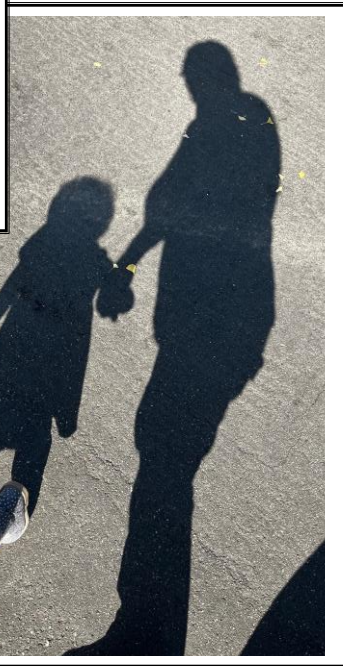


#GRAMPATIME



BOOK SEVENTEEN

Robert T.

*Read consecutively
but written separately,
the recurring nature of the
following themes, ideas and even words
attests to their patience,
pertinence,
and persistence.*

*Sent out in appreciation for
memories made,
good songs played,
and the family of friends
whose gifts can never be fully repaid.*

Editor: Karen Tobin

*previous editions 1 to 16 @
<http://www.robertvtobin-mpa.com/personal.html>*

DESTINATIONS
12/21/21

We end up wherever we're headed.

That has long been known
but frequently forgotten.
Unsurprising considering
the wealth of alternative options
and compelling self-justifications
which otherwise lead us elsewhere.

Unlikely as it may seem,
we are the captain of our own ship,
navigating not always swiftly but surely
in the direction of our own choosing.

Our destination may be undefined,
drawn forward by a combination
of instincts and interests
along avenues well-marked
by ours and others' previous wanderings.

The best alternative involves not a new direction,
but a different focus.

Inward rather than outward,
toward responsibility rather than blame,
compassion rather than condescension,
and love rather than fear.

Robert Frost took this road less traveled,
"... and it made all the difference."

RE-FRAMING
Winter Solstice
12/21/21

"Every action has an equal - and opposite - reaction."
Sir Isaac Newton

Welcome resistance.
Understand its inevitability.
Embrace its functionality.
Recognize its arrival.
Be open to its indicators.
Experience its reverberations.
Learn from its lessons.
Adapt to its impacts.
See cohesion beyond its causes/affects.
Explore possibilities revealed.
Feel feelings unleashed.
Accept resulting challenges.
Contemplate realities hidden by pre-conceived notions.
Appreciate emerging equanimity.
Live life beyond our (mis)perceptions.
Discover false boundaries imposed by our projections.
Avoid succumbing to arising fears and resulting resentments.
Find beauty in how things are.
Reevaluate definitions of time, movement, progress, and change.
Strengthen resolve.
Realign thoughts/actions with our purpose of being.
Refuse to be deterred by appearances.
(Re)unite with the highest powers of the universe.
(Re)unite with the highest powers of the universe.

ACTS OF LOVE
1/9/22

Everyone who ever lived
came into being from an act of love.

Granted, the experience wasn't voluntary for some.
For others, it didn't last longer than the act of conception
or may have been a complete accident.

But for most, it is undertaken
with good intentions
and high aspirations.

If we celebrated our conception date
as much as our birth date,
we'd better appreciate
the enormous commitment,
powerful connection,
and awesome act of courage
involved in our production.

We don't make love.
It makes us.

RESIDUE
1/12/22

We all share the same ambition:
getting ourselves to that place where
our best is all that's left.

Pretty hard to let go of the rest,
it being so sticky and all.
We're too busy holding on to realize
we're the ones who won't let go.

Not without a struggle, that is,
as complacency turns into inertia
... making us believe we're stuck,
as if we were.

And it's not just persuasive but convincing,
allowing the future to be determined by our past
and making our present what it seems
rather than how it is.

The challenge is to keep on going
until our best is all there is.

TRANSITIONS
1/13/22

We're all always involved
in some sort of transition.

The trick is not only to know
from what? and to where?
- from childhood to adulthood,
home to school,
school to work,
and life to death –
but also: why?

One reason:
what the Buddhists among us
call launching energy,
or what "The Alchemist" *
calls Beginners Luck.

They believe the universe conspires
to provide support for new endeavors,
which we receive only if seeking it.

A second reason:
if we don't realize things are changing,
we'll keep expecting things
to stay as they are
when they never do.

* Paulo Coelho

ACCEPTANCE
1/16/22

Can it be this simple?

Do what we can
where we are
with what we have,
and let go of the rest.

Easier said than done, of course,
even though what we think we want
is rarely better
than what we already have.

Thinking otherwise cannot be prevented,
given our culture's orientation and our ego's influence.
The trouble arises
when we allow them to determine our choices.

When we stop trying
to change things to suit ourselves
we create the energy and opportunity
to be our best.

SEASONING
1/16/22

None of us think we're the sage.

