionate romantic. My being a poet had been entangled with my being a romantic. When I quit drinking, it took two years for me to discover a base within myself from which to write. It's only been a year since I quit feeding myself as a romantic, and I may only be in the process of discovering a base from which to write. I told myself, for many years, that if passion was such a wonderful source, then whatever lay under passion must be an even greater source.

The source of all passion is being itself. I trust that being itself is a greater source than what comes out of it. I was living in the approximation of being. It's something we all do. I would never be faulted for staying in that rich reality, but I've been compelled to go deeper. After I stopped drinking, there was a two-year hiatus, and then I was off to the races as a sober but still passionate poet. I was still called a poet of the heart. The life of a drinker was an approximation of an approximation. A friend who was also a therapist, told me that the real poet would emerge, eventually, and he did. The same thing is true now. The real will emerge, because the real is the only genuine source. I've lost my dependable ways of being, but every way of being is only a form of being itself.

The question exists if we can make form out of formlessness, or do we require old forms to make new forms? My mind is constantly working to revise and improve existing forms, to invent new forms out of the worn out, broken, and shattered debris of old forms, to reinvent the wheel of life. As long as I write in prose, I'm safely in the familiar. I live among the practitioners of form, working at a university, teaching form to those who are here to learn form. I have a recurrent sensation that I'm only adding to the slagheap of form. Everyone is constantly trying to get it right. What if it can't be gotten right? What if rightness exists only before and after form? What is the virtue of our creativity? I suggest the reason there are thousands of forms of jellyfish is because the universe, or god, if you will, is in the business of creation. We live in the nature of creation. Creation is habitual, perhaps even addictive of our existence. Our being is creation-addictive. Darwin was praising God in his *Origin of the Species*.

It occurs to me, as I write, these days, that I feel a reluctance to continue, as I have also done in my email writing. Some correspondents have been critical of my brevity. I used to luxuriate in these books of journalese, allowing myself the freedom to muse on any subject of my interest, but lately, I've been writing short passages, and even then, in a kind of reluctance to write, as if this writing is habitual, like drinking was, or like thinking of women was, or like thinking itself is. I'm an habitual thinker. I've changed my relationship to thought, but I haven't entirely given up the habit. I know intimately the greater reality of awareness, where thought is dissolved in its deeper and wider milieu, where consciousness becomes the dependable ground of thought, where thought is the approximation of consciousness, and where consciousness is the approximation of awareness. I know these things, and yet I fall back into these old habits.

Prayer is a higher approximation of thought, attempting to climb into consciousness with one's eye on the awareness of being itself. Meditation is a higher approximation of consciousness attempting to climb into awareness as a state of being. All true realities are recognized in the moment of being, not by the use of ladders. You can't get here from there. Here is the location of awareness. Here is the innate state of being. Here is a constant reality, and there is no way to achieve it. There's no way to achieve what already exists. There's nothing to be creative about, in awareness. I've been a creative person all my life. I tended toward prayer in poetry, not knowing I was doing that, but I finally recognize how true that was.

I saw myself as a thinking poet climbing into a higher consciousness with my eye on awareness. Then I saw myself as a conscious being climbing into awareness as a state of being. But this climbing is ass-backwards. My mind wants to denigrate my thinking as a failure of prayer, to denigrate my consciousness as a failure of meditation. But I've always been in awareness in

being itself. I have always lived in awareness that's then created in these forms. There is no failure in these forms - there is only form.

There is the story in the Bible of God looking on his creation as a failure. I suggest God was only forgetting where he came from. God was looking at his created form and finding it wanting. Form wants to experience the formless awareness of its existence. If the creator of form can so easily forget the origin of form, why should I feel bad about my lapses into attachment? If there's no fault in form, that doesn't mean I need to fall into total absorption in form, either, although it's like playing soccer. If you let yourself go entirely into the game, you discover that you've let yourself go, entirely. And there you are, present in being itself. If the creator gave itself entirely to its creation, no creation would feel separate from its creator.

Once again, I come around to the same reality. Being is being, and being in Being is being, and being, in what becomes of being, is Being. The trick is to be, and be what one becomes, without losing awareness of being itself. One ought not lose awareness, simply because thinking of being has become a loud and persistent thought of being. If this seems circular, it is. I am circular in thought. In being itself, there is no circle to think about, and none to be caught up in, and none to be approximated as smiling happy faces.

Ann Coulter's Health Care Solution

I heard Ann Coulter say that the government can't solve the problems with medical coverage in this country, that only competitive capitalism can do that, that only competition in the marketplace can bring down prices and create solutions. I thought, "Wait a minute, we've had competitive capitalism in the health care industry for a long time now, and the problems haven't been solved."

We had a problem with caring for our elderly and retired citizens. It was a problem that free market competition had not solved. The government stepped in, and that problem was solved. The solution was called Social Security and Medicare. We have fifty million people without insurance in this country, and thirty percent of bankruptcies are filed by people who can't pay their medical bills. The capitalist system, of insurance companies in competition with each other, has not solved that problem, and they've had all the time and all the money they would ever need to do the job, and do it right.

It doesn't make any sense. If it were something we could solve by relying on competition, it would already have been solved. We've been mucking around in that solution for a long time, now, and the problem has only gotten worse. Sorry, Ann, but you're going to have to rethink this one.

Too Soon?

Barack Obama has been given the Nobel Peace Prize, and some say, "It's too soon, he doesn't deserve it, he hasn't done anything yet." Really? After his election as the first Black President of the United States, considering his presence in the world, and his effect in the world? Too

soon? The world has changed. A year ago, the U.S. was ranked the seventh most admired country in the world, and now, a year later, the U.S. is ranked number one. Now, the United States is the most admired country in the world. Is it too soon for that? His election, the way he has demonstrated his character, his determination to change the way the U.S. operates in the world – these things have changed the way the world thinks of the United States. These changes have changed the world. Is it too soon to change the world for the better? Is it too soon for us to take a positive role in changing the world for the better? Is it too soon for us to feel good about who we are in the world? Is it too soon to honor the man who has led this change? Is it too soon to feel good again?

Update of Poetry and Prose Poems on Steveabhaya.com

I've just published the latest versions of "Alone," along with the complete "We Tie Our Wings to the Trees," in two versions, one with "Alone" added in poem form, and one with those poems added in prose form like the rest of the prose poems of the longer collection. The next project will be to pare "Alone" to its minimal best, down from the 124 poems it now includes. This is a cruel and inhumane task, to convert poems to their homely counterparts in prose, but sometimes they thrive in a more homely incarnation and struggle, caught posing as poetry. This could be a new reality TV show, "The Rhetorical Runway", or "Bullshit Detector Survivor." I don't mean to speak harshly about my own children, because I love them all dearly. He said.

Grading Papers in Peace

“Grading papers goes against every fiber of my being,” I thought. Literally, as if my being had fibers, this process of finding fault in judging the work of others is incompatible with the awareness of being and my desire to stay in the awareness of being. But what about the process of finding what’s done well, in my students’ papers?

I’m in my fourth year, teaching again, after thirty years spent in the attention to being itself, where there is no right or wrong, no good or bad, no grading, and no judgment, but instead, a state of recognition and the awareness of what is.

I spend time in class looking to see what is, not what is right or wrong, etc., but I’m required to read the work of my students for its success or failure in completing the work I assign to them. I know how to do this. It’s not difficult for me to pass judgment. I have confidence in my ability to say what’s good and bad in what I read. But this talent, this professional skill, this practice of judgment, is not where I’ve chosen to spend my time, in this life.

And yet, here I am. I can concentrate on how this process of judging others, positively and negatively, affects the rest of my life, or I can focus on its alternative, the recognition of being that has become my practice in all I think, feel, and do.

In the past, I have been extremely good at this practice of judging others. In college, I had a razor tongue. It was noticed that I could dissect the behavior of my classmates with skill and accuracy. I was once called the Prince of the Swift Repartee. A restaurant owner, who told me about it, years

later, said he'd seen me cut five of my friends down to size, in quick succession, one night, in his restaurant.

Sarcasm and the judgment of others came out of my insecurity, living in an insecure world, but I grew out of that obsession. I still feel the presence of judgment in my thoughts and feelings, but I've become, over the years, keenly aware of the limitations of those thoughts and feelings. Judgment leads to resentment, and resentment eats away at peace and clarity, and that leads to the obstructions of the heart.

After two heart attacks, I'm wary of the obstructions of the heart. I'm not certain of a direct link between these conditions, one, in the physical heart, and the other, in the open spirit of a free man that we call heart. There are many obstructions of the heart, in both cases, and I'm opposed to them all, however they may occur, in every realm in which they occur.

A teacher may come to resentment, in the practice of the positive and negative judgments he or she makes, regardless of the benign context in which they are made. The process of judging others, no matter how benign it may be, even the process of judging others positively, is the practice of passing judgment, and passing judgment, as fundamentally necessary as it is for negotiating passage in this complex and challenging world, is a condition to be wary of.

