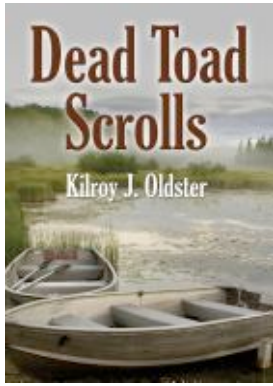


Dead Toad Scrolls

Kilroy J. Oldster





Narrative self-reflection regarding the timeless questions of humanity: syncretic investigation of time, community, religion, nature, justice, ethics, art, psychology, philosophy, illness, death, hope, fear, faith, friendship, love, hate, loneliness, fatigue, failure, shame, remorse, regret, and the role of memory, consciousness, language, free will, and identity. Examination of the ontological mystery - the baffle of being - and the cultural influence that school, sports, music, literature, television, films, politics, and law exert upon positing of an American's psyche.

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Why Tell the Story?

“For the present when backed by the past is a thousand times deeper.”

—Virginia Woolf

“If one is to try to record one’s life truthfully, one must aim at getting into the record something of the disorderly discontinuity, which makes it so absurd, unpredictable, bearable.”

—Leonard Woolf, “*The Journey Not the Arrival Matters.*”

Self-questioning and a desire to gain self-understanding is the fêted act of humankind. Why does each of us spend so much time constructing our personal story when there is so much other drama, beauty, and truth worthy of appreciation in life? All throughout our lives, we selectively draw on selected shavings of life events and reflect upon them through consciousness, creating an arranged catalogue of senses, faculties, and mental activities that compose our personal life story. Why do we need to know who we were, measure who we are now, and ponder what we will become? The lifespan of *Homo sapiens* is a highly dynamic process. Perception of a self is not simply about actuality. Human beings’ identities are self-generating and people constantly revise and recreate the story of their being. Coming-into-being, not being, is the highest expression of reality. We only attain the fullest knowledge of a living thing including ourselves when we know what it was, understand what it now is, and understand what it can become. We do not know the truth of a living thing’s existence until we discern its entire history from development to demise. Truth sits on the lips of dying men. The world of fire and ice reveals truth, which exist in the eternal passion and eternal pain that drives humankind to create, explore, and reflect upon all aspects of existence.

Each of us is the enactor of our personal saga; we create the phantom of the self. We are the principal character in our personal story, as well as witnesses and reactors to the storylines of other persons whom we adore. We are each the composers of our evolving personal story; we are the protagonist of our personal life story. Most of us will find love; we shall also encounter opponents, rivals, and outright enemies, an evil nemesis worthy of unqualified hatred. Occasionally we act as the antagonist on our own casting card. Our own internal voice(s) can torture us with feelings of insanity. For example, before filling her overcoat pockets with stones and drowning herself in a river, English writer Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) left a final note to her husband disclosing, “I feel certain that I am going mad again.” Her last note also stated that she feared that she would not recover from her illness, she could not endure another depressive episode, and she was hearing voices.

With every passing day, we add a page to our personal story, an illustrative script that casts our character shaped by an implacable external environment and fashioned by our supple state of inwardness. From childbirth to our deathbeds, we seek to impose our will upon the external environment. At each milepost in life, we seek to expand our state of conscious awareness. Personal experiences that disrupt stale routines result in the

phenomena of cognitive dissiliency, jolting our minds and enhancing our ability to internalizing new information. Our life is an unfinished manuscript; we constantly edit our evolving composition.

We are playwrights scripting our personal reality show and enigmatic fantasy world. Without a questing protagonist and a strong antagonist, the plot is tepid. All heroic conduct requires a journey filled with hardship, adventure, and a personal nemesis to conquer. Similar to a plant, we each engage in the act of gradual metamorphosis by our impulsive and calculated responsiveness to the restrictions imposed upon us. Our original components form us. The laws governing the processes, connections, and interconnections of the phenomenal world mold our malleable beings. Our thoughts and deeds determine us by defining and revealing us. The external environment shapes us in a systematic and painstaking manner. We each possess the ability creatively to respond to the ontological mystery of our existence. We each engage in artistic conversations with the external environment. Rather than merely surrendering to forces that surround us, our inspired action of responding with heart and mind composes our final configuration.

A dialectical tension exists between people and nature through which each person determines his or her ultimate state. We employ education and the convictions gained through the intermeshing of personal experiences and fresh ideas to establish the configuration of our being that in actuality was our mysterious potentiality from the very inception of our birth. Our personal story has many chapters that reconnoiter universal themes. We each struggle to understand ourselves and aspire to make ourselves known to the world. We struggle to win the love of other people. We seek to pick all the low hanging fruit that we come across in our journey through the corridor of time. We write our story in the Niagara of emotional experiences that flowing watercourse makes us human. We use a profusion of words, symbols, and the nuances pulled from a rich library of language to depict the cascade of our visions, sounds, smells, tastes, feelings, dreams, and infelicitous thoughts. We use logical and dialectal thought processes when communing with our inner self. We use self-speak along with the esemplastic powers of poetic imagination, sprinkled with the fizz of creativity, to cohere disparate chapters of our life into a unified whole and relay the effervescence of our story to other people.

Storytelling is the distinctly human implement designed to synthesize our purposeful interaction with reality. The metaphysical poetry of our innovative life springs from the aesthetic, scenic, and systematic processes of inventiveness, the creative impulse of an active mind generating aesthetical intuition. Our personal stories may be true or false, or intentionally or unintentionally misconstrued. In telling our story, we develop an internal voice, which vocalization can help us rise or keep us down. An internal voice that constantly speaks to a person in an uplifting and reassuring manner is a rare plum. People might experience occasions when their internal voice is positive or puts them down with a horror of negative mind chatter. We must carefully cultivate the voice that speaks to us because an internal voice is the ultimate narrator of our charming and delightful personal story or the documentarian of our tragic and disgraceful plotlines. Stories that we tell ourselves become our functional reality, which format structures the concourse of the nested emotional control panel that guides and girds us through the din of the present. Storytelling entails weaving a narrative out of the disturbing, strange, inspirational, and unremarkable detritus of life. By picking among the litter of our personal experiences to select evocative anecdotes to weave into a narrative format, we reveal which of life's

legendary offerings prove the most sublime to us. Acts of omission are momentous. Our narration of personal sketches divulge what factoids inspire us or do not stir us into action, or contain obdurate truths that prove virtually impossible to crack.