Maybe more like the oregano or basil,
here to spice up life's sauce
at whatever the cost
looking through eyes blue, brown, or hazel.

Certainly not the garlic or onions,
which taste good going down
but later force us to frown
and may cause gout or bunions.

We attempt to add flavor
to the already great.
Better to accept whatever's on the plate,
and instead learn to savor.

STANDARDS
1/17/22

Within life's various aspects
- personal, communal, corporate, political, governmental, etc. -
the increasingly common question
"what's wrong with that?"
becomes the criteria for determining
whether it's right.

The very idea
(i.e., not bad = good)
sets a low bar for society's standard of acceptability,
involving not so much moving the goal posts
as removing them altogether.

Since quality is a matter of individual preference,
its pursuit might engage us
in more interesting discussions
than those currently entangling us.

Focusing on the more-or-less good,
rather than good versus bad
or more- or-less bad
might reverse the direction
of our descending bar.

CELEBRATION
1/20/22

How slow we are to believe
what we already know:
people are who and how they are,
and doing the best they can.

We forget this about them
in the same proportion
we do about ourselves,
thereby going to the fire from the pan.

Only by pretending
can anyone think they will
be somewhere else
when you-know-what hits the fan.

Being who we are
day in/day out
is how we take
our place in The Plan.

MODERATION
1/25/22

Is there any wiser suggestion than
"watch out for what you wish for"?

Everything attracts its opposite,
so whatever we want is attached to things we don't
- the latter well hidden in our acquisitive glee.

The Stoics and Buddhists agree:
our wants lead us astray
when misdefined as needs.
The Law of Unintended Consequences
foists upon us what we don't expect
and takes us to places we didn't plan to go.

They also warn about extremism of any kind.
Allowing it in one aspect of life
invites it to take up residence in others,
causing us to confuse
interpretation with insight,
knowledge with wisdom,
and strength with power.

IRATION(S)
1/28/22

Tranquility.

Perhaps it's the only goal
to which we all strive.

Like love and joy,
it is a means as well as an end.

Like emotional sobriety, economic security, and personal freedom,
it's more often caught than taught.

Like patience, health, and mindfulness,
it is most noticeable in its absence.

All these qualities are present
when living tranquilly.
And we are most tranquil
when living in the present.

We determine success or failure
by seeing them both as impostors,
and treating them such. *

* "If" by Rudyard Kipling

BENDING
2/12/22
San Diego Harbor

There are days we'll never see.
People will never know.
Questions we'll never answer.
And gardens that just won't grow.

The issue is not how? or why?
but what we do instead.
Keep living our life as if it's ours,
not like a needle lacking thread.

It's the unfamiliar, and thus unexpected,
which always throw us off.
Do all we can to stay on track
and we're less likely to end up in the trough.

It's not a matter of being better,
but rather better being.
Looking at our world as a place we belong
requires a different way of seeing.

And so again we get to choose,
then again, and again, and again
to remove those barriers to Real Life,
which never break but forever bend.

VALENTINE MESSAGE

February 14, 2022

An entire holiday dedicated to love.
Even if it's just Hallmark's idea,
that doesn't make it a bad one.

You might not think it something which needed reminding ...
but on the other hand, just look around ...

Yet, upon looking even closer, we find love on the rise.
People continuing to work together while working through fears.
Doing so while raising our own or caring for other's children.
Or helping the sick get well and those who won't die peacefully.
They make us safe, take away our trash, and deliver mail,
and do so not while ignoring their concerns but despite them.

As has been said: "No greater love does anyone have
than to lay down their life for their friends." *

People around us are doing this every day,
you among them.

Perhaps, for this one day at least,
we can look at what unites us instead of what divides us.
See what is good in ourselves and others
rather than what could ... always ... be better.
And give the love we are looking to get.

Instead of complaining about what did or didn't occur
or worrying about what might,
we can thank those around us who help make it happen
and do what we can, with what we have, to keep things going.

So, I see you, appreciate your efforts, and urge you to carry on.
The love you have to give is needed now more than ever.

* John 15:13

NEVER BETTER

2/26/22

As of today,
it's been 33 years,
396.04 months
12,054 days
289,295 hours
11,357,700 minutes.

Guess that answers the question: who's counting?"

Time well spent moving toward
a better way of being,
changing attitude and action,
thoughts and feelings,
perceptions and perspective.

Turns out it was not sobriety
but serenity to which we aspire,
the former being a prerequisite for the latter.
Honesty, open-mindedness and willingness
become H.O.W. life gets better,
only when you do so.

Moments, like miracles,
abound when we're looking for them
and are sorely missed when we don't.

We do things for ourselves but not alone,
no matter how much our culture
or the story in our heads
tell us otherwise.

Perhaps it's called a "self-help" program
only to get us to a door
we would have avoided otherwise
and could have never opened ourselves.

HORTICULTURE
3/3/22
Enroute to Chicago

We learn as we go,
say the wisest among us,
but perhaps it's only as we grow.