Many years ago, when I'd only been teaching for a couple of years, I taught at a school where I had no information about the students I was teaching. I didn't know their histories. I assumed they were all good students. I gave them grades based on what I witnessed in front of me. I requested their records. I didn't get them for a while. When I did, I saw that several of my students had done poorly, in the past, and one, who I'd given a B, had flunked nearly every year he'd been in school.

I believe he responded to my positive acceptance. It had been infectious, and he responded in kind. He did the work well enough to be a B student. He began to act like a good student, because I had, almost by accident, treated him as if he was a good student. I began to wonder at this phenomenon.

In my own life, in my writing, and in my relations with others, I saw virtue where I could just as easily have found fault. Maybe having children of my own helped this change in perspective, although I think this impulse has always been a part of me. I don't mean to suggest that seeing good in everyone is the antidote to judgment. Seeing the world through rose-colored glasses or looking on the bright side is not seeing with clear vision. Clear vision is not judgmental, but judgment is necessary to live in the world. Both realities are essential. What is necessary is to recognize the pitfalls of judgment and not let judgment become the path of choice in one's life.

Does this mean I should continue teaching or not? I love to teach, and I love the process of opening the awareness of thinking with students, but I need to remain conscious of the negative potential of judgment. In all professions, there are pitfalls that can become abysses, if one lets them. I do think that education can become an abyss of judgment, losing the central reality of open inquiry into the moment of learning, in the heart, in the mind, and in the student body.

This is why I come to write, every day. This is why I let my mind open to the empty moment of being. This is why my awareness of being itself continues to be the source of everything I do, including the grading of papers.

War and Peace

When we hire someone, put him in uniform, train him, and send him into battle, if he kills some of those we call our enemy, we give him the Congressional Medal of Honor. If another man decides to do the same thing on his own, we call him mass murderer, psychotic, evil, and the scourge of humanity.

It's not a drastic leap of consciousness to believe that whatever the country says is OK must be all right for the individual. If, as a nation, we can kill the guilty and innocent at will - with justification, of course - isn't it reasonable to assume that psychotic and neurotic individuals might think they can do the same thing - with some twisted justification of their own, of course. And what do we imagine happens in the minds and hearts of the people we enlist to do our killing for us, no matter the righteousness of their and our justification? This is the season of peace on earth, good will to all. It is a time of forgiveness and understanding, not for the ill we do, but for the misguided will in which we do it.

Living in the Remarkable

I'm sitting in a café in Honolulu just up from Waikiki and none of that describes the constant reality of the remarkable that is this place called paradise the physical equivalent of grace and great fortune in the wonder of happiness the remarkable thing about this place is its natural perfection that elevates breathing beyond function to near ecstasy the trade winds are erotic caressing the body as if it were the soul.

This is not a perfect reality the people are the same as everywhere and everything costs too much there will come a time when the only people who can afford to live here don't live here even the weather is not reliable raining cold at times and the wind can be exhausting the islands are susceptible to hurricanes and volcanic eruptions all cities confound the joy of the heart turning it to occupation and entanglement the same as everywhere that people congest and the mind will confound the heart even in paradise.

The problem with the remarkable is we go looking for it and when we find it the discovery seems to diminish us until we discover the remarkable in ourselves everywhere we are then when we come across the remarkable we're not bound to it but it appears in our ability to take part in wonder itself.

The Bandages and the Burials: Inspired by a Friend of a Friend

In this world where we can isolate among those who are like us, once again in time in a tribal world with instant communication. Constant media allows us to ignore any but those who agree with us, but on Facebook I find myself in dialog with some I might never know.

Old associations have friends who talk to each other in their own agreeable realm but I'm part of the discussion thanks to my history among people I moved away from to pursue my own particular reality. Now we all chat often briefly until someone broaches a disagreement and the swords come out along with the bandages and the burials awkward moments become expressions of feeling belief and birth.

What's born is newness among contraries to be clear in oneself and fair to the other's clarity friended in a pit of controversies the contentious in society becomes contentious in our lives and overshadows communion.

Sharing in the midst of disagreement is to reveal an unseen commonality look how we are my friend hammering each other with words coming to the agreement of our energies it doesn't mean I agree with you I don't or you with me you don't we talk so our souls can unite in soul itself.

The Plutocrats Take Over

From Bill Moyers, "Now, most people know what plutocracy is: the rule of the rich, political power controlled by the wealthy. Plutocracy is not an American word and wasn't meant to become an American phenomenon – some of our founders deplored what they called "the veneration of wealth." But plutocracy is here, and a pumped up Citigroup even boasted of coining a variation on the word "plutonomy", which describes an economic system where the privileged few make sure the rich get richer and that government helps them do it." The Republican Party, pretending to be the party of the people, is the party of the Plutocrats. Watch them dismantle the recent attempt to rein in Wall Street.

Running Amok on the Savannah

I got the window seat on the emergency door aisle, lots of legroom, but no window. I didn't mind. I could look out the one behind my left shoulder if I wanted, and that's where I watched the Cascades below through a billowy cloud cover. Another man sat in the aisle seat, a congenial fellow originally from Liverpool, now living in Charlotte, the destination of this flight. We had an empty seat between us on a full flight. We joked about who would eventually come to take the seat, a man bigger than he was, said my seatmate who was bigger than I am. We both accepted the inevitable. But nobody came to take the middle seat. I offered my hand, and we shook on our good fortune.

It was a good flight, to begin with, and then about an hour in, a young boy, two or three, began yelling and grousing, complaining and generally making the middle of the plane miserable. He screamed, he whined, he yelped. He didn't have the cry of distress or fear but of demanding his desires, until he got them. I thought of the Dog Whisperer. It was another example of there being nothing wrong with the child except he was in charge when he shouldn't have been. His parents tried to soothe him, entertain him, shush him, and rock him, but he was having none of it. He was a tyrant, as children can be, when they are left to their own devices without parental guidance, without a pack leader to give them direction and protection.

Finally, after an hour or more, a woman passenger leaned over the seat and spoke to the kid and his parents. Whatever she said, they agreed to, and the father changed seats with her. The woman calmly, firmly, and kindly took over. The boy looked at her as if she was in charge, and he was delighted. She directed him in simple activities, getting him to move his hands and talk about simple things.

His face lit up and he became happily quiet, until the lady went back to her seat. He continued to be quiet for a while, and then he stood up and looked around, crying out, as if in search of the missing nanny, and then as if in search of his missing crown. She hadn't given his parents an effective course in leadership, and when she was gone, the old regime was reinstated, as two accommodating parents capitulated to the dictates of a child. An hour left in the flight and the child, happy when he was coddled and catered to, however briefly, regained his pattern of disturbance, and his parents regained their pattern of submission to his misdirected whims.

It was clear to me, at least, that in the presence of the accidental nanny, he was living life as a child, not in charge of anyone, happily surrendering, almost instantaneously, to her leadership, eager to be a healthy child, at peace in his world, but left without that guidance, he was like a teenage elephant without parental elders, who had been slaughtered by poachers for their own aggrandizement, running amok on the Savannah.

A Wild Animal

It's like this a wild animal with its keen senses is put in a zoo it's in shock to be unable to blend in to look and see so many eyes seeing it too easily every zoo animal is like the wounded it's vulnerability comes on it like a stunning blow but it isn't wounded nothing natural informs its critical weakness it has no clue that might inform the senses why it can no longer hide and seek blend and extend hear and fear an animal in a cage is entranced by the light of the attention it paces back and forth in a trance it's forced to create an ego it's given a name a personality a limited world a regimen a routine a fucking job for Christ's sake this animal ladies and gentlemen is a tiger when the cage door is left open by accident it suddenly becomes the tiger watch out for the tiger if it manages to escape entirely totally it becomes poetry it's effect in the world is osmotic it roams in the heart of nature once again unnamed and original in every step of its paw upon grass or branch

I Ran Into An Old Girlfriend

I just had the strangest dream. In the dream, I ran into an old girlfriend. Literally. I was driving and I ran into her car. It was in a strange part of town, in a city I don't recognize. I was driving an unfamiliar car, and I hit her car, which I also don't recognize and now can't remember. I did some damage to her car, so I called the cops to report the accident. Stoic and expressionless, she said she was going to go somewhere, and she drove off. I assumed she would come back, but she didn't. After about a half an hour, I thought it was silly for me to stick around, so I started to leave, too, but I spotted a police car with four uniformed cops in it. I could have kept driving at that point, since I hadn't given the police operator my name or the description of my car. Instead, I stopped and the cops asked me if I was the man who reported the accident. I said I was.

I said the woman hadn't given me her name, which was true, since I already knew who she was, but then I said so. I said she was an old girlfriend I had just run into. Literally. I said I couldn't remember what her car looked like, or where the accident had happened, exactly. I couldn't remember what street it was on, or where the damage was on her car, or what the extent of the damage was, and I didn't know where she lived or what her phone number was. The more I talked, the stranger I felt, and then I said, "And the strangest part is, this is a dream." Then I said, "And why are four cops driving around in a squad car, responding to a simple traffic accident?"

