

EXPLORATION(s)



BOOK EIGHTEEN
RoberT.

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

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

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Cover: Autumn 2022 Hike in the Catskills Mountains on Kaaterskill Rail Trail
Digital refinement by Sion Michel.

Books 1 to 17 @
<http://www.robertvtobin-mpa.com/personal.html>

SINCE
9/22/22
Upstate NY

COLUMBUS DAY (formerly)
10/12/22

There is nowhere to go,
so no chance we have arrived
- especially when it comes to perfection.
Of anything close, we're deprived.

Instead, we just keep growing - or not.
No option called "lateral drift."
When we finally accept this,
our spacecraft begins to lift.

We experience liberation
only after we choose it,
AND do what it takes to keep it;
otherwise, we lose it.

So it goes for peace and joy.
Also freedom and love.
They only come from within,
not from below or above.

There's plenty of travel options,
but we never really go anywhere.
We're in the place we've always been;
the only question is whether we're there.

There may be no greater common sense
than the collective perception
that we are where we are
in a world that is solid, stable, and stationary.
Indeed, unmovable ... earthquakes notwithstanding.

And yet ...

1,000 mph = Earth rotating on its axis each day
+67,000 mph = Earth rotating around the sun each year
+504,000 mph = Sun moving thru Milky Way galaxy
+90,000 mph = Milky Way moving in Local Group of galaxies
+1,350,000 mph = Local Group moves toward nearest galaxy*

1,922,090 mph = cumulative speed of our 'unmoving' Earth

Worth pondering whenever we feel things are moving too slow,
or not changing at all.

* 45 million light-years away

SOURCE: <https://stardate.org/astro-guide/faqs/how-fast-earth-moving-through-space>

REFLECTION
11/9/22
Maui

INQUIRY(s)
11/9/22
Maui

One of life's many blessings:
we never really know how badly we need a vacation
until actually on one.

Wonder how many other ways
self-protection is the best form
of self-preservation.

Certainly, in school,
where we are too focused
on getting good grades
(or not flunking)
to worry about whether what we're learning
will ever be applicable ... to anything.

Definitely when parenting,
as we are too busy keeping kids well
to even imagine all the ways they can get sick.

Ever thereafter,
we're too relieved to have made it this far
to think about how much further there is to go.

It's reassuring to know
life is looking out for us
when we're so busy looking out for ourselves.

We're all serving an indeterminate sentence,
knowing its conclusion but not its duration.

Whether a decade, year, month, day, hour or minute,
the only question is whether the interim is well-spent.

Do we sit idly in a prison cell of our own making,
focusing on another's part rather than looking for our own?

Do we spin purposelessly,
driven to dissipating distraction(s)?

Can we remember there are no time-outs,
review of the ref's decisions, or mulligans?

Are we unaware the only moment is Now?

Are we fully embracing the opportunity(s) available
as gifts to be received?

Can we find the trees
while still seeing the forest?

Do we let it flow while it still can?

It's not a matter of if, but when our time comes.
Not now perhaps, but not never.

THANKS GIVING
11/24/22

This day of celebration
sharpens alignment between head, heart and soul;
fosters closer correlation
between thoughts, feelings, words, and actions;
and opens us in ways that make it more likely
we might actually be so when the necessity arises.

It is also reminding us to avoid distinctions
that lack any meaningful difference.

Like darkness, for example, since it's not really a thing.
Rather, it only describes the relative presence/absence of light.

How odd relative brightness has this "dark" connotation.

Or how it is used to characterize
seeming adversities preferably avoided.

They aren't just a part of the process,
but an essential ingredient
in any recipe for personal development. *

Associating darkness with negativity
constrains full appreciation of life's complexity.

Alleviating all such barriers to connection
to ourselves and each other
is the highest celebration of thanksgiving.

* "The Parameters of our Cage"
by C. Fausto Cabrera and Alex Soth

RECEPTION (1)
11/25/22

"It's hard to say," says Karen.
And even harder to do.

To get beyond all that was
without ignoring difficulties encountered,
or forgetting their lessons.

To stay out of what could,
Would, or should be
without denying all those possibilities.

To remain here at least for now,
then now, and now again,
skipping the light fantastic
without defaulting into fantasy.

Such opportunities for revelation
patiently await our acceptance,
and appreciation.

LETTING GO
11/25/22

It's called "paying it forward"
as if there is some other time we can give back
what has been so freely given to us.
No wonder we so easily get off track.

We might instead say: "pull it forward,"*
as this more accurately describes
the hard work involved in shifting the paradigm
of a culture which so deeply inscribes.

We're robbing from those in the future
who will see only then what we're doing now.
Exploiting rather than sacrificing.
Showing off when we should have shown how.

In young people's hands, the world's better off.
They better balance their heads and hearts,
more clearly know best what's most important,
and very willing to do their part(s)

The best thing at this point is to let them
by getting the hell out of the way.
They and their kids are quite ready,
and it's time that they had their say

*Brandi Carlile

KNOWLEDGE
12/3/22.

One of the trickiest aspects of life, Karen says,
is to have hopes without expectations.

As each moment arises,
we do our best to let go of all else
and appreciate life as it unfolds,
not thinking or feeling it should be otherwise.

Seen in this way,
the bumps and grinds along the path are neither,
instead fostering the edification
that sharpens our readiness
for whatever's next.

Perhaps this is what is meant by "intelligent design,"
coming from whatever source or none
(as your personal theology permits)
and drawing from each experience its fullness.

Call it the most personalized form of "Special Delivery."