Telling other people our life story changes us in a startling and profound way. The act of telling demands selection, prioritization, evaluation, and synthesis, which intellectual activities increase understanding, make us more sensitive to key distinctions in principles, and expand our empathy for other people. Without experiencing personal pain, there would be no bases for expressing reciprocal compassion. Life toughens us while also softening us. We are born with the innate capacity to express empathy. Experiencing our own cuts and bruises, encountering our own difficulties and disappointments, expands our cognitive world and rouses the universal desire to understand and comfort other people in pain. We are born with the capability for the collective challenges of life to stir and stamp us. Unless we understand how the twists and turns of life operate to make us, we cannot comprehend who and what we are. Without self-awareness, we are blind to registering the intertexture of other people's inner life. Gracefully enduring personal hardships expands our minds to extend sympathy and empathy for other people. By casting our personal life experiences into a supple storytelling casing, we create the translucent membrane that quarters the fusion of our flesh, nerves, blood, and bones. Self-understanding is an essential step in loving the entire world.

Every person has a story; every person has a wound that he or she seeks to heal. Storytelling connects us with all of humanity. We possess common DNA. Every human being carries with them the stories of their ancestors, the story of their generation, and the rudiments of pliable clay to build future storylines that will shape their community of kindred souls. Storytelling unites us as a species and supplies texture to our lives. By listening to other people's stories and by sharing our personal story, we deftly weave the threads that compose the sacred hoop of the tribe. The stories that we know and tell regarding our family and friends provide the linkage that connect us. We all know the stories of the persons closest to us. We crave to understand the story of our common histories. Understanding and relating to the stories of ancient people and modern society allows us to pass on the eternal flame of humanity to future generations. Storytelling is reflective of all that is and all that has ever been. Regardless of the terrain it covers, the theme of all stories must simultaneously examine the human condition, relay life-altering experiences, distill knowledge, and inspire both the writer and the reader. Writing reflects life and life is a mystery. All any of us can do is press the fleet footed beauty of life close to our flesh and use whatever instruments are within our grasp to express the evanescent spark of mysticism that resides within us. Life for the artist and all humanity is a soulful objet d'art full of hope, promise, expectation, romance, love, and affection.

The universal story is composed of segments of anxiety, disappointment, profanity, prayers, heartache, tragedy, and despair. Our life story is a reflection of our internal poetry in motion, a poem which lyrical lines croons life as a groping accident, a playful roughness, a throbbing ordeal. Life's posy permutations jell together to create a brawly emotional ambiguity. An interlacement of untidy paradoxes, fastened by a tincture of pyretic hopelessness, sounds the charming pitch of life. We cradle in our nucleus emotional ingots gathered through studied immersion of the incongruities of life. In an elusive quest to disinter meaning out of life, we must cull joy from our daily rituals while conscientiously striving to nourish the nucleus of our buried innate essence. By

discovering inner peace blossoming amongst the rubble of daily life, while determinedly searching out the cytoplasm our innate essence, a person's reveals their inspirational tranquility.

We instinctively strive to attain reconciliation between what is divine and what is physical in our cellular membrane. Our pioneering journey devoted to rooting out our ultimate destination gives light to the splendid spark of spirituality that every person instinctively clutches in swoon of their innermost enthrallment. None of us commences life utterly alone. We each carry within our granular mass the protoplasm residue of past generations' ideas, customs, values, infatuations, prejudices, ethics, and mores. The leas wrought from our seedlings contribute to the social order that oversees a newborn's future. How we conduct ourselves in the here and now emulates our heritage, delineates the parameters of the present culture, and sets the embryonic stage for the emergent ethos of our future and for the generations of people whom we will never meet.

Our noetic byline is an artifact of our times twined with the string of choices that we consciously and unconsciously make. How we organize the chaos of remembrances linked by the conscious and unconscious mind's roller derby collisions in time exemplifies the prismatic edges of our philosophical outline. Reading oracle bones, searching for signs to resolve the paradoxes of life, and projecting a future is what separates us from other animals. Without the ability to reflect about our profound experiences and convey to other people the essential lessons garnered from resounding personal experiences, we would still be swinging from tress. Whenever we share a personal story with other people, we provide an enchanting testament that illustrates the distinctive tinting of our estranged and prose-like being. Each person fills their wheelbarrow of life with routine colliery and guerdons culled from a few diamond moments, all of which ingested payload forms the grist of life.

The enigmas of death haunt all people as if a fraternal brother. Foreknowledge of our rosewood fate presupposes in humankind a peculiar aura of ambivalence for living with a sinew of intention. With the fickle hand of fate's menacing grip heavy on the horizon, each passing day of humdrum living applies an added degree of stress upon us to break free from the incessant trappings of leading a slavishly unthinking and uncritical lifestyle. Similar to a rat stuck on a rickety boat lost at sea, many of us feel bollixed in by our wooden shell lives. The chore of resurrecting our abysmal life consists of applying a vulnerary of homeopathic remedies to our self-inflicted wounds, liberally applying the principle that small doses of what makes a person ill also cures them. In order to relive intolerable pressure bearing down upon a person haunted by strife, sorrow, travail, and doubt, a battered soul must muster all their compressed resolve and push back with their time-hardened gristle. We must use all the tools at our disposal in order to survive including tirelessly cultivating our physical hardiness and mental flexibility, and by meticulously engaging in the pursuit of learning. We intuitively seek out bliss and we must be mindful to listen to our internal voice counseling us to attain emotional harmony by living in a synchronized manner with other people and all of nature.

All warriors of a free life share a hardcore mantel that brindles them through troubled times. Humankind's struggle against a hostile environment causes people throughout the ages to deploy their full armory of logic, training, strategy, imagination, inventiveness, and creativity. We are born with the natural ability to strategize. The most influential tool in humankind's intellectual tool kit is the ability to regenerate a sense of unruffled alertness, to establish a poised stance that leads to intuitive discoveries generated by the conscious

and unconscious mind constantly filtering a plethora of data, selecting critical facts, and producing elegant solutions to seemingly insoluble dilemmas. The more that a person immerses themselves into a body of work that calls upon them to draw their life sustaining sustenance from an internal well of compassion the closer a person comes to developing, maintaining, and displaying the wholesome glow radiating from a peaceful mind. Serenity of mind produces an expanding awareness that fosters creative selflessness, which in turn enables us to experience unabashed harmony communing in rhythmical bliss with nature.