Damn Birds

Damn birds why do birds carry on such a chatter at dawn blabberbeaks I was awake before the birds started but they became the irritant that kept me awake the windows were open because of the heat but a late storm got me to shut some of them but the birds affected the closing of the bedroom window and then the storm came back with its lightening in the neighborhood and thunder filling the air with sound it's hard to blame nature for its noises damn nature

The Secret about Liberals

Rush Limbaugh said, yesterday, on air, that he, uniquely, it seems, understands liberals. He chuckled when he said it. He said he knows the secret. He said that whatever a liberal says, it doesn't matter. The truth is that liberals (and progressives, they are interchangeable), who seem to want to help others in their policies, whether it be in health care or environmental protection, don't really care about anyone but themselves. He said they have only one true agenda and that is to take liberty away from the people and take power for themselves. Social Security, for example, is not about aiding retired Americans, it is about robbing Americans of their liberties and setting up a socialist government that gives power to the bureaucrats. That's it. There's no use discussing climate change, it's only a plot to take away the freedoms of the people and create power for the liberals. Don't listen to any liberal or progressive, they are secretly and constantly plotting to destroy the nation by taking away liberty and supplanting it with a government that only serves them. Disaster relief is not about helping people recover from a disaster, it's about taking away your liberty to struggle through it on your own. You're on your own, Americans. Good luck to you. You can take your example from the wealthy. They're doing just fine, thank you very much. Literally. Thank you very much. Rush is a very rich man.

The Logic of Those Who Sense History is Not on Their Side

In the midst of a crisis, the President has been stymied by an intransigent Congress, who believe the crisis is the right time for them to overturn the progressive pattern of governance that's been operating since the country began. Conservatives claim that when leaders say they have the welfare of the nation in mind, these leaders are talking exclusively about their own welfare, and they prove their case by their own actions. A constituent stands up at a town hall meeting, and says, "We are your constituents, not Grover Norquist," an unelected advisor who has gotten his fellow Republicans to sign a binding agreement not to accept any tax, no matter how benign. We are living in topsy-turvy times, governed by Topsy and Turvy themselves, and the Turvy Party wants to topple Topsy at all costs, for the 'good of us all', no matter who it hurts, including the

nation itself. "We had to destroy the village in order to save it." This is the logic of self-serving ideologues who think history is not on their side. And rightly so.

I Smell Lemon in the Air

I woke this morning thinking of the dream I'd just had, in which John Stewart, the Comedy Central host and satirist, was talking with Bill O'Reilly, the Fox News host and right-wing commentator. Stewart was talking about O'Reilly's use of an old friend, as a conduit to the famous that O'Reilly might interview, when Bill interrupted John with a long story about his friendship with the man, followed by a film clip that barely touched on what Stewart had been trying to say. It meant to me that he was disrespecting his guest, taking over the conversation, and turning it to himself. Then I thought of our President, the first Black man to ever be elected to the office.

It has struck me how pervasive the opposition to Obama has become in disrespecting him in all he does, including disrespecting him for the things he does well, such as his public speaking, to include his education and his strength as a man. Then it occurred to me that this reaction has evolved out of this country's demand for respect from the black man.

In the old South, until very recently, all black men, including those of high standing, were expected to show respect for all white men, including those of low standing. This fast and slow historical development has led to some changes in behavior. It has evolved into a kind of disrespect, in varying degrees, for all black men, and it has transmogrified into subtle shows of disrespect, including a sort of benign condescension, including praise for normal behavior, as if normal behavior is unusual among black men. I thought about how this reaction exists in casual friendship with black men, behavior that would not be shown to people from other cultures or toward people with whom one would not presume to act like friends.

A White man growing up in a white culture, I remember the subtle and not-so-subtle treatment of Black men, behaviors that I have seen appear in my own consciousness when I have not wanted to see it, have not believed it, and have not accepted it. These are behaviors I call ghost characteristics, since they appear in myself, not based on my own experience or my desire for them, but they are characteristics I have inherited from a life beyond and before my own, including from my parents and relatives, but not confined to them. These ghost characteristics linger in the air that one breathes, like noxious, often undetectable gasses.

Since Blacks have been declared equal in an unequal society, I have seen and felt the adaptation in this same society, in genuine acceptance, in false faces of acceptance, and in poorly and well concealed denial of acceptance. I think of two friends I have made on the soccer field. one of Filipino descent, the other Black, and I like them both, and they both like me. We play well together, and we exchange stories of our lives every time we are on the field together. But I think I see a subtle difference in my behavior. I am more distantly respectful of the half-Filipino than I am of the Black guy, with whom I act more intimately friendly, not because he is closer to me or I to him, although that might be a possibility, but perhaps because I have inherited the seemingly benign and loving condescension of the white man toward the black man, big brotherly, as if I have emotional rights that I don't have with others.

The problem in my story is one I see in this society. I am friendly with my Black friend, and I am friendly with my Filipino friend, and they are friendly with me and have been for years. But the difference in our history affects our relationship, to the point where I can't be sure what is what. I also suspect that the taste of lemon in my pizza is not discountable because it's miniscule. It may only be a drop or two, but it remains in the flavor, and I'm not wrong to notice it.

I throw the lemon allusion into the story, because I heard a man say that at the Farmers Market this morning. As he was about to take a sample from an Italian Restaurant, and sensing the lemon, he refused the sample, since, I presumed, he is allergic to lemon. I am, and we are, as a nation, allergic to the presence of racism in our discourse, whether we can discern it or not. It doesn't take a genius to know that peanuts, as they are in the making of some foods, can kill, whether you detect their presence or not. I don't know about lemons, that's a new one to me.

But, this disrespect for our President, to the point of questioning his love of country, his intelligence, his manhood, even his articulation, is not merely a passionate disagreement due to his political leanings, which have been revealed to be centrist, including many policies that his supporters decry. This is not a trace of lemon; this is lemonade. These are lemons, pure and simple. The lemons of this disrespect are born of a demand for respect from one's presumed inferiors. This man's inherent and natural refusal to act like an inferior, or to cow-tow to the demands of those who believe themselves superior, in form or idea if not in fact, have brought the ghost characteristics of our past to the surface.

And what about those who thought he was the one to carry forth and enact their agenda, the liberals and progressives in all their manifestations, who are angry at the man for not acting out their expectations? Is this not like the White Student Body which elects a Black student to be its President, and then expects him to act as they expect him to act, and are disappointed when he acts like himself and not like anyone else?

President Barack Obama's behavior, in evidence before he was elected, in his writings, his teachings, and his words and actions during his first years in office have confounded all who have carried him in our expectations, to be angered or disappointed by his failure to act as we wanted him to act. Is this the scent of lemon I smell? Is this the experience and the sense of a White man growing up in a White society, a White man who is sensitive to respect and its equally powerful corollary, disrespect?

I am a poet, and I have been all my life, finally coming to terms with it in my adulthood. I live with the respect and disrespect I feel and have always felt for who I am and what I do. I live inside being a poet, where it is simply who I am, but I can feel and see, among others and in the society I'm from, the genuine respect for it, the false face of respect, the casual disrespect and the utter disdain for it. I am sensitive to the range of respect and disrespect, and my alarm bells are ringing in this time in this country with this President, this Black man, this man of the people.

I Predict the Right Will Inevitably Renounce Jesus

The way things are going, I can imagine that, at some point in the not-too-distant future, the right wing in this country will renounce Jesus as a liberal, socialist, communist, traitor to

righteousness. They will do this, for his forgiving, female nature and for his beliefs, i.e., "Leave your family and follow me," "Turn the other cheek," "The meek shall inherit the earth," "Love your enemy as yourself," "It's easier for a rich man to get into heaven than for a camel to get through the eye of a needle," "How you treat the least of these is how you treat me," etc. We all know the litany of love that is the canon of Jesus Christ. Or, the right will claim that liberals in the early church hijacked the 'real' Jesus. You know, the one with the sword and the anger, and they will rewrite the Gospels, as they have been doing since the story of Jesus was first told. When asked how to pray, Jesus said, "Go in your room and pull the door shut. Do not pray as the Publicans do, loudly, in public." He could have said, "Re-Publicans", but that would have been too prophetic.

The TalibaNation of America

I used to say that if pro-lifers really believed that abortion was murder, they would propose the death penalty for any woman who had an abortion, and long prison sentences for any woman who had a miscarriage, i.e., involuntary manslaughter. Now I think I was not merely exaggerating for effect, as we move toward the TalibaNation of America. A fertilized egg is part of a woman that very, very slowly separates from the woman and begins, very, very slowly, to live on its own. It is she that controls its viability, and rightfully so, not the society or the government. If you control reproduction, you control the lives of women. This is the socio-religious goal for many, and some of those are willing to kill to achieve that goal. They mask their desire for control of women with concern for the life of the zygote, as if it produced the mother and not the other way around.