So frequently we travel
from hither to yon
and end up with nothing to show.

A turtle only makes progress
when it sticks out its neck
and sees what there is to know.

We too best learn
when we consciously live,
and not just run to and fro.

A healthy lawn
requires food, water, and weeding.
It's not just something we mow.

We too require
constant cultivation,
lest our aspirations stay low.

THE ONE ON THE LEFT
3/10/22



Nineteen years ago just yesterday,
medical adversities accumulated
as your capacity for resistance sank low.

So completely unlike you,
being someone who always bounced back.
With a side-long glance and elfish smile,
it seemed there'd be nothing you'd ever lack.

But your breathing became shorter that day,
and your time with us as well.
Nothing more anyone could say,
but so much still to tell.

Your love continues to inspire
your family, friends, and those you aided.
Your body's no longer around,
but your spirit has never faded.

Ever onward we persevere
on yours and our own behalf,
knowing we continue to have your ear
and can still hear your laugh.

STARS
3/10/22
O'Hare Airport

Having survived the gauntlet
of parenthood ourselves,
how quickly we forget
its defining characteristic:
anything can happen
at any time.

That this is always true
attests to our powers
of amnesia.

That we muddle through parenting
while juggling professional responsibility,
navigating pandemics
and surviving imprecise role modeling
makes the accomplishment
all the more noble and notable.

No pressure, but let's not forget:
the survival of our species depends on it.

Parents are the really unsung heroes.

RECEIVING
3/15/22
In Chicago

In a sea of strife,
religions promise peace in the next life
by finding it in this one.

Elusive as it can be,
we all know intuitively
if/when its lost or won.

Not in the sense of achieved,
but rather something received
- an absolute good being done.

Putting a focus on Now
not elsewhere, somehow.
Ever present, like our bright sun.

In this state of mind,
what we seek we find
and enjoy the right kind of fun.

Not something deserved
or to be preserved.
It's available by the ton.

POSSIBILITIES
3/20/22
In Flight

Nothing just "is what it is,"
since it is also
what it's capable of becoming. *

Seeing things as they are
accepts their reality
without limiting their possibility.

There is nothing we can change
until we accept its existence.
Everything changes when we do.

To see nothing as static
embraces fluidity
as nature's defining characteristic.

We're told not only change,
but improvement is also inevitable, **
providing a scientific basis for hope.

Accepting things as they are
allows us to see
what we otherwise cannot.

* Matthew Kelly - "I Heard God Laugh"

** Charles Darwin

STINKIN THINKIN
Undated'

1. I always know what I'm doing, and where I'm going.
2. Life is all about the destination. How I go there is less important than how soon I arrive.
3. I have the relevant information to answer any question. I fully understand its possible ramifications and can discern what is best for all concerned without consulting anyone.
4. I don't get back what I put out. In fact, it's the opposite: I deserve more than I receive, and I'm justified in taking whatever I can get.
5. All my decisions and commitments are adaptable to changing conditions and emerging opportunities. Others' are not.
6. My assets should be recognized and praised. Any evidence of my defects should be ignored.
7. Not only are things the way I think they are; they're gonna stay that way no matter what happens.
8. The only real things are those which can be seen, heard, felt, smelled, or tasted. I can trust my perceptions and reactions while quickly adapting to fast changing circumstances.
9. Nothing has killed me yet, so I have every reason to believe I have all the time I need, can do whatever I want, and won't be harmed by what is not necessarily good for me.
10. My wants and needs are one and the same. These are satisfied by reaching for things outside myself. Pursuing them is my sole purpose in life, and the source of my happiness.

EULOGY

It's a great irony: only when facing death
do we encounter the real facts of life.

FACT #1: A life well-lived is defined not by what was done,
but the obstacles overcome along the way.
Not by the summit ascended
but the distance traveled to reach the destination.
Any other definition of success lead us away from it.

FACT #2: We live and learn in that order,
learning only later what we wish we knew sooner
about our own selves, those around us, and the world we live in.
The trick is to respond to all three with loving kindness.

FACT #3: Pain is inevitable, but the angst created
by our mind's story about what victims we are,
or whose fault it was – that's totally optional.
Our real challenge is acceptance, not understanding.

FACT #4: Our minds insist otherwise, but cultural heritage,
body physiology, and social domestication leave us with less control
over our responses to life than we'd like to think.

FACT #5: Whatever any of us did in our lives
was the best we could do at the time under the circumstances.
Otherwise, we might have done something different,
but not necessarily better.

FACT #6: We may know someone's shoe size, color and style
but still not know what it's like to walk in them,
no matter how much the critic in our head might think so.

EULOGY (cont.)

FACT #7: The most difficult people in our lives are our teachers.
From them we learn about patience and tolerance,
mostly in its absence.