Each of us knows what we'd rather forget:
life is both longer and shorter than we think;
what we perceive as coincidental is never random;
and our state of mind determines the quality
... and probably also the quantity...
of our lives. *

*Wayne Dyer

BALANCE
12/4/22

GIFTS
Christmas Eve
12/24/22

And yet another good one, Karen rightly notes:
we don't want to be – or be around - someone who knows it all,
but also want to avoid those who know nothing.

The trick lies in how we hold ourselves meanwhile,
as our mind constantly tells us what we think is right;
what we see is truly how it is;
and how we feel is what everyone else should be feeling ...
or at least those who are paying attention.

And not just our mind does this,
but our society as well.

In school, we reward those who have answers
rather than those who learn to ponder the questions.

In business, we celebrate those who bet luckily in the short term
rather than those striving for long-term sustainability.

And too often we love those who look (rather than are) good.

Herein lies what might be life's greatest challenge:
finding our way from there to here
without compass, flashlight, map or manual;
trusting ourselves neither too much nor too little;
and treating others as the fellow wanderers
and wonderers
that they are.

At least one more holiday season
with family gathered around.
It's not like we need a good reason,
or that one can't be found.

This one is especially dear
after all everyone's been through.
Will we ever again be so near?
Or get to choose what we do?

We can today at least,
receiving the best possible gift,
blessed with a scrumptious feast while
knowing the sands of time shift.

Too busy enjoying this one
to worry about whether it's the last.
Just see it all the way till it's done,
as it goes by plenty fast.

Expressions love
are always welcome and timely.
Like the flight of a Christmas dove,
which touches our hearts and lands ever so finely.

An entire holiday devoted to giving,
and the chance to learn about receiving.
Mastering both is the essence of living
when in that Spirit we start believing.

INVENTORY
12/31/22
NewYear's Eve

Our bodies are well suited for their purpose
in ways we might not realize or appreciate.

The brain gets bored by repetition,
encouraging mental as well as physical exercise.
Conversely, it gets stimulated by excitement,
allowing us to exhilarate
in the simplest of things.

Our body gets sore from exertion,
allowing us to enjoy the blessings of rest
and the benefits of stretching
- literal and figurative.

Our egos crave the habitual,
enabling us to experience mastery
while entertaining the illusion of predictability.

Our spirit aspires to tranquility,
calling us to look inside
for what we're seeking out there.

Experience(s) strengthen our capacity
to see progress even as bodies devolve,
and to let go even as we hold on.

DELUSION
1/6/23

How is it that we
are more likely to see consequences of a choice
which are positive and beneficial,
but its downside(s) less so?

Not exclusively, of course.
But we rarely say:
"All hell may break loose,
but I think I'll do it anyway. "

Ego makes our brains are self-selective,
not by ignoring others' interests
but rather by prioritizing ours above all.

It is not easy to recognize this potential
... proclivity really...
for self-sabotage.

We don't even know what we think we do,
yet have no idea what we don't.

The former gets us in trouble
because the latter keeps us in ignorance.

Not often do we actually pursue
the things we're trying to find...
such as peace or brotherhood,
without which life's a grind.

Instead, we get involved
in every business but ours,
forging the cell of our confinement
in a prison lacking bars.

The problem with going the right way
is this path is not well tread.
Yet finding that trail is not so difficult;
it's the one most others have fled.

It goes uphill very steeply
with unexpected twists and turns,
requiring perseverance physical and mental
as each step onward burns.

To remain on course, no matter what,
and learn lesson 'long the way
is the invitation extended each moment
and the blessing available each day.

It's not untoward
to return to pleasurable places
or duplicate positive experiences.

Trickier is our equal and opposite tendency
to avoid unpleasant or painful ones.

Both are equally informative
– illuminating in their own way.
Their subliminal dimension
speaks to us silently
while guiding us surreptitiously.

Who knew attraction and aversion
had so much in common?

There's nothing wrong
with having inhibitions
as long as they are ours,
freely – but not cheaply - chosen.

It's the ones we don't know about
or don't think we have
that throw us off the Right Road.

STORMS
1/16/23

Nothing like getting what we wish for
to want more of we don't got.
Whether it be rain or attention;
we pine for what we have not.

We never appreciate what we have as much
as we do after it's gone.
It's as remarkable as it is predictable,
like the chess player foregoing a pawn.

It happens, sure enough,
again, and again, and again.
Expectations are continually defied
as to Reality all must bend.

But as Darwin reminds us:
life unfolds in the best interests of all
especially when it seems otherwise.
It's as if everything responds to the call...

... to return once more to the center
and regress, as we must, to the mean
in response to forces as sure
as they are surely unseen.

DELIVERANCE
1/21/23

It's a most surprising discovery:
freedom is confining, not liberating.

Everyone's option to do as they please
is restricted by everyone else's right to do the same,
leaving our range of choices
somewhere this side of unlimited.

This latitude to go one's own way
is also infringed by another limitation:
who creates the roads, bathrooms,
and other amenities needed
- metaphorically speaking -
to facilitate our mobility?

Our choices are neither as unilateral
as we like to think,
nor are led to believe.

How easy it is
to be oblivious to the obvious.
Might this be our natural state?

If things were
the way we believe they should be...
Would that not be great?

But think again about
whether it would be as much fun
to experience a predictable fate.

Believing we know what we think
precludes further exploration;
wouldn't that be something we'd hate?

And yet we prefer ignorance
– perhaps because it's so attainable?
But then we get stuck in the grate?

At a minimum,
life teaches us patience in the interim
as, if nothing else, we learn how to wait.