A creative person aspires to devote the core state of their mind fixated upon performing the surge of work that expresses the raw passion driving an evolving notion of their quintessence. A beautiful mind's humble carriage shelters a flowering equanimity, which elegant bloom fluoresces from living in harmonization with everyday moments. Contentment with an abstemious lifestyle provides ample time for a person to engage in soul-searching contemplation, which in turn allows their maturing goodness to shine. A mature person reaps joy in the commonplace acts of living, appreciates the serenity of just being, while balancing the responsibilities that come naturally about when deeply immersed in family and community affairs. Directing their attention outward, assisting other people in their troubled times, while denying themselves the indulgence of self-absorption frees a person's bidding mind from a jumble of discordant thoughts, wants, and unholy bequests. Every sinuous person needs to experience the simple and pure pleasures that come from a life well lived. Our most intense joy comes not from personal feats, but from helping other persons achieve their goals. We become suppler human beings when we find true joy in witnessing other people's successes and unabashedly share in their joyful accomplishments. The sense of gratitude that we earn when assisting other persons is as they say priceless.

Many of our personal adventures begin with a sudden idea laced with bold expectations and fueled by a zestful admiration for the physical and aesthetic world. After devoting untold hours and good chunk of our physical, mental, and emotional energy beguiled in inspirational toil, we later confront the shattered splinters of our perceived folly. Who has not labored furiously to build their own version of a Spruce Goose? The puny outcome of a beloved project is bound to disappoint us. Whenever lauded personal missions come to a screeching halt it becomes judgment time, the fixed point where we must make a full accounting. We frequently stare at the piddle of our shattered dreams. We must ask ourselves and answer the looming question that hung over our shoulder the entire time that we labored: was all the time and effort worth the teensy result?

How we react to disappointment is a test of character. Do we allow the critical, negative responses to pulverize us in a shower of disappointment? Alternatively, do we rally from self-castigating failure? Is the key to living a robust life merely the demonstrated ability to rally after absorbing every heavy blow encountered in the ring of time regardless of the prospective for actually triumphing? Do thick cords of setbacks and failures rather than ribbons replicating successes supply the cordage of every person's fibrous life? As an impartial judge, I frequently found myself ruefully admitting that the projected fruits of arduous personal labor produce no long-term nourishment to sustain a fragile soul. Over time marked with periodic starvation and after enduring a life lacking in wholesome personal habits, a person learns how to harness the effervescence of hope and organize the contemptuous sneer of discontentment. I need to chart new mental maps to

house a dwindling supply of optimism while simultaneously dutifully reexamining the historical causes behind a galvanic performance of personal foibles.

When one verse in life ends in ignominy, we can use the glimmering marvel of nature's splendor and frayed edges culled from the black linen of past failures to write uncanny poems that give voice to the fissures in our hollow, reflective poetry that echoes our supple inner world of cherished dreams colliding with the serrated edges of savage realism. A life of living free and taking endless satisfaction from a person's promiscuous meanderings entails intermittingly retooling oneself to meet a desired future. Perhaps the most difficult challenge of life is detecting when the ground moves beneath us and then nimbly shifting our mental perspective. We must adjust our emotive outlook before drowning in bitterness and choking on despair. We must periodically weed out pangs of disenchantment and scour disillusionment from our hearts in order to console and replenish the depleted resolve of our spirit. Finding ourselves crippled by physical injury, weakened by illness, or left stranded in a vulnerable emotional condition brought on by grief, disappointment, and other physiological or psychological crisis, we must each examine our values and update our mythological mental maps in order to generate a source of stirred concentrate steeling a rejuvenated march onward. Perhaps our sources of revitalizing energy will stem from gaining a new perspective on ancient challenges, by establishing new hopes and dreams, or by delving a lofty purpose behind our efforts. Alternatively, perhaps we only develop the resolve to resume our scrupulous assault on the important issues of life by orchestrating a fundamental transformation of the self, a complete restructuring of our values and goals.

In lieu of fixating upon details of our life which can lead to sadness or madness, we achieve an enhanced perspective regarding the perplexity haunting our being by thinking abstractedly, a process that allows us to discern the essential principles of life. Writing is one means to investigate the mystique of life. Each fresh page is an unsullied canvas that an inquisitive writer employs to explore the poetic transience behind their existence. When I write, I enter a transpersonal state of consciousness, a lightheaded realm of mental imagination, a cognitive place where I can lithely finger the coherent and the absurd. I seek to cross over an intricate boarder where the conscious and unconscious minds meet, traversing the aperture where the real and the imaginary intermingle. I aspire to establish a detached vantage point where I can survey the entire human condition.

Writing when perched along a ledge of conscious awareness while simultaneously giving voice to the unconscious voice tumbling within allows a writer to tap into the external world of the known while also exploring the unconscious world of the unknown and the unknowable. For as long as I can stand the mounting pressure, I dance along this tremulous thin line separating sanity and insanity, mediating the conflicts between a lucid intellect and an impulsive, instinctual nature. Captivated in this submerged psyche space, disengaged from conscious tether of personal identity, and free from the jaundiced constraints and dictatorial commands of rational logic, I operate unencumbered by preconceived limitations. While engaged in automatic writing I strain to create a protective personal haven, ferret out a padded cell where I can rapturously hold court with the voltaic cells of the self. I labor in solitary, transfixed in a suspended state of consciousness. Freewheeling writing creates a bridgeworks to the situs where hidden gems of insight and candid genuineness wait to be unsheathed by the penetrating beam of a reflective mind trolling for inspirational insight. Probing putative desires while contemporaneously

fencing with a barrage of suppressed insecurities, requires piercing protective layers of denial and traveling with teratological¹ demons to confront the monstrous self-destructive gene lodged in the deepest recesses of a confused psyche.

All writers trammeling the ground of self-examining must explore their physical and mental constrictions and determine what awaits them, if anything at all, after the cinereous body returns to dust. Writing does not demand that one prefer death to life, but any writer seeking enlightenment might elect to assess the possibility of death releasing them from the conscripts of crippling dissatisfaction with their present way of living. Writing acts as a means to blunt pain and defer death by encouraging a person to live in an alternative manner. Writers cheat death by constructing an immortality vessel. The tug of self-destruction and the desire to defy mortality by creating an everlasting mark upon this world are uneasy acquaintances. The strident edginess behind a writer's searchlight voice is a product of the natural tension that engenders when an apathetic writer believes death could arrive tonight. Stunned by fear of a hard deadline, the writer is jolted from their state of laziness and mental neglect that trolling inertia dampens their aptitude to love life.

Embracing the possible immediacy of dying shocks a writer's lethargic and disdainful mind to attention, and this enlivened mental state assists them explore the possibilities of living purposefully. Invigorated mental activity examines how a person can enjoy a more enchanting existence by devotedly working on self-improvement. We derive insightful perception by observing and studying, comparing and contrasting. Without investigating why we prefer the veil of life to the cloak of death and without considering how to create dangerously, live honorably, and die gloriously without remorse and regret, we risk dissipating what precious little shelf life our brittle humanity grants us. Similar to other people, I suffer from my own brand of neurosis – a functional mental and emotional disorder involving emotional distress, indecision, social awkwardness, and interpersonal maladjustment. Unlike other rational people, I also suffer from mental delusions. It is a risky gambit attempting to hold at bay a pressing pack of personal abnormalities and a hazardous stable of personal neuroses including obsessional conduct, and compulsive thoughts while simultaneously straddling the horizontal bars of rationality and irrationality.