The Sad Part of This Split

The sad part of this split between progressives and conservatives is that we all live on both sides. In the same way that an angry man abuses his own forgiving nature, we close ourselves off from part of ourselves by making an enemy of one side or another. In the same way that we say a family needs both a mother and a father, we divorce them in ourselves.

Trying to Rebalance an Imbalance

Trying to rebalance an imbalance is not class warfare. Because most of us would like to BE rich, our attempts at getting the rich to show a little class is not hating the enemy. Our envy is being tempered by a concomitant desire for tax justice. Let's be fair while some of us corner the market on the American Dream.

I'm Just Saying

I wonder why some Republicans mock Europe as if Obama wants to be like them. When they mock Europe, I think they mean France. I wonder why they don't mock Germany, since Germany is the main force in European Unity. I suspect it's because the foolish German stereotype is of a cold-blooded efficient killer, and the foolish French stereotype is of an artistic culture lover. These Republicans mock the French, I think, because they are chickenshit. They don't mock the Germans, I think, because they are chickenshit. They mock what they think

they're tougher than, and they don't mock what they think might be tougher than they are, even though they're essentially the same ethos. If the mockery coming from chickenshit bravado is what we admire, it says more about us, than it does about who and what we deride. And President Obama still looks like the adult in the room. I'm just saying.

If We Had True Free Enterprise

If we had true free enterprise in this country, we wouldn't need these government programs, like sanitation. Before we had sanitation programs imposed by government bureaucrats, citizens took care of sanitation on their own. People dumped their garbage and human waste in the road, where it transposed into disease and sickness and death the way God intended it to, without the intelligent use of compassion and human will interfering in the natural order of things. I'm just saying.

A Major Figure

"Obama was a major figure on campus, the first black president of the Law Review. Some friends, in a prescient joke, just referred to him as 'the first black president.' He had a reputation as a conciliatory figure, not a confrontational one like (Professor Derek) Bell." (from Andrew Kaczynski)

Does this sound familiar? A conciliatory leader is labeled a radical because he stands with a tenured professor in support of a just cause. If you don't like the man or his policies, look for any way you can to label him an alien to the rest of us. FDR sat down with Joseph Stalin. They must have had sex right after the photo session, where they plotted the black helicopters, the rise of al Qaeda, and the discovery of Justin Beber. Everything you don't like can be traced to Satan or his minions... in your pants.

I Played Soccer Today

It was my first game since I turned 70, and they didn't bar me from the field. A little rusty at first, it's been a few months, but when the temperature is in the 70s in March, you got to go for it. After a while, I got my timing back, and I didn't fall on my face. Some young bruiser slammed into my chest, I bounced off, and I thought, "Every time that happens, and I don't die, I'm happy." One player said, at the end of the game, "Nice hustle, Steve," That's the equivalent of, "You didn't embarrass us or yourself." I'm a happy guy, tonight. Tired, but happy.

Haiku Café

I have just put this new book up on Steveabhaya.com. Haiku Café has been on the counter in Starbucks on Charlotte Street in Asheville for over two months now. This is a lovely way to be published. People read it, or parts of it, without knowing who the author is. Sometimes, when they are told, they turn around and say something nice. That feels good.

Family History

My great-grandfather drove a twenty-mule team between Dallas and Denver. My grandfather was a farmer and worked in a factory. I was born on the Mississippi River, grew up in Nebraska, and went to college in Iowa. I was an All-American in high school. I taught school in California, Connecticut, Illinois and Washington State. I drove a truck and painted houses for a living. I got degrees and worked all my adult life. I got married and had two great kids. My uncle made Dairy Queen a national icon and played bridge with John Wayne. My cousin was commander of the nuclear sub Thresher. My nephew was goalie on two Olympic water polo teams. My brother was base player for the best bluegrass band on the West Coast and wrote a book about Hemingway. I went to India where I felt more welcome as a creative person than I do here, but I came back to America, because I'm an American, and I'm a liberal, a social progressive, and I support Barack Obama for President. My America is a great country.

Ahead of Sandy

We got out of New York City just in time, this morning. The plane shook side to side, thanks to the winds. Rode the subway going to Picasso in Black and White at the Guggenheim, last night, and today, the subway is closed. Saw the best dance exhibition on the subway platform I've ever seen, eight guys and one girl topping each other with amazing moves, all of them showing love for each other and for the dance. Poor Picasso paled by comparison. I guess, his black and white show grayed by comparison. Still, it was a fine show. And now it's great to be home. Despite the shaking.

Essential Occupation

I'm reading from "Essential Occupation" at 3PM at Montford Books, here in Asheville. Reading poems always reminds me of the time I read with Stephen Vincent at a girls' school in Palo Alto. After he read one particular poem, someone asked him if he would read it again. He did. That wasn't unusual. But then someone asked him to read the same poem a third time. As he did, I saw something I hadn't noticed before. The first time, it was as if we were all listening to him read his poem. The second time, the poem floated out into the middle of the room. On the third reading, the poem became their poem. The ear is slow. It takes time to absorb a poem. For me too. Poetry takes time to become free of time, to become available to anyone who hear it.

Dave Brubeck Has Died

When I joined the Columbia Record Club in the late 50s, I got "Dave Digs Disney" as part of the six record deal. It was my first real introduction to jazz, and as silly as it sounds, it was great. Later in life, I taught his son at a prep school in Connecticut. He came to the school one day, and I got to shake his hand. Good man, I thought, then and now. I anticipate the work, "Dave Digs Eternity."

Sandy Hook Shooting

Re: the school shooting in Connecticut, and all the other shootings. If guns don't kill people, if only people kill people, what the fuck is going on in this country of people who kill other innocent people so easily and so commonly? We have amassed an arsenal of guns in our culture, a million guns in Florida, for example, and we have produced a higher percentage of murders, including mass murders, than any other country. A gun culture is people with guns who love guns and accept the idea of using them. We are a gun culture with guns, and we are killing each other at a sickening pace.

This is a time when gun defenders say we should not propose gun control. This is a time when we should ask gun defenders what they think is the right path forward. How do they think this problem can be solved? The usual answer is, "More guns." We can ask how that would change the mind of a shooter? How do we get killers to stop killing, before we have to shoot them, before they shoot themselves?

We could do what the Second Amendment suggests. We could organize all gun users into "well-regulated militias" in defense of the government, because that's what it says. Or we could, as a people, and as a nation, look ourselves in the face, and admit that something is wrong. A strong man is a man with strength. A weak man is a man with a weapon.

Political Bypass Surgery

I was operated on recently for political bypass surgery. I went from Intensive Care to Indifferent Care almost overnight. That's when I knew it was time to come home. Now I feel happy-thetic and laugh-argic almost all the time.

Owning Guns in America

Owning guns in America is like any other addiction, sugar, booze, drugs, you name it. If you don't use any of them, you don't crave them, but once you start, you want more and more. Fewer people in the country own guns, but those who do, own more and more guns. And we live in a sugar, booze, drug and gun culture, where images of their use are everywhere, telling us how great it is to use them. Even the bad pictures are attractive. We love our sugar, first as an image, an idea, a feeling, then for real, until we think any restriction is the end of the world. We've got to shoot it up, intravenously, in a suburban mall, or in our fantasies of self-aggrandizement we call "Freedom." The freedom to indulge is not the same as the freedom to create a desirable reality.

A Lot of Us Are Old Now

And a lot of us are getting older by the day. We didn't used to be old, and the only thing that makes us old is that we get old and we got old. The central reality of our lives is surrounded by this aging reality, but it remains unchanged at the core, so how do we recognize this ageless reality without getting all sentimental about the past? How about this? Valentine's Day is an old

holiday that feels young, no matter how old it gets, so Happy Valentine's Day to the heart of the heart of all of us, young and old, every one.

Shit Happens

If one cannot accept that shit happens, the tendency is to look for the shitter, sometimes in the form of a cabal of shitters, in the same way that one might say, "The Devil made me do it", or that God has predetermined everything that has ever and will ever occur. It can't just happen, it has to be a plot. If someone you like commits suicide, it must have been murder. If two idiots blow up the Boston Marathon, it must be the government, it can't just be two idiots. If I do something wrong, it can't be me, it must be God or my parents or the drugs or the transmitter planted in my brain by aliens working for Planned Parenthood.

In the Charlotte Airport

In the Charlotte airport after being bumped from an earlier flight in Asheville, on my way to Newark. But first, since that flight was cancelled, I get to fly into Charleston, and then get on to a different airline to fly to Newark. Airports are fun, if you're not bummed out by them. Call me crazy, but since I do most of my work in cafes, it's not such a big deal to get out my laptop and go to work in an airport. It resonates with the nature of poetry. Plenty of fairly comfortable seats in this aquarium of human faces. Just one more fish watching all the other fish floating by. Although it never occurred to me before that fish have baggage. These fish do. An old fish says to two young fish, "Enjoy the water," and swims off. One of the youngsters turns to the other and says, "What's water?"