So simple, and yet so hard.
So apparent, and yet so obscure.

The chances of getting what we want go down,
and getting what we don't go up,
to the same degree we try to control the outcome.

More so, and faster, if we do so
through deception or deceit.

Those odds improve significantly
when we bring tolerance, faith, or acceptance to the process.
Yet when most needed,
these are often not our first (or second) inclination.

Despite ample evidence, it still come as a shock:
we are least likely to be at our best at the worst moments,
and more likely to be at our worst when our best is required.

Accepting the reality of the former is one step
toward making the latter less true.

EXPECTATIONS (1)
2/9/23

Since everything has functionality,
and therefore value,
the reason for distractions isn't just to be distracting.
There must be good reasons
we strive to be sidetracked.

One might be to avoid facing
the uncertainties of life,
and certainty of death.

Another could be so we don't see
or even think about how razor thin
is the line between sanity and insanity.

Yet another: to keep us from remembering to remember
traumas which distort our perceptions and reactions
to the paradoxes life conjures.

There are undoubtedly other reasons,
but that's a couple possibilities.

Among what Dickens might have called
life's "great expectations"
is that things not only get easier,
but better.

They do if we look at it a certain way
which only comes to us after getting over
the shock that they don't and won't.
At least not necessarily.

It would help if life came with a warning sign:
"Mental manufacturing ... Hardhat required."
At least we'd be alerted
when crossing into the Danger Zone.

It might also be better truth-in-packaging
if we said "I think" when we're thinking "I know."
The former more accurately expresses what is happening,
but the latter falsely conveys confidence unjustifiably.

All expectations are wagers on future outcomes
when our best bet is to keep our attention in the present.
Any forecasts lay beyond our calculation powers,
projecting an implication of control
we do not actually possess.

Things are indeed always getting better,
but not necessarily in the ways we expected.

We call it our path
though it goes in no specified direction
or toward any actual destination,
except in the ultimate sense.

No such thing as moving forward or backward,
or even positively or negatively,
except in our own minds.

And there is no movement, per se.
Growth is the only option.
Change is not just inevitable. It's unavoidable.

Were it not for the fact that we're on it,
the very concept of a path is a misnomer.
It's more of a security blanket for the mind -
a trip for which there is no guidebook.

The experience of a journey is universal.
But our sense of momentum
does not always correlate with achievement of progress
whose absence is not always evident.

Marvels – miracles even – passed along the way
go unseen unless looked for
on an expedition going nowhere but Here.

There is meaning in every metaphor,
but their message can get lost
in our storytelling
... especially to the story teller.

It's true.
We really can accomplish
twice as much as we think we can.

But it will cost twice as much,
take twice as long,
and be twice as hard as we think.

Even when we've made allowance for this,
it's best to think again ...
... and again.

The foreseeable
is always obscured by the unanticipatable,
making it difficult to find
what seemed so clear from afar.
This makes it hardest to reach
what is easiest to miss:
that which is right in front of us.

The results are definitely worth the effort,
and in many ways better than we imagined,
but only if we don't confuse them
with what we hoped
- knowingly, or not-
or what return was required
to justify our initial investment.

It's true: our reach usually exceeds our grasp,
but what's attainable is greater than we expect.
It just won't be as easy as we think.

LABELING
3/10/23

MEMORIAL
3/10/23

We call it “communication”
because we incorrectly believe
that’s what actually happens.

What a difference it would make
if we called it what it is:
miscommunication.

A speaker believes they’re saying what they’re thinking;
their words convey their message;
and their messaging accurately reflects their intentions.

A listener thinks they’ve heard what was said;
processed it without any bias or other interference;
and drew the conclusions inferred by the messenger.

This makes at least six chances for things to go awry,
double in crucial situations,
and quadruple when either party is in stress.
And honestly ... When are we not?

Better to call it what it is,
and deal with it accordingly.

After all, the best time to know
when you are walking in a minefield
is when you’re actually doing so.

“It was 20 years ago today ...“
as Sergeant Pepper’s band used to sing,
marking our sister Moira’s passing
with smiles and tears and all that lies between.

If we only knew then
What we wish we knew now:
how quickly life passes,
and how fleeting the chances to share it.

She made an indelible mark on so many lives.
Her smile found its way to your heart
without any stops in between.
She could dig in like no other,
getting to the core of a matter in seconds flat,
and always had time to see it through.

There’s no way to overstate her impact,
or the lightness by which she carried heavy loads.
She had many attributes
– courage, tenacity, audacity, to name a few –
but capacity to love was her greatest strength.

She leaves us to finish what she started,
and carry it on as she did
to places no one suspected possible.

DISCOVERY
3/15/23

There are many things we see without noticing,
and some we can't till we do.
Some things we finish as soon as we start,
and with others we'll never be through.

It's the same with transitions,
which can seem like they're miles away.
Turns out they're already happening,
affecting thoughts and feelings today.

Not just ours, but others' too
as we're all caught up in the swirl;
looking at life's reverberations
as it each one was a pearl.

No way we're unaware this is happening,
especially when we think it is not.
The price of paying attention is rising,
requiring every penny we've got.

Finding our self is harder than it looks,
since it often involves getting lost.
It requires lots of diligence,
but the outcome is worth twice the cost.

LIES
3/16/23

Things are getting worse.

Cynicism pays.

Others should/will conform to our expectations.

Anything (else) would be better than this.

Individual interests supersede collective good.

It's all about content, not context.

Making accusations of another's ideological bias
are not one's own attempt to indoctrinate.

We can get tremendous benefit at minimal cost.