A writer seeks to discover a lucid state of creative consciousness uncoiling from a boule of internal disequilibrium and dutifully attempts to bridge that cavernous divide between the known and the unknown and articulate raw truths. By willing confronting the darkest recesses of my being, I fear losing a precarious grip upon eroding sanity. By writing myself into an experimental state of mental, physical, and emotional exhaustion, I fear experiencing the wilting of personal endurance to face another day of introspective examination. One-step too far into the pitch-dark underworld of deconstructive self-scrutiny and a person might not survive. A person's failure boldly to charge forward with all of their strength of mind when beckoned by the better angels of their nature might preclude that person from unraveling the very purpose of their being.

An ethical idealist, a person whom embraces the honorable philosophy of ethical idealism, performs acts that are honest, pure, and righteous regardless of their fearfulness. My history as an opportunistic egotist is contrariwise. I acted as realist: things are what they are and I strove to make the best – the most – of what was available for taking. At the inception of this writing project, I considered the wisdom of executing a purposeful

¹ Teratological refers to the scientific study of biological monstrosities and malformations.

slaughtering of my egotistical self. If I do screw up the temerity to commence with an autopsy of a soulful self, I might lack the fortitude to stay the course to dissect the nature of my being. Without deep-seated faith, I risk faltering at the operating table and never rising again. Will I suffer from a desertion of boldness? Alternatively, will a stunning lack of talent and criminal absence of cognitive insight, perception, and discernment along with a paucity of intellectual and practical acumen betray me when I attempt to whisk up incomplete mental fragments previously abandoned to simmer in the deepest recesses of my animalistic being? Overwrought by a hovering sense of terror concerning what filthy rubbish I might discover lurking within the hallways of my afflicted soul, I am hesitant to descend into the labyrinth of the unknown. I might not endure to write about what fate awaits me when I attempt to harpoon protean personal thoughts steeped in fear and disgust.

Self-questioning is bound to arise at the outset of any worthy quest attempting to gain self-knowledge, and this disconcerting sense of uneasiness will continue to surface akin to a petulant sea serpent until a person undertaking a vision quest either discovers a safe haven or perceptively changes the trajectory of their destructive life. Writing my fleshy story consisted of examining the butchered offal of my carnivorous character. Flayed like the catch of the day, I scrutinized the ramified offscourings of my worm-ridden soul, a parasitic host to tumors of self-doubt and lesions of personal insecurities.

Most of us suffer from the pangs of self-doubt; yet, the courage to tread forward must originate from within. I seek to articulate a definitive purpose behind my effort and then resolve to devote all interpersonal resources to achieve established goals. I need to be mindful of personal talents and imperfections, boldly face all fears, bravely straddle the unknown, and unerringly establish high-minded objectives. I must exhibit determination, resilience, and courage to give my best effort and never slacken a resolute pace. A seeker is obligated to be truthful; I cannot engage in self-deception if I hope to develop the integrity of my spirit. Comparable to all worthwhile tests of character, a person seeking growth must ultimately conquer his or her insecurities and discover a means to muster flagging personal fortitude. Can I throttle back from the black lagoon or did I travel too far as a chainless soul up the river of insanity to turn back now? Can I reintegrate myself in a normative world where self-preservation and reasonableness reigns? Can I conduct a Black Ops reconnaissance operation by reconfiguring the organs of a dismembered self with reawakened astuteness, and exhibit the determined stoicism indicative of my ancestor lineage?

In order to discover life-affirming answers, a seeker must ask the correct questions. Can I frame the penetrating questions that will open a diffident person's mind to investigate how to live out the remainder of his life? What insistent questions must I ask and answer in order to uncover the essential truths for personal survival? Can I frame the crucial questions that self-revealing answers might stave off instant disintegration? Can I find a subject of intellectual investigation worthy of creating an enduring legacy? How do I eradicate from a secretive, brooding, and shut-in mind the insidious and incapacitating thoughts that turned me into an inert maumet² or an empty-headed person? Must I accept the rheum of my timid meagerness? Alternatively, must I expunge all mucus remnants of my diseased former self? Can I shock myself awake from a zombie-like state of spiritual deadness? Can I create out of the phlegm of a frozen mind a new Adam that walks and

² Maumet refers to a doll, puppet, scarecrow, or other figure built to resemble a human being.

talks for me? By destroying a former self, can I save myself and create a vessel of lifeworks that carries a stream of earnest thoughts into the minds of future readers?

The stories of people who came before us seeking slabs of truth forges an integral part of our personal survival plan. Telling our personal story reveals the shape shifting landscape of our mind. Trampled upon by an unruly hoard of life-altering tribulations, we subliminally search for a path leading to spiritual salvation. A scrupulous chart demarking the deliverance of one person onto the road of recovery hews a lifeline of inspiration for other people to grasp. Am I alone in an ensconced inner world where I obsessively worry about what happens to me, where the story of personal survival becomes the central theme of my shallow existence? I think not. Swaddled in our own brand of strangeness, we all struggle to come to terms with our demonstrated personal shortcomings. Our yearned-for life of living in pink skyways far removed from harm's way is depressingly marked in contrast by our actual crabby existence spent scuttling along akin to a smug lobster, scrunched down on the asphalt streets, working in the city grid as frumpy members of the faceless mob.

We use the mind to create ourselves. Stuck amid the inevitable gaps between the mint of imagination and the postholes of actuality, we stutter step through the stratum of objective and subjective reality. We constantly amend our internal mental maps. Each day we awaken from the nighttime dream world with a revised identity of ourselves. The projected vision in the mind's eye of a person's conceptual self represents a self-edited photocomposition. Our conceived self consists of an admixture of facts gleaned from the residue of yesteryear's reality imposed over a bed of surreal images. Daily life is an ongoing adaptation process of imprinting our memory's storage center with useful data and the ceaseless expurgation of undesirable facts, exfoliation of destructive thoughts, and weeding out annoying emotional quirks that seemingly sprout out of thin air. Each of us fabricates an anaglyphic portfolio demarking our contiguous photo-essay.