To Let Go of is to Let Goof

To let go of, is to let goof. To let goof, is to let go of. Let goof the world. Let goof the politics of the world. Let goof the internet. Let goof Facebook. Let goof yourself. I will let goof you, if you let goof me. Let goof this goofiness.

My Brother is Not a Liar

My brother is not a liar, he's a fiction writer, who discovered, a long time ago, that his life was a book he could write as he went along. His only problem became critics who depended on their own perceived reality for their paradigm. Then, my brother discovered the variability of human paradigms, the shadings of truth that parallel his own achievement. He came to see that his mendacity was not only creative, it was common. Facts were still a problem, but he saw that even facts were manipulatable, in this world of the convincing imagination. My brother may still be a liar, but he's safe in the company of his peers.

Sitting by a Lake

Sitting by a lake in Minnesota, even using the weed-whacker, swimming in cool water, out of range of pirating the neighbors internet, relieves the thought of wanting to somehow make this a better world while reading the political blogs. There is a better world already in place in nature

and in the quiet heart, water lapping against the shore, loons crying in the distance, both literally and figuratively.

Sitting on the Deck

I'm sitting on the deck of a coffee and tea house, "In Hot Water", in Annandale, MN. The cafe is not open on Saturday afternoon, and there is no other cafe for many miles. This is it, folks. Fortunately, I can still use the wifi and the deck is nice. I can hear a train whistle and watch the traffic, much of it weekenders coming to the many surrounding lakes. There's a large mural of kids jumping into the water of a lake much like the reality nearby. I hear the best pizza in town is at the gas station.

There is One Place

There is one place where we all get along, blending our ethnicity, gender, political persuasion, and every other kind of diversity into an amazing display of cooperation and civility. It's on the highways of America. Millions of motorists of all types manage to get from here to there while demonstrating remarkable skill in cooperation with everyone else. For the most part, not counting road rage, which is by far the exception that proves the rule. I was struck by this remarkable reality, crossing the country, even seeing the diversity at rest stops, where this civility also occurs. If something needs to be done, it gets done. We are good at getting things done, if we put our heads together and our hands to work. The notion that cooperation is un-American is itself un-American.

A Thought About the Heart

I had a thought about the heart of language, as poetry tells it, the embrace and the heads up, the kiss and the kick, the fullness of the voice, the gentleness of softly spoken images, without telling anybody anything.

Words in a string, talking in rhythm, with barely a rhyme, naturally, and out of the ordinary, the uncommon commonplace, reaching into the moment and stretching it all over everything that's present, including the speaker, the listener, everybody and everything that might be mentioned, an arrangement of sound, a conversation between no one in particular and no one in general.

Warm and friendly, like cops in the family, like a preacher who happily quit the cloth, the history of a dancer, any kind of intimacy, like every other kind of intimacy, a bell, shoelaces dragging on marble, silence before dawn, and the crash of daylight.

Oh, My, Twelve Years a Slave

Oh, my, "12 Years a Slave." No romanticism. Not for one tenth of a second. Startling beauty and wonder in nature and in human life, but without the wash of romanticism. Life itself doesn't need it. I watched for an hour, and then the tears came. The inescapable brutality of a way of life that is still with us in its after effects, in its mind-numbing justifications, in its dramatic and

distracting romantic renderings. The actors were great, but it was the reality shown, in the cruelty that occurs between human beings, to this day, every day on this earth, somewhere among us. It reminded me of the powerful effect of the Holocaust Museum, in the honest depiction of that reality. a story about real people, living in an unimaginable reality, a story about what people are willing to do to other people for the sake of power, money, and not incidentally, sex. And then justify it. An extraordinary movie, but better, a revelation of history and its unending reality in our lives.

So Let Me Get This Straight

Santa, who is, they say, white, like Jesus, has magical powers like a god, to fly all over the world in one night, bringing reward to good little boys and girls, for he can see you when you're sleeping, he can see when you're awake, he knows if you been bad or good, like a god, for heaven's sake. So, I wonder, is Santa Jesus as an old man? And you tell me Santa is not real? Where does this disillusion end? Is all mythology unreal, or only some of it? Let's have no war on mythology; the backbone of my creative life, damn it, I mean, God bless creativity. Where would poetry be without a little license?

Elaborate Hoaxes

Because, you know, Climate Change and Evolution are elaborate hoaxes, perpetrated by "scientists" who are doing it for the money. I mean, look at all the filthy rich scientists in their science centers crammed full of unquestioning worshippers. Oh, sorry, those are Mega-Churches. If you want to see where all the easy money is, look to the churches that claim "hoax" when anything challenges their assumptions, based on the "word" of the God of ancient tribesmen, thousands of years ago, people who said the moon gave off its own light and the sun was set in the sky. You know, real science, not this phony science, based on actual evidence and undeniable reality.

Delta Flight 906

I went into the lavatory on Delta Flight 906, flying back from twelve days in Guatemala, and I saw a sign above the toilet, that said, "Do not use during takeoff or landing," and under that, it said, "Load limit 100 pounds." That surprised me a bit, I mean, really, but then I realized there was a fold-down table there as well.

American Diversity on Display

So there was American diversity on display at the Oscars, last night. Black. White, Hispanic, Male and Female, Gay and Lesbian, including Foreigners, all acting as if life was one grand selfie, happy for each other, celebratory, getting along, like a big happy family. A movie about science wins seven Oscars, a movie that comes to terms with the truth of slavery wins best picture, a Kenyan-American wins best supporting actress with grace and gratitude, what's it all mean? Are we stuck with this comity of heirs? I certainly hope so.

Manifesto of the Real

The only reality, that can be proven to exist, is this moment. I don't mean the popular *moment* of anyone's current activity, but the moment between thoughts, the moment that conscious time surrounds, the moment of existence.

I'm a realist. I mean to speak of what's real. Since the language I love is the province of the relative realities of past, present and future, this is impossible, but I keep trying. If I can't describe the indescribable, I can speak of relative reality from the awareness of a non-relative place. As human beings, as thinkers, as poets and philosophers, we've spoken of the moment of existence as something spiritual, abstract and philosophical, and we've spoken of our transient body/mind as if that construct describes us, as if that is who we are.

It's true that we're transient beings, and all our creations are transient, but the essence of our being is not. We've identified ourselves with our periphery and not our center. I've written from the center, and I've written from the periphery. Both are valid perspectives. We are transient beings in a transient universe. And, we're able to be aware of our intrinsic nature. We are able to recognize ourselves, as energy, that is capable of being self-aware, and, in our transient selves, we recognize the fact of our existence.

We're able to recognize ourselves from within our intrinsic nature, without recourse to the identity of mind and body. This is the opportunity to speak from the moment, in the moment, about the moment of our own existence. Everything in our history goes against this opportunity. We're habituated by the neglect of our own reality. I'm a realist, and I have been a romantic. I've been inclined to speak from intrinsic existence. Letting the romance of reality fall away reveals the reality that underlies the romantic and all the other postures of the poet.

In my life, I've gradually felt more real, and that's been the reward of my nature. Some of my writing has been an attempt to speak from this awareness, and that writing has been seen by others as spiritual, abstract, and philosophical. From my perspective, it's none of those. I describe what is and what occurs, in my awareness, using this flawed, beautiful tool of language. I see the difficulty in using transient language to speak from the only reality that's not transient. Poets have always tried to leap into the center. When poets don't effectively leap into the center, the description of the intrinsic sounds abstract, with a romantic costume, like religion or spirituality, or it becomes philosophy.

I love this transient world we live in, I love the transient life we're living, and I speak of transient reality in simple wonder from the awareness of the real. The real is greater than the exquisite transience of its lesser realities. I'm not a physical being living a spiritual life, I am awareness, I am energy, living a physical life. And all my words are only my hands waving in the air.

The Subterfuge of Spirituality

There is no spirituality to speak of. There is only the physical. Everything takes place in the body. Even the mind is a function of the body. The mind serves to keep the body alive, to know the body, to speak for the body, to make of what occurs in the body of use to the body, but here's

where it goes off on its own. The mind, in its capacity to imagine, invents a realm beyond its own reality.

Knowing that the only true reality exists only in this moment's perishable existence, the mind is quick to respond, to act as instant surveyor of everything that occurs, in order to keep the body alive. But the mind also knows, if it bothers to think about it, that everything that seems to exist beyond the moment, is past or projected future, so it invents a permanence for itself, where none exists.

The mind grasps the reality of energy, that imperishable force that animates and invigorates all of life. The mind knows it owes its life to energy; the imprecise reality that functions without character or instinct, without past or future. Even knowing the truth of the body, and the truth of energy, the mind chooses to name itself the center of reality, deposing the body and disregarding energy, seemingly jealous of the existence of energy animating the body's more present reality.