Life is an intellectual experience.
Thinking will get us through it.

The end justifies the means.

We learn from history.

MISNOMERS
3/19/23

Just because an idea is counterintuitive
doesn't make it isn't true or useful.

For example, it's suggested that love is a one-way street. *
We usually think of it as an investment with an expected return,
but that makes it a loan instead of a gift.

In fact, real love involves giving, giving,
and giving again for its own sake.
And it's for our own benefit, and not theirs.
Not a favor we bestow on others,
but rather a present we give ourselves.

In fact, the truest form of love
guarantees there will be no return,
as every religion challenges us to direct it
towards those we don't even like.

Another example: it's suggested we're better off hopeless. **
Such wishing attempts to impose our will over something
about which we know nothing: the future.
It focuses our attention on what isn't instead of what is,
narrowing perceptions of Common Good
to personal self-interest.

Better to be appreciative of all we encounter,
and not miss any opportunity to welcome it.

GRATIFICATION(S)
3/24/23

Childhood lessons are our greatest teachers,
if we remember them.

I recall one evening long ago,
arriving at a house on the lake
and all of us running down to throw rocks in the water.
The fun of the next day's splish-splashing was greatly reduced
by having to step on each one of those rocks.

And so it is with life,
where a momentary enjoyment the previous night
can adversely affect those of the following day
in ways we literally can't see,
but could have easily anticipated.

This can also be said of rock throwing of all types,
as all gratifications are temporary by definition
and often outweighed by continuing ripple effects,
some fleeting and non-binding
but many irretrievable and unending.

This is not to disparage or discourage fun,
but instead to prevent some now
from diminishing better ones later.

*Shantaram

**Pema Chodron, Byron, Katie, and others.

BECOMING
3/29/23

Politicians politicize.
Profiteers profitize.
Prophets prophesize.
Romantics romanticize.
Incrementalists incrementalize.
Pessimists pessimize.
Optimists optimize.
Monopolists monopolize.
Skeptics skepticize.
Militarists militarize.
Compromisers compromise.
Victims victimize.
Sexualization sexualizes.
Synthesizers synthesize.
Literalists literalize.
Liberals liberalize.
Demons demonize.
Antagonists antagonize.
Critics criticize.

BIRTHDAY REMBRANCE
4/5/23

Hard to believe
our mother got us all
on the merry-go-round called Life
without getting spun off (or out) herself.

Laws of Physics alone
would argue otherwise.
(They don't call it
centrifugal FORCE for nuthin).
And let's not get started
on the Laws of Economics...

But as the evidence shows,
she didn't just live life.
She loved it.
She loved loving,
and being loved.
She loved being alive,
and boy was she ever!

And she showed us how and why
there are sooooo many reasons
to smile.

ARISING
4/10/23
Easter Sunday

We were continually drilled on the necessity for salvation
when perhaps the focus should have been on our redemption.

The former concentrates on deficits,
and the resulting sense of lack;
the implication of truths beyond our grasp;
and admonitions not to do
the very things that make us human.

The latter directs attention to the utilization of capabilities;
the embrace of the purpose(s) for which we are here;
and full realization of values to which we are born.

Both involve love, of course.
The former focuses it outward
on a savior and those promoting him/her/it.
The latter focuses on the Spirit within we often overlook,
its powers that bring life to us
and us to life.

REMINDERS
4/12/23,
Tempe, Arizona

Dogs and kids remind us
of what we always know yet
so easily and quickly forget.

Like how quickly wants become needs
whose best time for satisfaction is RIGHT NOW!!!

Or how fast our perceptions become reality
to the exclusion of all other possibilities.

Or how easily we equate what we don't like
with what we don't know or haven't tried.

Or how we quickly reach
for what feels and tastes good now,
no matter how bad it may make us feel later.

Or how adamantly we insist
what we're getting back is not a function
of what we're putting out.

Yet we wonder why kids and pets don't acquire
the very lessons we've yet to learn.

SEEING
4/17/23
Grand Canyon, Arizona

GUIDANCE
4/19/23
Zion National Park, Utah

How often we allow past experiences
to dictate present perceptions and resulting plans.

A family trip in my youth
to this beautiful spot on a brief flyby
shaped my impression not only of the place,
but also, the best way to explore it.

Decades later, we did a similar flyby
– go, look, and move onward –
although the hundred-degree mid-July heat
may have had something to do with it.

Third time's a charm, as they say,
as we are discovering a variety of natural wonders,
interesting places and even more interesting history
just beyond the rim of our previous wanderings.

People who know such things*
describe this as the W. Y. S. I. A. T. I. Effect
- the misimpression that What You See Is All There Is -
Not just a limiting, but blinding, influence.

Unless recognized and overcome,
it dooms us to what we're seeing
rather than what is actually happening.

* Daniel Kahneman

Rather than start by describing
what we'd see on the nature walk he was guiding,
Ranger Bill invited everyone to stop,
close their eyes,
and listen to the chirping birds and passing river.
And he encouraged us to notice the silence
that lies beneath, beyond, and within us.

Rather than just seeing the sights,
he invited us to be in the moment.

This pushed us toward a different way of exploring
forces of time and nature which carved the canyon.

He described a world inhabited by native peoples
and by emigrants pushing them out,
who then unsuccessfully eked out a living on hard ground
without the knowledge and wisdom of those they evicted.

And he told us about present-day challenges
of processing countless visitors daily to the park
while minimizing their impacts on its fragile environment.
Sound familiar?

Looking beyond what we can see
is the only way of discovering what's actually here.