We are each authors of a self-concocted depiction establishing our present day identity. Our persona is woven from a range of truths interweaved with inspired imagination and occasionally bounded by convenient falsehoods. Creating our personal story generates an identity myth that allows us to carry on. Withstanding the onslaught of life's rapidly changing demands produces an inevitable sense of foreboding, which menacing energy spurs us to create, nurture, and protect the identity foliage that we till from the charred sphere that we exist on. Identity maintenance requires the cyclical rotation of our mossy perception of who we are and who we want to be. In setting our formative goals, we contrast the character traits exhibited by people whom we wish to emulate with the behaviorisms of people whom we do not wish to imitate.

A person can cultivate a new persona from a *pâté* of earthy personal experiences. How do I reconcile all my faults and propagate all my innate gifts to create the type of self that I am happy to claim responsibility for authorship? How do I go about turning over the peat moss that lines the feldspar of my rocky existence? How do I plow under the seedlings of my youth and grow a protective bed of winter clover to shield my adulthood? How do I mulch the clippings from variegated personal experiences, ferment the rot, harrow new rows, and plant hardy spring wheat to take root in the enriched chocolate loam of a fertile mind? Is all this laborious plow pulling work of creating a fresh and authentic self-identify worth the backbreaking effort? How does one go about revamping their personal storyline? How do I cast myself into a robust image that does not appall other

people? My continued existence entails industriously giving seed to the lush myths that I live by, amassing dwindling personal willpower, and resolving to impose upon my weathered soul the missing character traits that wait forging in the glowering inferno fed by a rising mountain of ignited personal anxiety.

A willingness to let go of an old self and allow creative thoughts to remake a person into a better version of oneself requires an act of courage. Destroying the prior emaciated doppelgänger image that I held of myself is merely the first step of creating a revised personal identity. Can I accomplish the dissolution of my disembodied self and determinedly recreate a mutable sense of personal identity out of the scalded remnants of a psyche inferno? The past is an annoying critic whose loud tirade of accusatory declamations detracts from experiencing happiness. Loitering within the craggy shadows of my lithograph identification apparatus is the splayed viscera from the blood-soaked entrails of an egotistical self's riddled history. The unbidden past tugs at my sleeves of similar to a persistent tramp demanding an attentive accounting. A disgraced personal self refuses to release its despotic hold upon my guilt-ridden psyche without exacting a sacrificial tithing. Strewn wreckage from my history of scandalous debacles cast a pall of shame over the present. The shambles of my disreputable past stifles my present desire to celebrate in the rudimentary grandeur of living robustly. With the past snarling its reproach, my mind is preoccupied with ugly thoughts, and every day reduced to a tiresome and worrisome filled existence that halts my progress towards achieving an envisaged life.

Emotional exhaustion follows fast on the footsteps of physical and mental depletion. I feel my lifeblood draining away in an oily spigot of inner turmoil. Questions abound and personal survival hinges upon sorting through possible solutions and selecting the most fitting answers. Is my pain real or simply an illusion of a frustrated ego? What do I believe in? What is my purpose? I aspire to discover a means to live in congruence with the trinity of the mind, body, and spirit. Can I discover a noble path that frees me from the shallowness of decadent physical and emotional desires? Can I surrender any desire to seek fame and fortune? Can I terminate a craving to punish other persons for their perceived wrongs? Can I recognize that forgiving persons whom offended me is a self-initiated, transformative act? Can I conquer an irrational fear of the future? Can I accept the inevitable chaos that accompanies life? Can I find a means to achieve inner harmony by steadfastly resolving to live in the moment free of angst? Can I purge egotisms that mar an equitable perception of life by renunciation of the self and all worldly endeavors? Can I live a harmonious existence devoid the panache of vanities?

Without parlaying with the renunciation of the world, a person must establish a means to live in harmony with the uncertainties of a chaotic world. Can I discover how to live so that life ceases to be problematic, so that one lives in the eternal and not in grip of the falsities of time? Can I expunge selfishness from my gene pool? Can I mine from my central chord the ability to demonstrate empathy, supply a compress of sympathy, and extend charity for people in need of assistance? Can I concentrate all my cognitive material to express grace and thankfulness for the world? Must I shed the tattered shirt of yesteryear in order to advance to the next stage in life? When the pigmented henna of the naked self is exposed, do I see the resin of my elemental character more clearly? Stripped of the restrictive pig iron of disappointment, I realize that the mystique of the future trumps the perspicuity of my blemished past. Letting go of the past and torching a wagonload of personal guilt is freeing. Once disburdened from a repressive sense of a

remorseful and shamefaced self, I am free to prowling about uninhibited and nurture a mantle of renewed optimism for the brilliant seasons to come.

A wise person strives to reach self-transcendence by engaging in delicate contemplation, while avoiding the snare of self-denigration's negative invocation. An overshadowing sense of a caustic self can be destructive, whereas an encircling sense of a kindhearted self allows a person to express the profundity and elation of a feral creature curiously exploring nature's glorious playground. Regardless of the physical world that a person finds himself or herself mired in, everyone can attempt to control the angle of their psychological reference point through constructive self-evaluation and by conscientiously refining their heightened cognitive viewpoint in order to revise and upgrade their mental autobiography. Apprehending our self and assessing our place in the world is an inherent activity of all human beings. Each one of us must make our own way and determine how to fit into a world that is constantly changing. Each of us posits our perception of a self and makes conjectures regarding how the world functions.

Every time that we consider our past, examine our present environment, and speculate about the future, we engage in mental projection. Contemplation merges into thinking, and thinking unspools into theorizing suppositions. Every act of attentiveness expands our state of awareness. Deductive surmises represent an ongoing process of making applicable connections between theories and facts. Devising working hypothesis represents one of the highest intellectual achievements of humankind. Liberating a prejudiced mind from its preconceived notions and scripting a life of purposefulness requires constant postulation, observation, evaluation, and synthesizing. I need to initiate a constructive course of treatment marked by positive thinking in order to implement a prescribed course of self-healing designed to achieve a balanced state of mental health.

Self-evaluation proved to be distasteful business. The refraction of light created from an undulating wave of critical self-observation passing through a tarnished lens produces its own morose, self-negating fixations that can result in a dangerous downward spiral. Unless timely arrested, murderous bouts of self-hatred can destroy a person. A person must use self-detestation exclusively as a means to pry oneself away from the haunting specter created courtesy of the clamor, filth, and grunginess of their prior anarchism. Kick starting a stranded person's emotional motors through reflective contemplation and thoughtful rumination acts to prod loose remote memories seared in the unspoken silence of a person's unconscious memory bank. Self-discovery is also an uplifting affair. Contemplation helps one confront their streaked presence and realign their inner voice with the sanguine spirits of their ancestors that preceded one in the walk through time.