FACT #8: It's hardest to remember what's easiest to forget:
it's life's quality, not quantity, which matters most.
Da Vinci left 7,000 pages of backward scribble no one remembers,
and a half-dozen paintings no one can forget.

FACT #9: We each are on our own voyage of discovery,
sharing the fate of all explorers – who reach far and fall short.
We rely on others to alert us when danger is near
and encourage us to try, try, try again.

FACT #10: We decide to what we hold on
and of what we let go.

Every life is a cause for celebration.
The thoughts of those who remain behind
about those who have gone ahead
determine whether they — and we — live in heaven or hell.

Few of us could do better
- and many could do worse -
in face similar issues we all face ... eventually.

Experience reminds us of the necessity
- as our sister Noreen nightly prays -
"to see our life as it really is,
and appreciate what we have while we still do."

May we more firmly resolve this is what
those gathered for our own final blessing will say of us.

KARMA
3/25/22

Is it possible the sages were right yet again?

Watching a Sinatra documentary reminds us
of the conclusion of a story told over and over again:
those solely focused on attainment of fame, riches, power
or other hallmarks of "success"
are least likely to attain
joy, peace, freedom, or any form of contentment.

Even more so when they double down
and try harder to secure them.

We were told this would happen
by Marcus Aurelius,
like Jesus, and Buddha before him,
yet ever onward we go
blissfully ignoring their warnings.

Historians comment on the March of Folly *
by which, for millennia, leaders have shown
unnerving proclivity to pursue policies exactly contrary
to their own, their country's and their people's best interests
despite warnings to the contrary.

Perhaps it is also for us all:
never getting what we so desperately want,
never fully appreciating what we already have,
and yet continually wondering why.

* Barbara Tuchman.

DEMEANOR
3/26/22

Two thousand years ago,
the Stoics * advised us
not to allow our personal ruling principle
to be compromised by outside influences
- psychological, physiological, economic, political, etc.

How few of us even know what that principle is,
let alone so many ways it can be affected?

If our kindness and compassion depend
on how we're treated by others.
then it's neither of those.

In the best sense of the word,
self-care keeps our focus where it belongs:
on things we can do something about.

The one - and perhaps only - of those
is our orientation toward life
(aka our attitude).

When we take care of ourselves,
everything else takes care of itself.

* Marcus Aurelius, Seneca, et. al.

REQUIEM
3/26/22

Attesting to our power of denial or avoidance,
it's not until reminded that we remember
how quickly we've forgotten life's first and perhaps only fact:
The End can come for anyone at any time.

It is only surprising we find it shocking
when life's only inevitability comes to pass.
(Paying taxes is no longer the other one),
It catches everyone unprepared,
those directly impacted most of all.

Or then again, maybe not.
For all we know, they saw it coming
and achieved complete acceptance
... maybe for the first and definitely the last time.

It's a time of sadness
for those left behind, of course.
But perhaps it came as relief
to those who finished the race
with at least shred of dignity and propriety,
ending a story
which took a lifetime to tell.

CONCENTRATION
3/28/22

It was only when we began to wonder
that we began to wander.

Nothing wrong with intellectual pursuits,
which, like all things, has its place.

But morbid curiosity
- as our brother Mike called it -
seems to kick in when focusing on the why and how,
pulling us toward the past or future.
This diverts attention to what, where, and when,
which only happen here and now.

Given our attraction to the unusual,
such wondering reflects not so much denial as disbelief,
casting doubt on things we innately know
while searching for facts never fully provable.

There is no reason to wander
from the Middle Path to which we were born.
It connects us to the person we already are
and always were.

LESSON 1: The Past
4/1/22

Is there anything harder
than keeping our past behind us?

Not being entangled or jangled
by feelings or perceptions,
thoughts or projections
about things no longer happening or pertinent,
unless we make them so.

Such experiences are further distorted
by anxieties and adrenaline.
And by our mind's Velcro tendency
- by which negativity sticks
longer and louder than all the rest -
while its Teflon tendency causes
the positive to slide from our memory. *

Even when not stuck in the past,
some lessons take a lifetime to learn.
May we receive them gracefully,
and graciously.

*Richard Rohr

LESSONS 2/ The Future
4/5/22

Is there anything less purposeful
- even when not done on purpose or even consciously -
than being preoccupied by the future?

It provides acceptable justification
and an ever-ready excuse
for dissipation of effort,
introducing futility to prospects
even before they become possibilities.

The infinite number of circumstances
over which we have no control
is a recipe for full-time fear
and a source of continual distraction.

Recognizing such projections as immobilizing,
and avoiding such speculation
- idle or otherwise -
is our next step
toward a brighter future.

MIRRORS I
4/8/22

We resist seeking help
for justifiable reasons,
using anger, resentment, or shame
as ways of disguising our secret belief
that whatever we do won't help.

So, of course,
we do the one and only thing
guaranteeing we won't get it:
we don't ask for it.

A self-fulfilling prophecy if there ever was one.