SPRING TIME
4/30/23.

Unlikely as it may seem,
we can be the chief obstacle
to our own contentment.

In addition to all our biological and autonomic influences,
the resistance predicted by the laws of physics
makes us adverse to new experiences.

Rather than allowing them to teach us
about our insecurities and vulnerabilities,
we often find ourselves avoiding
the learning opportunities they afford.

Among the greatest ironies of these lessons:
what we perceive as crap
becomes the compost
which fertilizes our inspirations and aspirations.
What starts out sticky and stinky
ends up fueling our growth.

As frequently noted, *
it's the flowers attract our attention and appreciation
but it's our dirty work with bare soil makes them bloom.

We must do our part before the gods can do theirs.

* Shunryu Suzuki
and many others

MAY DAY!
5/1/23

It's been said* humans' greatest need is for attention.
So why are we least likely to give it to ourselves?

We offer it ever so frequently and freely to others.
Those who deserve it or don't,
ask for it or not,
or may neither want nor need it.

We also waste it on the past or future
about which we can do nothing,
instead of what we might be doing right now instead.

We direct it toward the side of the street that isn't ours
and on places and situations in which we will never be.
We worry about things that will never happen,
and carry shame/guilt that might not even be ours.

Attention may be like nature's other precious natural resources:
we determine whether it will be squandered.

* William Glasser, MD, PhD.

EXPLORATION
5/4/23

Our bodies sometimes try to 'help' us
In ways completely unhelpful.

In times of tension or trauma,
our breathing becomes rapid and shallow,
depleting the flow of oxygen to the brain
when we most need our wits about us.

Our brain reacts in similar fashion,
flooding our thoughts with judgments
based upon expectations and the assumptions
in situations when calmness and clarity are paramount.

Our mind manufactures self-fulfilling prophecies
as we seek evidence supporting what we already believe,
further narrowing our perspective
when it most needs expanding.

Our ego's resistance to the unfamiliarity of change
Increases the very things trying to avoid or ignore,
the reality of our mortality most of all.

The challenge is to remain aware enough
to stay alert in such circumstances,
maintaining coherence
between our feelings, thoughts, words, and actions
when physiological and psychological responses
pull us elsewhere.

No small feat involving a lifetime of work,
and the work of a lifetime.

RIPPLE EFFECTS
5/4/23

Perhaps the sole exception to the law of physics
about every action having an equal/opposite reaction
is any expression of loving kindness,
so long as we remain unattached to the outcome.

Such efforts are ends-in-themselves,
like a rock thrown into the pond of life.
It makes a splash which immediately disappears,
but not before sending out ripples in all directions.

Control over the landing draws our attention,
but exhilaration of the toss
is our greatest source of satisfaction.

Only after we realize this
does our universe respond,
not with an equal/opposite reaction
but one which reverberates harmoniously into infinity
regardless of whether we see, realize, or believe it.

Perhaps the most poignant lines in all of literature
is the quote from someone standing at the foot of the cross:
“He could save others, but himself he could not save.” *

OK, maybe he didn't actually say exactly that.

But if meaning is most often found in metaphor,
then that story's end is as apocryphal as any.

This could be read
as condemnation to helplessness and frustration,
seeding sources of resentments real and imagined.

Yet it also conveys a message:
we can - but ought not - go it alone,
and, in fact, don't need to.

Opening our mind and eyes wider
and extending our focus further
allows us to see resources aplenty to address any challenge.

These are found in the people around us,
the resiliency of nature that surround us,
and the higher powers of our best self within us.

Each of our choices make a statement
about who we are,
and why we are here.

FINDING
5/8/23

Three things can be said about the Present Moment:

- 1) It's here.
- 2) It is as it had to be.
- 3) It advances the best interests of all ... eventually.

We as easily to miss these truths
as the moment altogether,
lost in mental meanderings as we so often are.

And for good reason,
as the allure of the past and future
keeps us away from the only time that actually is.

Our brains, culture, and ego conspire to lead us elsewhere,
but pain aversion or avoidance are temporary solutions at best.
Only when we don't succumb to them
do we (re)discover the blessings hiding in plain sight
in Real Time.

VERBIAGE
5/14/23

Our sister Kath was the first of many since I've heard say
love is not a noun (a thing we get)
but rather a verb (something we do).

Makes me wonder how many other things
aren't really things at all, but actions.

Acceptance? For sure.

Tranquility? Most certainly.

Happiness and Joy? But of course.

Appreciation? Yep.

Learning and growth? Daily.

Spirituality? That too.

Mindfulness? Yessss!

Confidence and humility? Absolutely.

Fear and pride? Who knew??!?!??

Insight and perspective ... elusive as they are.
Intimacy and connection also.

None of these just show up on their own.

All are reached only by reaching for them.

PRESUMPTIONS
5/15/23

For all the time we spent in our heads,
you'd think we might better know what we're thinking.

For all the energy we devote to getting there,
you'd think we might better know where we're going.

For all the effort spent looking around,
you'd think we might better know what we're looking for.

For all the time we're supposedly listening,
you'd think we might hear better.

For all the interest we have in connecting,
you'd think we'd be better connected.

ADIOS AMIGO
5/18/23

Nothing like facing another's mortality
to put us in touch with our own.
We may ignore or deny, but can't avoid it;
this has been much shown.

Everyone's life is a story
which takes a lifetime to tell.
How we live our lives in the meanwhile
determines if that story ends well.

We're all somewhere between
that story's beginning and its end.
How we treat our self in the meantime
determines if it's writer's our friend.