Broadening personal knowledge of the world is a worthwhile adventure. Education flows from insightful firsthand experience and from listening carefully to the astute observations of other people. It is essential to pay heed to valuable information passed down by writers and by the *viva voce* of respected contemporaries. I must take what is portable from the dearth of personal encounters and make out what I can from the richness of studious words shared by kindhearted souls whom I have met and what few author's lustrous works that I was privileged to read. I cannot continue languishing in a stilted personal underworld. A sterile mind can transform itself into a fecund mind through astute perception and resolute determination. A prolific internal landscape emanates from appreciating the incomparable beauty in this world. Sensory deprivation of all forms predictably instills in a person an intense gratefulness for living a sumptuous life whereas

exposure to an abundance of radiant sensations supplies a tractable student with wealth of handy diversity. I cannot afford to be contemptuous of what is familiar, nor turn away from investigating personal ignorance. Without the fervor to taste life's bewitching fruit and in absence of a keenness to gain personal knowledge gained through exploring, probing, surveillance, and self-scrutiny, I risk apathy, befuddlement, and lethargy overwhelming me.

Useful knowledge oftentimes comes unsolicited by distilling survival techniques from personal forays that end infamously. Pain avoidance is part of life. A campaign to minimize hunger and lessen pain drives us to develop systems that will provide us with nourishing food and protective shelter. Pain is a trickster. It can send us true or false signals that confine us to our beds or spur us to roam long and far. Pain has a lifesaving function. Pain can signal us to implement evasive action or attack our problems head-on. Pain has a putative role. Pain can torture us for engaging in careless deeds. Pain performs a restorative role. Pain can tell us when we must rest. Pain is tutor and a healer. Pain implores us to take heed of our physical and mental infirmities, urges us to call out for help, and compels us to adopt modified strategies.

Pain touches everyone differently. Some people suffer from a genetic defect that weakens and kills their pain neurons. People whom are unable to register physical pain usually die young because they lack an essential survival monitor that tells them how to protect themselves. Other illnesses that mask pain can cause people to burn or maim themselves, or die prematurely. Leprosy, a bacterial infection, if untreated, can be progressive, causing permanent damage to the skin, nerves, limbs, and eyes. Leprosy does not cause body parts to fall off, although secondary infections can cause numbness in the infected regions of the body, especially in the extremities. Lack of sensation causes patients to disregard injuries to their hands and feet, nose and eyes, forearms and lower legs. Without the ability to register pain, patients can lose their fingers, hands, toes, and feet, and ultimately die without medical intervention.

Using pain medication protects us from feeling select infirmities. There is an extensive list of medications available to reduce or eliminate unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential physical damage as well as moderate depression and anxiety associated with chronic pain. A recognized danger of taking various pain diminishing medicines is that some pharmaceutical drugs prevent people from feeling ordinary symptoms of pain that would otherwise alert them to the existence of a medical condition that might be life threatening if not immediately treated. Sometimes we must not act to mask or dull pain, but listen to the important message that pain sends us. Experiencing fundamental variations in our exterior world or undergoing a series of personal transformations can prove painful and life altering.

Human beings experience pain from loss, loneliness, physical injury, mental disability, and frustrated desires. Pain is an indispensable teacher. Pain is also an inflexible taskmaster. Painful inscriptions upon our neurological message boards condition the mind to recognize what is dangerous. Pain tells us when to scratch, when to gag, when to cover ourselves with clothing, when to retract a hand from a hot iron, and when to seek treatment for pronounced suffering. Regardless of a person's religious affiliation, spiritual inspiration, or other philosophical doctrine, pain is the untiring muse that instructs us when to yield to forces that outstrip us. Stinging nettles teach us what not to touch. Absence of stinging needles teaches us that we can proceed. Constant exposure to painful stimuli

causes unremitted fear to buildup that frequently results in a cautious state of mind. Unremitted pain can cause a guarded state of anxiety to take us hostage. Understanding and embracing our source of pain can also be enlightening.

We achieve a state of solicitous quietude by recognizing the source of our personal pain. By acknowledging that we are the progenitor of our pain, and by adopting a philosophical stance that subdues our innermost anguish we attain a higher plane of living. Living in a noble, righteous, and charitable manner reduces personal pain associated with anger, regret, and self-chastisement. Kindness, a loving heart that accepts other people, is the other tutor for the well-rounded student of life. We must discover and nurture our gentleness. We must strive to develop fondness for the entire scale of life, and we must learn how to express both the sweet honey of empathy and the renewing dew of affection.

We learn to love by basking in the love of other people. We learn how to express our love and our warmest feelings whenever other people grace us with the privilege of besetting upon them many acts of kindness. We unleash a germinal of internal tenderness by affectionately doting upon pets and by generously spending time admiring the natural world. Analogous to how we teach a child to develop vision by exposing them to visual stimulus a person must learn how to love by immersing themselves in the quick of nature and actively engaging in the tumult of family life. We become loveable by being a loving person. We find ourselves by devoting our lives to the service of other people.

Our genetic map makes us human. Our physical and emotional genomes establish the baseline for us to operate. When we strike out in the world, we seek out vivid encounters with other people and nature that speak loudest to ourselves. What we make of our brilliant experiences modulates who we become. The way we think, feel, and express emotions enables us to personalize our experiences. Memory, imagination, and passionately responding in accord with the deeply embedded impulse to act with decency are pliable mechanisms that we can employ to attain happiness. Running the gauntlet of the trials and tribulations of life, we accumulate an array of useful habits and self-defeating behavior. A personal routine that customary characteristics garner positive traits must be cultivated with care. We must ruthlessly discard the bad habits of yesterday along with any notion that one will appease a restless soul's willful temperament with acceptance of any degree of personal slovenliness. Injecting new challenges into our lives can assist us recognize when we have allowed apathy and stale habits to dampen our spirit and dull our minds. Rejection of all forms of personal inadequacy and casting aside familiar tapestries opens our eyes to rediscover the unsullied sensation of living vigorously.

Change is part of life. Civilizations rise and fall, the tides wax and wane, the planet undergoes periods of climatic revolution, the young grow up, and the old die. What will come is that what shall be. Survival as individuals and as a species demands fluidity of human thought and the demonstrated ability, temperament, and perseverance to change. We fear change because it insists we discard long held structures that no longer function suitably. I commence the act of personal transformation by unreservedly accepting the inevitability of my death. When I thrust aside fear of death, I become a new person, I transmute into a reformed person who is unafraid. The fear of the unknown does not hold me down. Free from attachment to life allows me to embrace personal ugliness and admit to my decided paltriness. I am no longer ashamed of my personal deformities. I embrace my impermanence with a candid shrug of the shoulders and a slight nod of the head of that

conveys utter indifference. Now unhampered by awareness of my transience, I can act by using this limited window in time to paint myself for how I, and only I, see fit.