The body is the perishable present. Energy is the imperishable present. The mind works to become what these realities are, but it can't be, except by its subterfuge, through which it creates a reality seemingly greater than all other realities as what's called spirituality and its structured incarnation, religion. The mind attempts to graft itself onto the energy of the animated body, to take on shape and form where no form exists, to take on the life force, in this transient reality, where everything dies.

In order to lock-in this tenuous grasp on all things, the mind proposes a grand bargain of the perishable and the imperishable; to make the body eternal, to make the eternal a thing of the body, and to make the mind itself the uniter and monitor of this tenuous union. This subterfuge is revealed by its language. The mind uses the language of its own tenuous reality to promote the image of its creation, even to imagining a creator who acts in ways that are familiar to the mind.

The mind, born of the body, creates a creator of all things physical, and then names it something beyond the physical, in the pseudo language of *the spiritual*; a variation of the mind's own making. All of the sensations of the spiritual are sensations of the body, energized by the energy of all life. Peace is the body at peace. Acceptance is the body accepted. Joy is the body in the experience of joy.

Recognition of the eternal is the recognition of imperishable energy in the body. Surrender is the surrender of the mind to its own absence in the moment. Every-thing we call spiritual is the nameless occurrence of energy in the body. The mind is merely its chronicler. In this awareness, the best minds attempt to chronicle the truth of their mind's reality. They recognize the limitations of the tool for the task. The *chronicler* is a function of the *witness*. Both are manifestations of the mind.

What the mind calls *spiritual* is that which is beyond the mind's capacity to become, but not beyond its capacity to describe. This profession of description becomes the thing it attempts to know. The mind attempts to know what is already known. Knowing is in the body, and knowing is in energy. The mind is a bystander. Can we know the body without elevating it to something

beyond itself? Can we know energy without limiting it to the personal body or impersonal existence?

Recognition of the body is in the body. Recognition of energy is in the energy. What is recognition, if it's not *unthought* knowing? The mind is the occurrence in the body that recognizes the body, by letting go of its separation from the mind. The mind is the witness of energy that recognizes its true nature as energy by letting go of its separation from the mind. In this abdication of separation, nothing is lost. Sun, moisture, root, sap, limb, and leaf; all become the tree, and the tree sighs in relief, in the natural, innate, and forgiving love of its self-promoting parts.

To be free of separation, one must know, straightaway, or begin to believe and then know, that one's true reality is energy in a body. One who thinks, in, of, and as the separated self, creates a self that is imposed on the greater reality. In the great delight of itself and others like it, the conscious mind is relatively real and endlessly fascinating to itself, but it has no past or future, so it invents both for itself. We love the mind for the multiplicity of all its relative realities.

The mind, is a marvelous instrument, but, like a beloved and beautiful dog, it shouldn't be given the run of the house. Left to its own devices, it will tear up the furniture and shit on the rug. The mind needs an overseer, and not one devised by the mind. The mind needs the awareness that has no agenda, it needs the perspective of inherent energy, and it needs the wisdom of the transient body.

How does that happen? It happens. Letting go of the trappings of the mind's creative imagination of its own reality, is helpful. Conjuring a world of spiritual truths is a nice approximation, and the study of such things can be helpful, but it's ultimately a trap. Having, finally, no map is like taking a long walk in nature.

Can one venture into the wilderness without losing one's mind, one's body, one's life? No, one cannot. But there's no problem. Nothing can be lost inside this everything that includes all its parts.

I Am a Fiction

Sometimes I love living in this fiction, and sometimes I don't love living in this fiction. Do I want to live in this fiction, or do I want to live in the reality this fiction so effectively masks? The fiction is overwhelmingly the most common way we live as human beings. It's common to the point of being nearly universal, throughout history, but it's still a fiction. We know that we all die, and we know our lives are ephemeral, but we prefer to live as if they are not ephemeral by concentrating on the physical and on the apparent reality of the mind, which allows us to create the beliefs of our continued existence, even when there is no evidence for it.

I am a fiction. Sometimes I love living this fiction, and sometimes I don't want to keep up the charade. I don't mean to say my life is *like* a fiction, or even that my life *is* a fiction, but that *I* am a fiction. I don't mean to say that I am an actor on a stage, as Shakespeare said, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." I'm saying that this life is a stage, and I'm

an actor on this stage, and my being an actor is also a fiction. Being someone playing his part is also a fiction. Everyone in the audience is also a fiction. The very foundation of this reality is based on a fiction. That means it's not the real foundation, but a structure build on top of the actual reality.

This fiction is nearly complete. Everyone participates in the fiction, to the point where almost no one willingly admits to the fiction. What does it mean to no longer participate in the fiction? It means to become aware and to stay aware of the fundamental reality of one's existence, without immediately jumping to fiction, in thinking of that awareness in the shame of thoughts. Thought is the vehicle of the fiction. Thought is, itself, fiction in action. It is the engine of the fiction. Now, I am not saying that this fiction is wrong. I'm not saying that this fiction is bad. It is what it is, and along with almost everyone else, I love this fiction. I really do. I love my own fiction.

I love the sense of myself as a human being, as an animal being, as one who thinks, feels, and does. I love the sense of myself as someone of instinct, character, personality, and history. I love the fiction of past and future as if they are reality. All of these things fall into what I happily call "relative realities." Once you accept the fiction of this existence, everything becomes relative, more or less real, but still real, within the realm of fiction.

"Did you see that actor? Did you see how real he was? I believed his character." Yes, and I "believed" him as a person, before he started acting. You see, belief is the functional engine of this fiction. Once you begin to participate in belief, you become a committed participant in the fiction.

Are you annoyed, or intrigued, by this gentle diatribe against the fiction of relative realities? I repeat that I am not "against" this fiction. I've been an active and committed participant in it for over 70 years. I'm participating in it, right now, without any rancor or difficulty. So what's my problem? I don't have a problem. Neither do you or anybody else. There is no problem. My problem, if I want to call it that is that, having experienced the awareness that this world of relative reality is a fiction, and having seen what is NOT a fiction, I have wondered if I can keep it up.

Pretty soon, I'll be dead and the question will go away, just as I will go away. But I won't go anywhere. I will simply stop existing in this fiction. I will return to energy, from which I came, and which I have never left, and the rest of me will disintegrate, dissolve, and disappear. Energy is the story, here. I am energy, and I am fiction, except for the reality of energy. Now, lots of people believe that. And there's the rub. As long as this reality exists as belief, the fiction stays in place, apparently running the show. Energy requires no belief. Nobody has to believe in energy for it to exist. There is some fundamental sense of who I am that requires no belief to be true. So, what is my awareness of that?

I once said, at a time when I was contemplating death, "OK, so just go ahead and die." I didn't mean to end my life, but to enter into that state of being that we call being dead. Now, as I age, older and older, it isn't death I want to enter into, it is

Enlightenment

OK, I'm going to try this one more time. Enlightenment. The thing about enlightenment, it's no big deal. It's a done deal. Everybody is already enlightened, but we don't... most don't.... we don't get it... because our attention is elsewhere, and has been, habitually, for thousands and thousands of years.

Without Friends and Family We Are Nothing

A friend who has suffered terribly in the last few years has written, "Without friends and family we are nothing." She is right to express her love and deep gratitude for her friends and family, but to say that, without friends and family, we are nothing, is a pernicious sentiment. It was meant to praise friends and family and to declare the virtues of relationships, when one has become dependent on them, but what if a person is without friends and family? What if friends and family don't fulfill the need they are thought to fulfill?

Then, this is a prescription for despair, without hope or recourse, and that is wrong, unnecessary, cruel, and denies the reality of all our lives, that deep within us, deep within the nothing of our fears, is a well of acceptance and innate love, in the timeless and endless "nothing" we attribute to God or to the nature of the Universe.

This innate acceptance is ours to hold and be held by, without holding onto anyone or anything. We are born in the acceptance of our reality by our reality itself. The human mind has intervened and focused on our relationships as the only place to feel whole, but the mind is itself dependent on relationships. The mind exists only in relationship, to itself and to everything and everyone else. The mind cannot recognize the innate acceptance of reality beyond its capacity, but we can.

We are capable of this recognition, through the capacity of our awareness, which functions innately and takes shape in the mind. The mind then acts as if it is the originator of consciousness, but awareness functions freely, with and without thought. All creatures function in awareness, but we humans are self-aware, and that occurrence became the breeding ground for the mind to develop its own agenda. The human mind developed - in self-awareness - as self-consciousness, and thereby, the first relationship was born.

We began, according to our minds, in self-consciousness, as one part of the human self, relating to itself, as if it is relating to another part of oneself. This is the creation of the ego, but the nature of awareness is not bound by duality and separation. In the nature of awareness, there is no ego, no other, no relationship in itself, and no relationships between ourselves and others.