This tale flies by oh! so quickly,
and it's over sooner than we expect.
How we treat fellow travelers 'long the way
determines if we've earned their respect.

For once, the message we're receiving
is the same as the one that got sent.
A friend's passing's the ultimate reminder:
it matters how energies get spent.

That story is never about us,
but that which we're only a part.
By connecting to others, we are connected
to the love living in our own heart.

ANTICIPATION
5/21/23

Is there a more odd or accurate statement
than "tomorrow never comes"?

We know this to be literally true,
but we certainly don't act like it.
Instead, we believe sometime other than now
is when things will be different
- and preferably better -
than they already and always are.

It requires suspension of disbelief
to see the future as the illusion it is,
rejecting the delusion of its allure(s).

This is not about the agreement
to meet up next Tuesday to (fill in the blank),
but rather about our tendency
to think something or someone besides us
will make things right
... according to our precise specifications, of course.

If that's not already happening now,
it probably won't.

(RE)DISCOVERY
5/27/23

PROGRESS
5/30/23

We didn't come this far
to only get this far,
but we might have.

We rarely leave
as soon as we should,
but we could have.

Nor did we wait till
it was too late,
but we would have.

We still don't know now
what we wish we knew sooner,
and we won't later either.

We can accept
what we cannot understand,
and never will.

We can give to ourselves
what we seek from others,
and they won't till we do.

We are advised* that comparative judgment
should only be applied to where we are now
in relation to where we used to be.

To how much we learned,
and whether we grew as a result.

To what extent our perspective has changed,
and our thoughts and behavior thereby.

To what this reflection reveals about our false beliefs,
and whether we have released them.

The focus of such analysis
is not on the past,
but on helping us be more aware
of where we are now
and continuing to do what we did to get us here.

All other considerations are not only off the table ...
there isn't even an actual table.

* "Courage to Change: One Day at a Time in Alanon"

RECEPTION (2)

5/30/23

NON-ATTACHMENT (1)

undated

Is there any greater example of the influence of ego
– chutzpa by its less technical title –
than the expectation that this world
adapt to our personal preferences
rather than the other way around?

How fervently we deny this illogical assertion
similarly attests to our deafness to the deftness
of the ego's effusion and elusiveness.

There's no greater demonstration of ignorance
than this exercise of willfulness,
as attempts to bring order to seeming chaos
have the opposite result,
and sows more of the same.

Only when letting go of control
do we realize we never had any,
and focus instead on our own
rather than others' thoughts and actions.

The connection happens when reaching out,
and not in the actual connecting.
It's the process - not the outcome - that's important,
but this lesson is not self-directing.

It is one unlearned repeatedly,
and apparently requires many a reminder
that things are never what they seem
and there's always opportunities to be kinder.

Seeing better requires removing the blinders
horses don't even realize they're wearing,
which work well in keeping them on the road
and pulling the load they're bearing.

Like them, we must remember:
it's about the journey and not its destination.
Only by doing so
can we avoid self-desecration.

FAMILY GATHERING
6/3/23
Fort Worth, Texas

At least one more time
we get the chance
to do what we do best.

Show up,
be together, and at least for a minute,
completely forget all the rest.

Seeing all these young(er) ones
take their turn at the plate;
they're not ones with whom to be messed.

Checking in with peers
fighting their way through life's battles,
and not just for a ribbon on their chest.

This helps us see ourselves better,
and life as it is.
After all, we're not here as a guest.

How we accept
instead of resist ...
perhaps that's the only real test.

Correlating attention and intention
– that's the way to higher consciousness-
sure as the sun sets in the west.

MIRRORS
6/4/23
Love Field, Texas

Seems there a few things harder
than to see ourselves in other people.

We have no trouble
thinking they should be like us,
but abhor the idea
we might be like them.

Perhaps this because we can see their weaknesses
overcoming their strengths
while finding our own assets superseding any defects.

What seems too embarrassing to contemplate
is a missed opportunity for our own edification.

Our sister Virg says the ideal combination
is having confidence counterbalanced by humility.
Since so many have too much of one or the other,
that's a mixture hard to get right.

Better to see others the way we see ourselves,
and ourselves the way we look at them.

How different our world would be if all did!

RECEPTION (3)
6/10/23

SPIRITUAL TREATMENT
6/14/23

Just because we have a thought
doesn't mean it's something to think.

Just because refreshment is offered
doesn't mean we should take the drink.

Just because it makes me feel better
won't guarantee it puts me in the pink.

Just because it makes me scared
doesn't make it something from which I should shrink.

Just because I say what needs to be said
doesn't make me a fink.

Just because it's written down
doesn't mean it deserves ink.

Just because it doesn't seem to be working
doesn't necessarily mean there's a kink.

Just because it exposes vulnerabilities
doesn't make it's something at which I should blink.

Just because my footing is slippery
doesn't mean I'm at an ice rink.

Just because the dishes are dirty
doesn't mean I should be at the sink.

Just because it seems OK
doesn't earn it a nod or a wink.

Just because I think it's gold
doesn't mean it's not zinc.

There is a god,
and I'm not it.

It brought me here,
already provided me what I need,
and will take me home when it's time.

It is within me always,
coaxing my best effort
and telling me all I need to know.

It connects me to those whose light helps illuminate my path
on the 12-inch journey from my head to my heart,
from my mind to my spirit, from illusion to reality,
from my own interests to the Greater Good.

This godly influence guides me and all others,
giving life to our deepest desires and wildest dreams.

Acceptance and gratitude are all that is asked
in return for these gifts,
encouraging me to value all that is
without hesitation and reservation.