Undergoing personal change is a difficult but necessary process of maturing into the ultimate manifestation of a desirable self. True personal transformation requires a person honestly to assess their inner spirituality and adopt a clear vision of who they want to be. An earnest person experiencing inner transformation of their values and belief system is apt to feel conflicted, confused, and disorientated. Change of self is displacement, disarticulation, and loss of self. Alteration of our self-image results in disrupting, dislocating, and modifying a person's perspective of what is significant. Transfiguration of the self is painful since it represents sprouting downy wings that give flight to a battered soul. By simplifying our lives, we rediscover our child-like stalk of innocents that reconnects us with the central resin of our innate humanity that knows truth and goodness. To see the world through a lens of youthful rapture is to see life for what it can be and to see for ourselves what we wish to become. In this beam of newly discovered ecstasy for life, we realize the splendor of love, life, and the unbounded beauty of the natural world.

We cannot suppress our defining humanity and innate spirituality. The quivering pulsation of life force buried within the scarlet corpus of our blood waits like a winged angel adamant to erupt from a cocoon of unholy encapsulation whenever we return to ligature of our primitive essence. We each share in innumerable physical and emotional experiences. Our like-kind responses to the external world connect every person together whoever walked this earth. Who has not seen death tap dancing amongst the shagged icicles of a winter wonderland? Who has not heard their hearts petals welcome the bloom of springtime's opalescence? Who has not experienced the calm of leaves rusting beneath their feet or felt befallen with an overwhelming sense of regeneration after slathered in baptismal wetness by an unexpected rainstorm? Who has not drunk in the smoky smells of leaves burning in October, hunted solace in the singeing embrace of a campfire on a cold winter night, or sought to escape from summers burning blanket of oppression by dunking their overheated stovetop into a mountain stream of clear water? Who has not felt the cold kiss of winter or experienced the melted butter feeling of crawling into bed after a day of hard work? Who is exempt from the punch of hunger in their gut or immune from the enraged screams of an unquenchable thirst? Who has not broken out in a frisson of Goosebumps when passing the graveyard on an ill-omened evening and experienced the electric sensation of ghostly fingernails running down the tapered stem of their spine? Who has not fallen in love at first sight? Who has not danced on the edge of a cliff, stared into the gloom, and asked themselves what if they slipped over the lip? Who has not experienced the existential vertigo, the anxiety of dizziness that freedom brings whenever a human being standing in solitude navigates amongst the tension between the finite and infinite and contemplates the possibility or of the divine shaping reality?

We seek to glean physical, emotional, and spiritual sustenance from our daily chores. Will working impulsively in velvet-lined ravines under tonight's harvest moon yield any hearty hale to conciliate the ambitious rumblings of tomorrow? I cannot shun the past because it contains information that is useful to script future goals. Looking back into the opaque window of reductive retrospect, what essential opportunities exist today that beckon one to seek with unrestrained enthusiasm? What iridescent signals flare from our conceptual self that if we heedlessly ignore their luminous summons, such deliberate acts of omission will suture the apex of our souls, relegating us to the dreaded curse of mucking

along in an ordinary life stalled out by our overweening fear of estrangement? We each labor under our own brand of personal doubt that undercuts longed for equanimity. We diligently search for a lost language that tells us how to live with zest and joy. We seek to align ourselves with our sublime inner nature and mirror the divine wholesomeness of the matchless beauty of the natural world that surrounds us. We seek to devolve transcendent fluidity of the mind through the personal power of self-control, perception, and knowledge.

A bird with a broken wing cannot survive nor will a man with a broken spirit endure. Wrecked and despondent at midlife, I need to undertake a strict personal evaluation that will lead to personal transformation. I must be willing to start afresh and attempt to make myself anew. In order to begin all over and not culminate in the same deadhead rut as before, I admit to harboring personal insecurities and boldly confront my greatest fears. In order to establish an altered foundation that will support a revised self, I commence by asking the pertinent questions. If I run fast enough and long enough, can I quash slavish personal demons and capture an elusive self? Can I exercise the self-discipline to eliminate the artificial screens that I hide behind in order to peer out at the formidable world? Do I possess the personal audacity to explore unfamiliar terrain and the internal grit to dual the primal flex of nature's power while accepting on equal terms the thrall and tragic beauty of surviving in a violent habitat?

Living in a fractionalized society, unmoored from hunter-gatherer lifestyle, cut off from the hub of society, and overwhelmed in achromatic work, a person can become disorientated, lost in the eddies of a bland life. How does a person fill the colorless chambers of their inscrutable canal? Does a person pledge their faithfulness to the vessel of memory or stake their pot of allegiance to ductwork of imagination? Should a person seek to meld inner peace out the convergence begot from the afterglow of past memories fused with the divine brush of creative inspiration? How does anyone bridge the insoluble gap where the mineshaft of recollection ends and where the inspirational and playful spires of a lustrous imagination first take flight? How does a person activate the camshaft where the shoots of disassociated memories are stored until stroked by dream work's combustion engine? How does a person harness the divine afflatus winds of inspiration that blows warmly upon all people and gives scented breath to our clement ideas? How do I come to terms with my checkered personal history, enjoy the vast array of scintillating offerings of the present, and prepare for the uncertainty of what the future bodes? Should I scout out the inner depths of my hidden plume to unearth a degree of personal happiness? Alternatively, must I remain steadfastly devoted to pragmatically meeting the present day exigencies of a worker's robotic life?

A person can suffer from a lack of dreams. Should I stick to a regiment of what I know, grudgingly accepting the daily fodder of a middling life? Alternatively, must I stand upon tiptoes and stretch beyond the altitude of my present reach in an attempt to glove cerebral gems that soar outside the boundary lines of my familiar grasp? Each of us encounters many diverse experiences that make us grow and transform, but we seek to return to our roots, which is quietude. A person whom questions the purpose behind enduring life strafed with pain and self-doubt must construct a self-rescue plan. Does a demoralized person discover contentment and a meaningful life through expanded intellectual studies or by becoming engrossed in living deeply connected to nature? Should I seek personal conquest and eradication of ugly segments of my persona or merger and unification of the irrational splinters of a fragmented and traumatized personality? How

does a person express what it means to be human? How does a person locate the incandescent flash of their flesh? If I shout into the wind with all my might, will responsive people hear my wild cry? Will placing pen to paper buffet the cantos of a troubled mind, expose the operatic musings of a madman's ranting song, or will looking at each day through the diverse lens of both detachment and solipsism ignite an illuminating shaft of wisdom to grace the sinkhole of a fallen man?