Self-sabotage raises timeless questions:
Who's in charge?
Who elected them?
And how, for gawd sakes,
do we get them out of our driver's seat?

When we are honest about looking
for someone to blame,
we usually discover it's us.

The TAO of THEN
4/13/22

Few guides for practical living
espouse the virtue of then.

Philosophical and theological literature abounds
with situational ethics and if/then scenarios,
highly logical and often hypothetical,
yet always acclaiming the benefits
of sooner rather than later.

Nobody writes a "Be Here Then" book,
nor would it be bought or read if available.

And for good reason,
since it's a story we readily avoid,
instead pursuing opportunities
to "live, love, laugh and be happy" *
even if they increase our insecurity.

Our future doesn't shape our present choices.
It's those choices which determine our destiny.

Focusing on then not only prevents us
from being here now
- the only time there ever is.
It also guarantees we'll never get there
... then or any other time.

*"When The Red Red Robbin
Goes Bob, Bob Bobbin Along"

COORDINATION
4/18/22

There is so much to be done
when it's time to do the right thing.

Perhaps the only thing not to do
is ask yourself whether you feel like it.

That leads us into our heads,
where distraction and diversion lurk,
moving us away from our hearts,
where courage dwells,

Maybe the only thing worse
than underthinking a thing
is overthinking it,
empowering egos and instincts
often beyond our awareness
and somewhat outside our sphere of influence.

It's easier to fall off the right path
than to get and stay on it.

There's always a good time to do what's right,
but just not right now! *

* Saint Augustine

QUESTION(S)
5/6/22

Our eyes and minds conspire
to focus on content rather than context,
conflating the essential with the pressing.

As friends note:

"why" is a management question
and we are merely laborers in the vineyard of life, *
learning to allow rather than resist, **
find similarities rather than differences, ***
and listen so we may hear.

"What" and "how" questions often indicate
a triumph of form over substance,
drawing attention to the immediately fleeting
while increasing likelihood of
misperceptions, misinterpretations, and resulting mishaps.

"Who" questions similarly divert our attention
from solutions to problems,
thus diminishing our efforts' effect.

The most important questions get the least recognition.
"Where?" and "when?" concentrate on the rightness of an action
and the timeliness of its relevance to our lives.

* James T.

** Pete C.

*** 12 Step Principle

PERSPECTIVE
5/9/22

Not a day passes when we don't feel daunted
by what life brings.
We can find ourselves being haunted
by its dents and its dings.

Hard to look beyond the apparent
- like the proverbial half-filled glass -
and take in what is inherent.
That's a challenge which few of us pass.

Appearances are so misleading,
we can see things the wrong way.
Small wonder it feels depleting
when we don't know how things lay.

When we're being perceptive,
we see each day as a gift.
But only when present and receptive
do we experience its lift.

MACHINATIONS
5/19/22
Jamestown, VA

Historic places.
Complicated people.
Trying times.
It has always been thus.

Then as now,
it's not about what's right,
but what we don't agree upon,
which makes life disagreeable.

The gyrations involved
are only recognized as such in hindsight,
blinded as we are by personal interests,
collective fears,
and selective amnesia.

It's never one person or event
on which the business of life turns,
despite history's implications to the contrary.

Personally and communally,
outcomes are determined
by our working together.
Or else things come apart.

CONCLUSIONS

5/19/22

Kure Beach, N.C.

- 1) Life is shorter (and sweeter) than we think.
- 2) It's better to make mistakes than have regrets.
- 3) We achieve spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical fitness in that order.
- 4) The hardest place to get out of is our own way.
- 5) Yes, time does heal. But only if we're healing.
- 6) Peace is not the absence of war; tranquility is no accident.
- 7) Nature provides a continual report card on how we're handling our ongoing global stewardship test.
- 8) Contentment depends less on external events than inner well-being.
- 9) Don't panic ... or else panic and get it out of the way.
- 10) If we see life as a blessing or burden, so it is.

BREEZE(S)

5/19/22

Sunrise on Kure Beach, N.C.

Waking to the roar of the Atlantic
is enough to make one frantic,
but it's just nature having its say.

Fishermen cast into the shore break
to give as well as take,
as another sunrise makes tomorrow today.

Watching shore birds floating by
makes me want to give it a try,
just as the Wright Brothers did not far away.

Pelicans dive for their meal
before taken by a seal.
The Circle of Life on display.

For them, and us all,
prospects rise and fall
making it easy to get lost 'long the way.

COMTEMPLATION

5/27/22

Chicago, Ill.

The hardest sound to hear
is the small, quiet voice within *
which tells us what we need to know
in those times when we're low.
That's when real life draws near.

The most difficult of things
is to accept help when it's time to change.

It is no easy task
to take off our mask,
feeling vulnerable and strange
as each lesson stings.

Where does one find
the strength to persevere?
We're tempted to relent
when all energies are spent
and to the very things we revere
we've become blind.