The love for and the love from others is a lovely reality, especially when it is lived in the recognition of something less defined. True love functions without separation, and that is the fundamental reality of our awareness. In awareness, whether in relationship or not, there is no separation, and the nothing, that we fear, opens into the recognition of what we've come to call love, acceptance, and wholeness.

We are already everything we have ever desired. This is not to lessen the joy of living with others in mutual love and acceptance, but to see that even alone, we are not alone. Aloneness is a state of mind. In awareness, without the focus on relationships, there is no aloneness to fear. We are even more free to love in our relationships, when we know that we are not dependent on them for wholeness, and we live in the recognition of love and acceptance without defining thought or doubt.

What Is Real What Is Not Real

Thirty years ago, in my first one-man show, on stage in San Francisco, one of my invented characters asked the question that has been my question ever since, probably all my life, “What is real, what is not real?” I know now the answer to my question, if not to the question itself. My dilemma has become, “What do I do about it?”

I wrote, many years ago, and still believe, “I am good at doing and being nothing, not the nothing that is the absence of something, but the nothing that is the presence of everything.” When I was in India, twenty years ago, it was confirmed for me by a good teacher that the peace I first felt as a teenager came from the absence of ego. That is, my true self abides in emptiness, and I am at peace in that emptiness. It confirmed the habit of my writing as a poet, where I enter into a state of mind that is not of the mind but of awareness in not thinking of anything. This is my happiness. I could carry this simple meme for my own happiness, “Begin to write a poem,” and I am at peace in the world. This is not a state of mind where I think of the world in any particular way, it’s not a mantra of thought, it is a call to emptiness of thought, even as thought is near.

So, what’s the dilemma? Well, I’m also a man of action, and I’m also a man who appreciates the illusion of my individual personality, my character, and my brief life in this body. Most of my books were written after it became clear to me that my truest reality was having no definable reality. I’m not saying this very well. Let me try to break it down to its most basic. The product of my mind, as fascinating, terrifying and considerable as it seems, is not the reality of my existence.

When I was a student in college, it was common to hear in bull sessions that we are living an illusion, that all of this we call the world is illusion. It was fun to think of when I was young, but I gave it no serious consideration until I began to ask the question of myself, “What is real, what is not real?” Since then, I haven’t become obsessed with the question of illusion, but I’ve been unable to escape it. I’ve also been disinclined to embrace it. I know the truth of this illusion, but I have continued to live as if the illusion is more real than the reality it obscures. I know better, and still I persist in living the illusion. This is my dilemma.

And I don’t just imagine that illusion obscures the reality, I know it to be true, and yet I cling to the life of illusion. This is in part due to the fact that I’ve lived these seventy years plus in the presence of passionate illusionism. Illusion is tied to the body, as the mind is tied to the body, and the body is demanding of my attention, as is the mind.

The body dies, we all know that, but we continue to kill each other, as if the body is the illusion and we continue to cling to each other as if the body is the reality. Now, I’m starting to

editorialize. This is the problem with my consciousness. I'm conscious of the illusion and I'm conscious of the reality, and my mind wants to discuss it. In furthering the discussion, I further the hegemony of the mind and the body as if they are the reality, even as I speak of their illusory state.

I ask myself what it is that would give my life peace and I know the answer. When I act in the awareness of existence and not in the thought of it, I am instantly at peace, and yet I continue to act in the thought of existence, or more specifically in the thought of the world around me. I have a particular way of making this occurrence my reality, and it is when I think to write a poem, not in thinking about poetry, but when I enter that state of awareness that's always been the ground for me to write a poem.

I tell this story all the time. Forty years ago, I was sitting in a café, the sort of place where I did most of my writing, surrounded by talking, laughing people, many of whom I knew, and I took out my paper and pen in anticipation of writing. As I sat in preparation to write, the woman I was seeing said, "Steve, do you know what happens when you begin to write? You become spiritual." She had noticed the state of awareness I was in that apparently showed itself on my face, in my demeanor.

I knew what she meant, but I would never have called it spiritual. It was a state of openness without agenda, without thought. It was being in the absence of the ego of the mind that has things to do, in favor of having nothing to do, without ever thinking about it. On that occasion, I remember looking out the window, up the busy street, at nothing in particular. I was not focused on anything or anyone in particular, and I was at peace. I was also ready for anything to happen.

It was the nothing of everything. Anything could happen, and I was ready for it. Contrary to common thought, this state of awareness that some call meditation is not a state of negating the mind, negating thought, negating reality, or negating we could call the illusion of life.

It is a state of awareness that comes naturally to me. I could be called gifted or blessed for the ease of this occurrence, but I believe this is the natural state of being awake and aware as a human being, but it is obscured by the considerable presence of the world of thought and action. In everyone, and me, too. I get busy thinking and doing, and when I am so occupied, especially when I am compelled or when I am successful at it, I lose my attention on the very thing that blesses me.

The call from my experience in India, with a teacher who was committed to remaining in his awareness and not in his consciousness, has been in conflict with my habitual urge to create a life of my thinking and doing. But he did that, too. He was a teacher surrounded by people who wanted him to tell them how to be at peace in their reality and not be so caught up in the illusion. He played the same game as has been played, as I have played, of talking about living in awareness without clinging to thought. I'm doing it, right now, in this writing. I'm talking about it. I'm playing the game that has been exposed to me, since I was a college freshman entertaining the idea that this is all illusion.

A year or two before that time in India with an aware teacher, I had already experience the break from thinking as the base of my consciousness. This is it. There it is. We act as if thinking is the base, when thinking is not the base. Thinking is a secondary reality, but since the first human beings discovered themselves thinking, thinking has taken priority and has become the base of our reality. And, of course, there are those who believe thinking is weak water compared to action, that acting is the base reality, but both of these are hurrying out of the garden, as if they have tasted of the apple of knowledge, and there's no reason to go back before that seminal occurrence. The bite of the apple of knowledge has become the starting point for all human beings. But even those of us who follow the apple logic, talk about what came before the apple. Unfortunately, we use the language of the apple to talk about the reality that was pre-apple.

Religion speaks to that more original reality that supersedes and forms the base of our lives, but religion does what I'm doing now, it describes and explains the reality as if it is of the same substance as the illusion. The base of religion's reality is mind and body, the same as the secular reality.

But this is still me, talking about my dilemma, and this talking only fosters more thought about the dilemma. I am writing this dissertation to get myself to the break point, where I let go of my allegiance to the illusion and remain in the reality. This is not a great risk to my existence. This is the fulfillment of my existence. This is the reality of my existence that becomes the consistent state of my consciousness, and not merely the ongoing subject matter of my thinking.

"Begin to write a poem" ought to be the constant of my reality and not the occasional state of my reality. Let's explore that for a bit. The state of awareness that I call beginning to write a poem has often led to the actual writing of a poem and then several poems or many poems. The writing of poems has led to the making of books and that has led to the publishing of books, the reading of poems, and the making of a career for myself as a poet. But I'm also a writer of prose and of theatre, and that kind of writing, more directly connected to the patterns of thought, has led me to become concerned with a public career. In the making of poems, especially in the state of mind that precedes the making of poem, I have no interest in these consequences.

I leave the garden. I get busy making a life in the world, based, ultimately and fundamentally on the state of awareness that gives me peace and happiness. That life becomes, to some degree, separated from its source. This, I believe is the reality of human history, but let's stay on topic, here. I am trying to educate my poor brain, so that there might be an answer, not to the question of what is real and what is not real, but to the question of what I might do about it. One answer was that I become a spokesman for the dilemma, an elucidator of the question, a promoter of the answer, a teacher of the way of self-awareness.

One day, walking on the road, away from the daily session with the teacher I spoke of earlier, I was wondering this same question, whether I should become someone as he was, a teacher of the way of no way. Then the thought came into my happy mind, "No, I want to be a poet... like Rumi... and Kabir." At the time, I had little or no knowledge of either man, but I felt better with my answer than I did with the proposed answer that I be like that teacher. He was a brilliant and articulate teacher. His teacher was perhaps the best-known teacher of the way of self-awareness,

the way of no practices, the way of no teachings. I realized that I could not become a teacher who had nothing to teach but nothing, both literally and figuratively.

I can write poems, but better than that, I can be in the state of awareness that precedes the writing of a poem. I have recognized that this state of awareness was the state of awareness that I came into my own consciousness, knowing. And, it is the state of awareness that best prepares me for the death of my body and the dissolution of the life of my mind.

It is the state of awareness that I've inherited as a human being. It is the closest to living in eternity, in human form, of any state I can achieve, because it is literally unachievable. I can't get here from here. I am already here. I can get there from here, but I have to leave here to get there. Finally, I can get there in this life, and I can stay here for the entire journey. These two are not incompatible. Here is always here, even in there, but when my mind is on there, I lose consciousness of here. Here hasn't gone anywhere else, and neither have I, but I think I am lost, when my mind becomes attached to the idea of there.