This I gladly – but not always – do.

I am not the best judge of what is, might, or should be.

When letting go of the outcome, I enjoy the process
of exploring, experiencing, and celebrating
life's awe-inspiring wonders.

Let it be so.

REGRESSION TO THE MEAN
6/15 6/23

We look at our lives
the way some people play the stock market,
looking for consistently peak performance
without seeing it won't stay that way.

Better to look at the overall average,
and be content with small, slow, incremental improvement
rather than clinging to the outliers.

Athletes, doctors, and most of the rest of us
are domesticated* to strive for perfection
in some aspect of life
at the cost of mediocrity (or worse) in the rest.

Better to concentrate on being average,
using as our gauge continuity in performance over time
rather than fleeting attainments,
striving instead for a life
measured by qualities
rather than quantities.

* Miguel Ruiz: "The Four Agreements"

Our obsessions fuel our compulsions,
surely as night follows day.

We may not even know what they are,
but eventually they will have their say.

In each scene we act out our part,
as if there's a script for this play.

And forge ahead, ever onward,
no matter comes what may.

A commitment is required
to find, for us, a new way.

Much as we like to think otherwise,
life is not just a roll in the hay.

Only after we start walking
do we find our feet made of clay.

Yet with life's clock continually ticking,
there's no excuse for delay.

With every step further inward,
fewer obstacles get in the way.

PREPARATION
6/22/23

We are often advised* to move forward,
but what about facing forward instead?
With only one head on our shoulders,
and two feet firmly on the ground,
our mind is not so easily misled.

That's the suggestion of every guru
and theme of each spiritual text.
Embracing what is.
Ignoring what isn't.
Concerned only with what's next.

Every moment is like no other,
and yet we continually compare.
They may not be unique,
but they certainly are special.
Being here now's the best way to prepare.

*Yung Pueblo

The most difficult of all things to do
is something different,
as habit, fear and resistance
create their own form of inertia.

We're told* a body in motion
will remain in the direction it's headed,
unless intervened upon by an outside force.

Such forces are bombarding us daily,
and yet we sail ever onward,
blithely if not always blissfully
unaware of their relentless impacts
for better and/or worse,
for richer and/or poorer,
in sickness and/or health,
etc. etc. etc.

In this world,
change is the hardest thing to do
and yet the easiest thing to find.

After all: it's happening all around us
all the time.

*Sir Isaac Newton

THEIR WEDDING
7/5/23

Found myself telling friends about a wedding
we recently attended in an unfamiliar place.

I described how *THEY* suggested that *WE* wear head coverings;
how *THEY* had prayerbooks different from *OURS*;
and how *THEY* used a language different than *OURS*.

Those I was talking to found my choice of pronouns odd.
But this was precisely my point,
as I then talked about a little laminated card awaiting
where *WE* sat down in whatever *THEY* call pews.

MY pronouns changed at that moment,
as this card explained what *WE* should do to protect *OUR* selves
when – not if - one of *THEM* decides there's too many of *US*
and finds it advisable to “reduce the surplus population.” *

This card offered only three options:
Hide. Run. Fight back.

Hard to imagine being in such a sacred place,
where calmness and peacefulness are essential to reflection,
and these were the only three choices available.

Only then did I remember the security guard at the front door.

And so there *WE* were, one of *THEM* ...
wondering if today is the day
and now is the time.

That's too much power for anyone to have over others,
let alone *US*.

DAYBREAK AT LAKE MANZANITA
Mount Lassen National Park.
7/13/23

Tips of tall pines
catch the first rays of the sun.
Bird calls greet the new day.

Campers begin rustling
through available provisions.
Breakfast is on the way.

The chill in the air
makes the sleeping bag alluring.
Every one and thing has its place.

New adventures awaiting,
but no need to rush.
After all, life isn't a race.

At least not here
or anywhere else,
if the truth were known.

We don't got to,
but get to begin yet again
to harvest good seeds we've sown.

* Ebenezer Scrooge

NON-ATTACHMENT (2)
Mount Lassen National Park
7/13/23

We are so often reminded*
to let go of the outcome
in order to achieve serenity,
precisely because it seems like the other way around.

More likely we get things
where we want them,
and only then accept whatever results emerge.

Who knew such managerial efforts
– futile attempts to control, by a nicer name –
move us away from the very harmony we seek?

Well, the Buddhists for one,
who have sung the praises of non-attachment
for as long as anyone can remember.

And native peoples, for another,
who live in symbiosis with nature
and in appreciation for whatever Life offers.

If that's the place we all hope to end up,
how much better were it the place we begin?

When we let go of what's not ours,
there's no need to seek tranquility.
It finds us.

NEW BEGINNINGS
Mount Lassen National Park
7/14/23

Every meal begins at first bite*
and every kiss with a wish
that both will be followed by more,
in an ever more savory dish.

And not just through the lips,
but from thoughts and deeds in continuous supply
reflecting contentment of mind and heart,
upon which we can rely ...

... in good times as well as bad.
A very tall order
which involves more than simply doing our parts,
and greeting each other at our border.

Each moment is one to enjoy,
like any meal's first bite.
We honor our past by staying in the present,
making our future bright.

*The Daily Calm

*thanks JK

IGNORANCE
7/16/23

Didn't realize understanding
comes from acceptance,
and not the other way around.

Didn't realize I was projecting
a level of intentionality in others
I don't even possess myself.

Didn't see how those we judge disparagingly
we first dehumanize
by demonizing their morals,
- about which we hardly know anything -
and their motives
- of which we know nothing.