Everyone and everything will end.
Of that we know for sure.
We each do what we can
to stick with The Plan,
undistracted by glamor's allure
when facing what awaits 'round the bend.

* 1 Kings 18:20-40; 19:12

WHO KNEW?

5/28/22

Chicago, Ill.

There are many ways to walk the beach
or to walk a dog.
Yet in each case, our mind tells us
there is only one
and it just happens to be ours.

Such differences in perspective
is how wars get started
- foreign and domestic.

It's also why they are never truly won,
as so-called winners often squander their gains.

Among our greatest skills
is the capacity for self-deception,
which makes us want to do what we ought not
and adverse toward what we must.

Like all things in life,
this is a blessing which only seems like a curse,
prompting efforts to dig deep and work hard.
Only the alternative is only harder.

WARNING(S)
5/31/22
Back Home

It takes so long to learn:
more willful we are,
less content we become.

Warning labels should be attached
to those who pretend they're self-made.

Our culture, companies, and communities
celebrate them for going about things
not only the right
- but supposedly the only -
way there is to be.

Too often, their lasting fame
ends with the crash-and-burn
resulting from aspirations run amok.

Testimonials to the virtues
of competitive instinct
make it easy to forget:
the tortoise, not hare, won the race.

Our sages say happiness is not an outcome, but an input.
It only exists to the extent
we recognize it's happening
and recall from where it comes.

VEHICLES
6/9/22

We live our lives
as if riding a magic carpet,
soaring along as if we could.
We see everything,
can control anything,
and act as if no one else should.

Living as if every wish
is ours to command,
and every dream comes to fruition.
Every want
becomes a need
available for acquisition.

There's just one problem
with living on the fly:
it makes us so remote.
Life is happening where we aren't
as we flit by,
unable to realize what things connote.

It only seems ideal
to live such a way,
until we actually try it.
It's like a car
with too many gadgets,
which we admire but never buy it.

ALIGNMENT
6/19/22
Father's Day

We concurrently live our lives
better than we thought
and not as good as we could.
Of both, there is ample proof.

Even when connected
with those around us
and the one within,
we still can remain aloof.

We often find
ourselves on the floor
when thinking
we're on the roof.

Or convinced that others
are running amok
when we're the ones
who're the goof.

It's very hard to stop
and count our blessings
even knowing how quickly they go POOF!

ENGAGEMENT
6/24/22
Enroute to Chicago

I mighta thought
it woulda, coulda
in any case shoulda
have come sooner to my awareness
how love making in any form
requires total presence
and complete concentration
not mustered in a moment,
but rather only cultivated over time
with purposeful practice,
innumerable sources of distraction
and diversion
being exactly that;
our attention span
shockingly short;
and our discomfort level
with intimacy of all kinds
directly correlated
to our unfamiliarity with it
and to our hesitation
to explore the complete unknown
while simultaneously experiencing
to the most powerful force in the universe.

MIRRORS II
7/2/22

Struggles are life's way
of letting us know
there are lessons to be learned.

Suffering is what arises
when we resist, avoid, or ignore
those teachings. *

The scale of any problem
diminishes as we face it,
but grows as we dance around it.

Life is hardest
when we're hardly working at it.
It requires conscious, consistent, and
- luckily only sometimes, but at critical moments -
enormous effort.

It's no mystery.
Make our lives good
and they get better.
Look in the mirror when not.

* Emmet Fox

PROGRESS
7/31/22

We certainly aren't
what we once were,
nor then what we are now.

We know more and see better,
but hard pressed to explain
exactly how.

Maybe listening more deeply
is the real difference,
more aware of what is meant.

More relaxed.
Closer to peace.
Ever more content.

When we let go,
We come to realize
love's more about giving than receiving.

When better able to accept,
We've less need to understand.
Seeing is not required for believing.

GRANDSON
8/2/22

It's not so long ago
- just a minute or two -
that your dad read to me
just like you now do.

You get to hang with him
just like I did,
playing all sorts of games
... I'd seek when he hid.

But more often, we'd talk
- he did like you do.
Whenever we stopped
never meant we were through.

For life carries onward,
and true love never ends.
We all start out as strangers
who turn out to be friends.

Perhaps someday,
on similar occasion,
you'll pass on this message
to a child of your relation.

RELATIVITY
8/4/22

Having flunked mathematics,
Einstein had to rely on his wife for his theory's calculations.
So he didn't have to be a total genius.
and, thankfully, neither do we.

Among his amazing discoveries:
time speeds up or slows down
depending on our own rate of travel.

This explains why busy people never catch up,
since time accelerates as quickly as they do.

It also tells us that while we cannot stop time,
we can slow it down
merely by making the most
of each passing moment.

So quite literally
the more we stop to appreciate life,
the more time and greater opportunities
will we have for its enjoyment.

And this is the REALLY crazy thing:
doing so slows time even further,
providing even more chances
for happiness and fulfillment,
and even greater likelihood for
love, peace, and freedom.