Is my dilemma resolved? It was never unresolved. I was merely unresolved in the question. Still, I've become frustrated with the presence of this dilemma. Incidentally, I've felt the presence of what's called the here, all during this writing. The words here and now don't help me, though. For me, the sense of being about to write a poem works. I don't know and I can't say what might work for anyone else. The mind is like a great dog, who wants only to be told what to do. It isn't what I tell the dog to do; it isn't my relationship with the dog that matters, it is the state of awareness that assumes the role of pack leader over the dog. A trusted parent doesn't need to command respect. Respect isn't even given or taken. Respect is. Respect exists. Respect has always existed for me, in this matter of listening to the voice of my existence, but I have often been waiting for the command, when I am the one offering it, by the reality of my own presence in this life.

I act as if this awareness of my own fundamental reality is constant, and it's only my habitual ties to the illusion that keeps me from enjoying this peace and happiness all the time. That's almost true. I just went to the Y, got on the elliptical with a TV in front of me, put a New Yorker on the machine, and after a few minutes, realized I was not in this state of mind, as I had been, mere minutes before.

I looked out the window at the cars in the parking lot and I held my focus on nothing in particular, but my thoughts kept coming, like dancing dogs in front of me. I did what I've done for many years. I said to myself, "Oh... thoughts," and I began to see the world as if it was the open ground of an as yet unwritten poem, without a poem in sight. It took a while, a minute or two, but I was able to accept the reality, instead of focusing on the business I'd put myself in the middle of.

What's true is that the recognition of this awareness is more of an occurrence than the result of activity or thought. That is, many people spend many hours, if not years, trying to induce this freedom, but it's often not easy to stop doing what we humans have been doing for millennia, often out of sheer habit.

I stumbled onto this practice of writing poetry, or coincidentally, I found that being a poet was the perfect match to this occasion of natural awareness, but, in me, at least, I have the luck of being so inclined. This external reality of being a poet encourages the occasion of my awareness, and the recognition of that occasion, as something more fundamental than just being a poet. I noticed, forty years ago, in speaking to someone else, that when I said I was a poet, it didn't engender a sense of myself as something or somebody, but I seemed to disappear in saying it.

The external reality, or the illusion of naming it, in this case, for me, coincided so perfectly with my innate inclination to be who I am, that it jibed. I don't know what that jibing is for anyone else. I'm not suggesting that everyone be a poet. I suspect that, for most people, this occupation is perfectly wrong. What is right? I don't know. Everyone is free to find out for themselves what matches their illusory life to their inherent reality. Maybe nothing does, but I optimistically believe that something does.

Even for me, if I think too much about being a poet, or if being a poet were to become my profession for success in the world, I might find it a dead-end. Outside my reality, whatever I think or do can take on a life of its own, just as the illusion of my personality and character can take on a life of its own, and then who I think I am becomes afraid of dying. I woke up at 4AM, afraid of dying. I know that my overactivated mind, my ego, my sense of myself, is what is afraid of dying, and so it should be, just as the body is afraid of dying, just as any I that forms in this reality is afraid of dying. It knows it will die. In fact, it dies every time I enter into the ego free reality I always have been, at the core, and the delightful surprise is, that death is painless.

It isn't the death of the body or the mind that hurts, it's the thought of dying, or the time of dying, that hurts. Dying can be horribly painful, whether it is in the body or in the mind. Even the contemplation of this death of becoming nothing to oneself is both desired and despised, sought and feared. Many suffer for their freedom, but it isn't freedom that provides the suffering. It is the attachment to the illusion of mind and body that tears away in suffering, until one realizes there is no actual attachment. The discussion of attachments enhances the illusion of attachment. "Oh, don't throw me in that briar patch! Oh, please don't throw me in that briar patch!"

This monologue doesn't dissolve my dilemma, either. It only encourages it. I have to look up, from time to time, to see if I am not becoming entranced by my own language, to see if the empty ground of its formation is still my reality. So my dilemma remains. I think it can only be resolved by removing myself into stillness, either away from everyone else, or in the company of everyone else, by sheer force of will. That's like asking if being happy spoils it for living my life. The illusion is addicted to stress, strife, conflict, and turmoil, in order to maintain the illusion of joy, peace, happiness, and calm. Happiness is not a bar to being happy.

Taking away the illusion of looking at a tree doesn't make it harder to see the tree, it makes it easier, because the tree is no longer clouded or colored by illusion. Illusion is a relationship. Having no relationship with the tree doesn't blind me, it clears up my vision. I see the tree for what it is. I become what I am. The tree and I get along just fine.

I can be at peace in my awareness, without any loss to my thoughts of war and peace. The larger question to me, at this point, seems to be, can I allow my illusory self, my personality, my

character, to thrive, to let it play itself out on the stage of life, without being stuck in the illusion. Years ago, I imagined myself as Zorba the American. I wanted to be fully passionate in my illusory life, right up to the moment it was over, but I got caught in wanting to fully break from my habitual attachment to a life of illusion. In the course of a poem, even after its immaculate conception, I have often been caught in the passion of its presence. So what? What now?

There's probably a reason why I ask myself this question, from time to time. The answer is not of reason, so it seems to come to me in a time of need for a break from reason. I have been feeling ambitious for myself in this life, before this life comes to a crashing end at some point in the near or not near future. I have felt the bliss of my freedom from mental ambitions of any sort, and I've seen the happy results of that freedom, but my mind habitually reenters my reality with the pitch that that freedom is not enough, and that pitch comes when something else triggers it. My brother died nine months ago, killing himself, because he was in physical pain, but also because he had given up on his life, feeling that he had been betrayed and ignored. He was my younger brother, but I was influenced by him. He was the unromantic version of my romantic artist life. I have spent the last ten years recognizing and accepting and releasing the hold that romanticism had on my consciousness.

I think the effect of my brother killing himself has been to trigger in me some of the same questions about my life. He had that effect on me. He pushed the boundaries, and I liked that. I was more accepting and I was more accepted. I wanted to drop the boundaries in my own life, and he was an influence on that. Now he has set a new standard, to have killed himself in his disappointment at this life. I don't feel the same disappointment, but I have questions about my own desire for acceptance in the world. I am strong enough to imagine what I might do to engender that acceptance, and that imagination triggers these questions. I am at peace, and I am free to be at peace in my life and in my death. I do not have his compulsions, but he was my brother, and his influence has been upon me, all these years. It occurs to me, as I say this, that the influence of my father/mother/brother/sister/human family is the same as my dead brother's. I live in respect for the dead and the dying. This is a human condition that defies the underlying reality.

Driving to a soccer game, many years ago, I told a friend, a university professor of aging, that "we are all, already dead." I meant only that the way we conceive of our own lives is through our minds, our thoughts, and every thought comes a nanosecond after the reality, so that our conceptions of ourselves are constantly living in the past, and since the past no longer exists, even if it exists only a nanosecond in the past, we are all already dead. I added, immediately, of course, that this death is only in thought. In the reality of our being, we are as alive as eternity is alive.

All of this one-sided conversation is about me coming to terms with the thinking of my mind, in love with my brother and his hurtful death, in love with the death of all human beings, in love with my own death, trying to match the rest of my life with this awareness of the nothingness of my awareness and the nothingness of my actual death. I have been asking myself this question for a long time, "What is real, what is not real?" If only death is real, what is life? If only life is real, what is this fascination with death?

“Why do we die, daddy? Why did Uncle Mark die? Where is he now?” All the work he did to make something of his intelligence has been destroyed. Literally, by those who were given his belongings, and literally, in the death of his mind, where it all held sway for nearly seventy years.

In the consciousness of awareness, this is not a problem, nothing is a problem, and problems are only things to be dealt with. I know that, and I believe that is the answer, but in the mind of my life, I want that awareness to put me at peace. I want the calm of my awareness to put my mind at peace. It does when I am in it, but when I am caught in the habits of my mind, I am not at peace. I have imagined that this situation has a remedy. In religion, there is a solution. We are told to accept a set of instructions, and a set of expectations, and our minds are to be at peace, now and in eternity. I am not a believer, and I see that the mind is a manufacturer of beliefs. I see those who live in their beliefs, and some seem to be at peace with that, and some don't.

I have the same results from Eastern religion, as well. I have seen similar results from the well-worked and well-organized minds of non-believers as well. I am not satisfied with any belief that seems to answer this question. I came to recognize that belief is another romanticism of the mind. It is the mind's favorite solution, made of the mind, by the mind, for the mind's satisfaction, but it is dependent on the mind for the resolution of the mind.

I have thought for a long time now that there was a way to put the mind at peace, that wasn't a product of the mind, but the only thing I see working is this awareness. It has no alternative in the world, but it functions in the world, as well, and better, so what is my problem? Am I merely being loyal to my mother/father/sister/brother? I keep making things of thought and action and offering them to this world of thought and action. There will come a time when that will stop, not by my willing it, but by my death. Is that it?

This is a dissertation of thinking, about thinking and doing, and it does not satisfy me. What is my desire for satisfaction? Why do I think I am responsible to find satisfaction?