Didn't know I was expecting others to be mind-readers,
and needed to tell them what I think or feel.
They won't really know even when I do,
but more likely to than otherwise
and certainly not until then.

Didn't know I was holding others to a standard
I could never reach,
to tests I myself would flunk,
and expectations I could not fulfill.

Didn't find my willingness to love,
capacity for joy,
or accessibility to peace
until I searched for them.

ENTERTAINMENT
7/17/23

Each day we go to the circus, *
and decide if we watch the show
or become one of the clowns.

We usually don't even know we're there,
let alone that it's our choice
as to where we're sit.

And don't realize
others are in the same position,
making the same decisions
more and/or less knowingly.

Maybe they think we're the ones who sit to close
cheer (or boo!!) too loud,
or get up too often for popcorn.

No matter what seat we've chosen
or role we play,
it's up to us whether we enjoy the show.

*John E.

RANDOM THOUGHTS
7/18/23

We spend our life trying to figure out
what we will never understand.

It's never quite what it seems,
but always more than appears.

As expectations and assumptions decline,
possibilities increase.

Love what you see,
and you'll always see what you love.

The most real things in life
rarely seem like it.

We aspire to keeping our slate clean,
but it's never a blank one.

The most important things
hide where we cannot see them.

What makes us uncomfortable is what's unfamiliar.

Our position shapes the perspective
that creates our perceptions,
not the other way around.

RELATIVITY
7/20/23

One of life's most difficult things
is to avoid equating current position
with overall progress.

It's hard to see whatever is
as part of a continuum
extending from what was to what will be.

This makes NOW a crucial link
but not a singular one,
and hardly a permanent condition.

Life is an ongoing procession,
with whatever is now happening not only necessary
but also integral to our Universe's grand design.

This makes evolution not just a theory to be grasped,
but also an art form to be cultivated.

MORE THOUGHTS
7/27/23

STORYTELLING
8/4/23

We know life has complications,
but are never quite prepared when it gets complicated.

We think that we know,
but, in the end,
we only know what we think.

There's always more we don't know than we do.
But luckily, not knowing what that is
makes it a LOT easier to ignore.

We are reminded, every time we forget,
that life doesn't go as we expect.
Yet that doesn't stop us from expecting.

It's not just kids who want what they want when they want it,
and are willing to do almost anything to get it.

And it's not just kids who are subject
to the law of physics about conservation of energy,
which explains the universal tendency
to expend the least amount of effort possible
to get as much as we can.

We're not just the narrator
of the story we tell ourselves.

We also think of ourselves as its hero
when actually just one of many actors
on a stage larger than we can possibly imagine.

Not that we suffer from lack of imagination of course,
as we want the writer to give us better lines,
the lighting person to give us more spotlight,
and the PR person to give us better billing. *

None of these things change the story,
but they make it less interesting for all involved.

We live "in a room full of mirrors," **
making it impossible not to be
our own frame of reference.

And perhaps we should be,
while also taking full responsibility
for where, how, and who we are,
and not try to upstage anybody
... including ourselves.

*AA Big Book
**Jimi Hendrix

PERSPECTIVE
8/6/23

R. I. P.
8/7/2023

While life may not unfold in a precise order,
there is orderliness to it all
which defies capacity for description
as it passes by with or without permission.

Our attention is drawn to its content
even though the complexity of any issue's substance
is at least partially unfathomable
and thus not fully appreciable.

This distracts us from life's context which,
just like a river's flow,
has a degree of predictability
that can be observed
and even anticipated.

Not with certainty, of course,
but with greater likelihood
than our preoccupation with content will ever afford.

Just as framing can make or break any artwork,
more fully grasping the Big Picture
allows us to better see its details.

My favorite fruit is peaches,
partly because they arrived
at my favorite time of year: summer.

Not just because there was no school back then,
but also because we could stay home.
Not that we spent much time there,
being busy with baseball and bikes
and other pressing matters.

But also because of who was always there ...
the one who got us all here
and made sure we didn't leave it at that.

She was into truth-in-packaging before that was a thing.

And she was there
- unwavering though perhaps not exactly unflinching -
for our first steps and many later ones,
some better than others.

She still is present in our lives,
reminding us all of what is so easy to forget:
love is not the most important thing;
it's the only thing.

It's tricky what metaphors we choose.

I can see time in life as an hourglass
with less sand left than has already passed,
pushing me to get on with what's next
and thereby missing out on the here and now.

Or I can see this moment as never ending,
happening whether I know it, love it, or even like it.
The past and future as matters of perception,
and avoidable sources of distraction.

Or I can see time for what it is:
a man-made construct designed to bring reality
into conformity with my experience
when it should be the other way around.
It creates distinctions between things that aren't different,
and difficulties where there aren't any.

If things are neither good nor bad,
and it's our thinking that makes it so, *
then of what else can this be said?

Perhaps mistakes, desperation, anticipation, fears,
vulnerability, disaster, blessings, and maybe death itself?
None of these are what we think,
yet more than they appear.

* William Shakespeare

Taking out a new bottle of orange juice,
I unscrewed the top
and tried to pull off the plastic safety seal.

And I tried.
And I tried again.
Unsuccessfully.

I heard myself thinking:
geez... I wonder how senior citizens pull this thing off.

Only then did I remember,
to my shock and dismay,
that I am one of those.

Who knew?
Apparently not I.

It all went by so quickly.
And apparently unwittingly.

Had I missed any more of it than I did,
it would have gone by even faster.

Got the safety seal off... eventually.

Apparently, accurate self-appraisal
will take a while longer.