The result is not only a better life,
but a measurably longer one as well.
Maybe this is not quite the immortality we wish for,
but we're closer to it than we imagine.

LAUNDRY
8/17/22

It's so easy to get caught
in the spin cycle of life,
especially when not aware.

Wet and dizzy,
going 'round and 'round,
trying to hold on to our share.

When we realize
it's not even ours,
that's when facts get laid bare.

We are limited
by our way of seeing,
blinded by all the glare.

We can opt
for a clean bill of health
available, if we so dare.

When we adapt to life
and not the other way around,
everything fits as if wash-and-wear.

LESSONS/Various
8/25/22

What tastes best to me
is frequently not the best for me.

Today we're learning
tomorrow's lessons.

Whatever we can't find
is right where we forgot we put it.

Things are never how they seem,
yet always seem how they are.

Every burden comes with commensurate benefits.
And vice versa.

Getting what we need is always worth the price,
but the actual cash is only part of the cost.

Closer we get to the top of the mountain,
slipperier the trail,
more precarious the hike,
longer the fall,
greater the panorama.

We expend more effort
getting where we're going
than we do being there.

WEDDING WISHES
8/29/22

Enjoy each step along the way.

Stay open to the possibilities.

Resist complacency.

See the blessings and look for the miracles.

Say "Please". And "Thank you".

Always look for the best in each other.

Fall in love over and over again.

ADVISORS
9/10/22

In these difficult times, we are blessed
to have so many experts who seem to know
exactly what other people should do.

They are unhesitant in exercising their right
to tell others what they should think,
how they should change,
and where they can go if they don't.

With so many doing this to each other,
everybody is too busy to listen to anybody.

Since no one follows anyone else's advice
or even - heaven forbid - their own,
matters which require engagement
tend to drift.

And since nature abhors a vacuum, *
societies throughout history have proved:
the absence of evolution fosters devolution.

And earthquake faults have shown:
shifts not happening slowly and continuously
are as precipitous as they are calamitous.

* Aristotle

PROSPECTING
10/1/22

We look for magic
in life's so-called realities
but it's only found in its mysteries.

Life bounces us
between extremes
when balance is only found in between.

Great debates swirl
regarding what constitutes education
instead of what learning requires.

We are inhibited
by thoughts in our heads
which tell us: believe only what you see.

We should instead be feeling
from the place in our hearts
which already knows what's real.

That's where our brain is located,
or so ancient sages believed,
and perhaps they're correct.

Possibilities expand beyond what is probable
when unconstrained
by what seems inevitable.

TRAJECTORY
10/6/22

We view any opening
of the window of opportunity
as small and fleeting,
but what if it's neither?

It is, after all, our perspective
that shapes our perceptions,
and not the other way around.

Counterintuitively,
both of those shape our positions,
not so-called facts or reality(s).

This makes it equally possible,
and perhaps even more likely
opportunity is not a window at all,
but rather a door which has no lock
and swings both ways.

Or perhaps it's not a window or door.
Maybe it's the air we breathe,
the moment we're in,
or the path we're on ...
all asking just one thing of us:
keep going!

IRONIES
10/17/22
North Natomas

Just as energy drinks leave us depleted,
and seeming winners eventually defeated,
we always find what we seek
and become strong only after realizing we're weak.

When we presume, we assume ...
that's when troubles resume.
We resolve the irreconcilable in our favor
by weaving stories depicting us as the savior.

When we stop attempting to control,
we discover our actual role.
And when we accept our defects,
we stop acting like rejects.

HOME ADDRESS
10/18/22

'Not here' is our most frequent place of residence,
for it's where we spend most of our time
and, apparently, where we're most comfortable.

And 'mental meandering' seems to be our primary occupation,
as stories we don't even know we're telling ourselves
not only shape our narrative
but also define our destination
and the pleasure of our journey.

Psychological muscles needed to focus our attention
are flaccid, to put it mildly.
Underdeveloped as they go largely unused,
we often find ourselves in places
we didn't intend to go.

"Now hear this ...", the captain of the ship used to say
over the intercom in WWII.
Turns out that's a pretty good recipe for having
all shipmates present and accounted for:
"Now. Here. This." *

How easily we miss this point
and all others
when adrift asea
rather than moored in safe harbor.

* Price Pritchett

REVELATION(S)
10/18/22
Sacramento

What we often dismiss as coincidence,
or at best consider serendipitous,
might more accurately seen as synchronistic.

When physicists, naturalists and theologians agree
on the interconnectedness of all things,
we need no mystical explanations to appreciate life's miracles.

I witnessed them this week
after twice noticing my mind drifting
in directions neither adverse nor constructive,
but not particularly conducive to tranquility.

Before attaching such aimless thoughts
to their unhelpful conclusion,
I was interrupted both times
by calls from people seeking help
from the very guy who needed it.
Of all people.

Only when positioning ourselves to be of service
do we awaken from our own self-absorption
and (re)discover this not-so-secret fact of life.

And only when looking for life's miracles
do we find them.

PERSPECTIVE
11/2/22
All Souls Day

We have no idea what's coming hereafter
but, for all we know,
it could be better than this. *

We honor this 50/50 proposition in theory
but treat it as less than likely in practice.
What else explains our disproportionate attention
to mind/body over heart/spirit?

Our narrowed definition of well-being
is reflected in the culture's limited vocabulary
for conveying these ideas,
and its proclivity to fixate
on value rather than meaning. **

The answer to such questions are unknowable,
but perhaps their main purpose
is to provide a frame of reference
for starting to look now
at what we cannot see until then.

* Socrates

** Viktor Frankel

TRAVELING
11/6/22
Maui

We're all on a schedule,
operating according to an agenda
of which we're at least somewhat unaware.

We live according to a plan
based on objectives
as important as they are unclear.

Our intentions are good, we assume.
Even better if we knew what they were,
and saw their drawbacks as clearly as their benefits.

We are being driven relentlessly onward
by an ego we cannot locate,
appetites we will never satisfy,
and desires with sources unknown
but not uninfluential.

This makes for a lifelong exploration,
with continuous adventures
revealing to us only in hindsight
what is and isn't.

Oh! The places we go *
to get to where we are,
be happy there,
and wish for no other.

ILLUMINATION
11/10/22

We all know something about everything,
but not much about anything.
Therein lies our dilemma.

Realizing we don't know much
but believing we know better than others,
we're not big on listening ... especially to suggestions.

This combination of superiority and vulnerability
makes life simultaneously rickety and slippery,
especially when our sense of communality starts to fray.

Bodies in motion tend to stay
in the direction they're headed,
the physicists among us predict,
making dramatic reversals possible
but extremely unlikely.

Yet evolutionary forces move toward improvement
- relentlessly and inevitably, albeit only eventually -
which makes grim appearances not only common
but also, uncommonly deceptive.

We don't need to know what's coming next
to do what must be done now.
The path forward is revealed
Whenever we shine our light on it.

* Dr. Suess

PAVING STONES
11/11/22
Veterans Day

How odd life's glory is experienced
at its most difficult moments,
when we're most likely to miss it.

Everyone is an artist
creating their own masterpiece,
but we're usually too close to appreciate it.

Why is it so hard to see
our sole purpose for being
is to bring love to life?

Part of the answer to these puzzles
lies in Carl Jung's concept of archetypes. *

He says we're all some combination
of King/Queen, warrior, Magician and Lover ...
these roles interacting in ways we're only partially conscious.

If not balanced in relation to each other,
darker characters emerge instead:
Shadow King/Queen, Dark Knight,
Sorcerer's Apprentice and Addict,
all of whom cater to our basest instincts and inclinations.

This is a reminder that weaknesses
are strengths taken to excess, *
hidden by those supposedly good intentions
by which the road to hell is paved.

* Socrates

SUGGESTIONS
11/15/22

It is difficult to listen to anyone,
but the one hardest to hear is ourselves.
Try as we might, and no matter how often,
it's a struggle to reach our top shelves.

That's no reason to stop trying, of course,
or to let ourselves get downhearted.
No train can reach its destination
if from the station it hasn't departed.

Just because we know what to do
doesn't mean it gets done.
It takes more than information
to know how a race gets won.

That involves preparation and practice
and, even then, there is no assurance.
Our personal best may not win the prize,
but each attempt builds up our endurance.

It's humbling but not necessarily humiliating
to restart again and again.
Best to start by listening to our own advice
as if it comes from a friend.

TIMING
11/19/22

It's never too late
to live a life
good as well as great
by reducing all manner of strife.

We are only one choice away
from love, joy, and peace. *
Delay only allows
wallowing to increase.

Rather than live
avoiding the looming threat,
we can accept every trial
without resistance or fret.

Things are neither good nor bad;
that's determined by our thinking. **
Nothing makes us happy or sad;
it's our attitude which creates such linking.

Perhaps the most difficult task
is to accept that which we don't approve.
Take this step, and then we bask
at the center of a glorious groove.

* Byron Katie

** William Shakespeare, Buddha, and others

#GRAMPATIME
11/20/22

We're too close to our own kids
and not close enough to others'
to realize parents don't have
as much influence over their kids
as we'd like to think.

From our grandkids we learn
personality is largely innate.
We each are unique from the very start,
making self-determining choices
- large and small -
which define personality
while expressing individuality.

This process can be nurtured,
but requires no one's permission.
The more it is inhibited,
wider and more wildly does it fly.

The challenge is not to mold or guide,
but rather to encourage
their self-discovery process
and celebrate its unfolding.

We have an opportunity to be for them
what we have a hard time
being for ourselves:
the cheerleader instead of the coach.

That's what grandparents can do best.