The inexorable search for a stanza of meaning hangs like a thundercloud over the troposphere of humankind's prosaic existence. A dithering sense of loss engulfs us. Humankind's unattainable desire to achieve a slice of perfection generates a suspenseful haze of doom. A lingering stab of incompleteness coupled with the tantalizing riddles of fate are inalterably interlinked and imbued in all thinking people's tormented soul. This cross coalescence of unattainable longing melds with the mystic tinged edges of uncertainty, spawned by the unanswerable questions posed by fate, fomenting a dialectical dissonance that distinguishes and ultimately exemplifies the arc of humankind's plaintive subsistence. Is life meaningless, without a fundamental purpose? Alternatively, must each of us proclaim a distinctive purposefulness for living? Is happiness a desired goal, and if so, what is personal happiness? Does happiness coincide with truthfulness? People intuitively seek happiness. How does a person haunted by memories of failure attain happiness? Should a person strive to realize an enviable social status and becoming fabulously wealthy (i.e. achieving fame and fortune)? Is happiness a mental state that instigates from a person leading a life that gives them maximize pleasure derived from their personal efforts? Does each person have the tools to achieve personal happiness? Is personal happiness a matter of making the right choices in life, of living a good life? Is the key to enjoying a happy life striving to obtain physical comfort, mental stimulation, and emotional wellbeing? Does a person achieve happiness by making choices in life that will enhance their degree of pleasure, lessen their degree of pain, and reduce their amount of personal sacrifice? Alternatively, does achieving a happy life require living virtuously by demonstrating honest work and helping other people? Can eradicating self-deception lead me to discovering a unique purpose in life that heretofore eluded me? Perhaps a creative course of constructive achievement will provide a glimmering moment of happiness.

An enlightened person strives to live a meaningful life, defined by their personal humility joy, passion, and profound reverence for life. Should a person devote their efforts to achieving their maximize potential, or dedicate their talent and abilities to accomplishing worldly projects that improve other people's standard of living? Is it possible to be happy irrespective of the lack of financial remuneration obtained through personal efforts? Can a person attain happiness by discovering, developing, and honoring their aptitude and skills, working diligently to improve their own life and other people's lives, while also striving to integrate all divergent aspects of their personality into a unifying self, i.e. integration of the id, ego, and superego? Can a person achieve a happy and meaningful life by pursuing an artistic life of creation? Does granting ourselves free rein to produce artistic embodiments depicting the elemental evil underling our base nature rivaling with our preening desire to engage only in goodness inevitably give birth to our textured spiritual awareness?

Dreams fuel human beings imaginative response to existence. Is it absurd compulsively to labor in an effort to express the present crucible of our earthly reality conjoined with our punch-holed dreams? Does penal work on a chain gang dull the senses

or does all honest work give birth to a person's creative sensibilities? Must we actively participate in all the evocative activities of life or risk becoming forever stymied by indifference, self-doubt, and by the petrifying summons of self-loathing? Is it absurd to dismiss ourselves and dejectedly resign ourselves to occupying a windowless soul? Must I accept living as an emotional midget? Should I capitulate to stumbling along frozen in a daze of bewildering hopelessness? Alternatively, can I impose a moratorium upon my present suffering and attempt to discern a better way to live? What is the correct path to end suffering and discover joy? No one else is interested in my story, but I still feel an irrepressible need to shape the tale of my travails into a storyboard format.

We each pine to express our uniqueness. Is it absurd to take ourselves seriously, and resolutely search out a means to discover and express the story that plaits a modicum of coherent reality out of our existence? Is it ridiculous to garner joy from walking in the woods, spending dashes of time intermingling with family and friends, and by working unerringly at our jobs? Is it right to take solace in minor moments of wonder woven together similar to strands of wool in a familiar sweater? Can I wring joy from the snug encounters of daily living by participating in an interlinked web of community of life? Can I foster goodwill by saturating my heart in time-tested faith? What does a person do when life crushes them? Is it absurd to want a different life? Alternatively, are personal dreams the only facet of life that we exclusively possess that can sustain us in time of distress?

Hope is a form of conscious dream making. Can a person live without hope? Must a middle-aged man such as me who underwent a bevy of loss and failure aim to summon the interior moxie to watch the sunrise on each new day while wearing a faint smile of hope? Must I stoically resolve to endure bearing the weighty load of previous personal debacles? I gain nothing by wallowing in self-denunciation. Guilt and shame exacts a severe tithe. I cannot lead a worthy life by tumbling into alcoholic numbness or a drug-induced pit. The powerful questions of life produce a dynamic dualism, which interplay creates the operatic structure that we must operate. Can the flesh and spirit coexist? Can inner despair and renewed optimism reside under the same roof? Can we harness humankind's wretchedness in order to broker its salvation? Should all people seek out perfection or work to accept their fallibility? Should I eschew pain or embrace suffering? Do I cave into the meaninglessness of my life or actively rebel against the patent absurdity of human existence?

We are condemned to be free people, liberated people who must make life-defining decisions. Freedom requires choices and all choices entail value decisions. I have come to that fork in the road where one must decide how to live and how to die. No wonder I am agitated to the point of falling into state of irreversible catatonia. Self-doubt and apprehension, along with intensifying self-loathing and fatigue beseech me to stop questing. Why am I am plagued by the dueling dynamism that binds my existence? Does the ball of fears and doubts, and chain of self-hatred and personal exhaustion, which manacle me, inhibit other people?

Human life might be predestined or susceptible to a modicum of alteration through a determined act of free will. Who is the warden controlling my fate? Can I create a new self-governing overseer to guide me through an underground tunnel of repressed desire? Can I inculcate myself from a diseased mind by discovering freedom from suffering? Can I chisel out a paradigmatic way to live righteously? Can I cut a groove in my heart and discover the lightness of soul that I seek? Can I discover a hidden key of enlightenment that allows me to manumit my enslaved spirit? Can I put an end to the atrocious evilness

that haunts my existence? Can I burn a neural route through my brain that releases the intolerable pressure searing my tattered soul? The deluge of an immoral life threatens to bury me in shame and self-loathing.

The mental mist of ambiguity and the fog of ambivalence hamper human existence. Why do the ambiance of self-doubt and a shroud of multiple layers of contradictions underscore my confusion? Can I attain happiness by carving out a protective niche in the world, a place where my thoughts can roam free, a safe place where I can work unencumbered by silly worries that mar an ordinary life? I am free to do as I please, so why does life seem so bewildering, difficult, frustrating, and unsatisfying? Am I any different from other people? Do all people by their very nature stretch their puniness to know? Does it place a person in jeopardy to reach out to explore the difference between the known and the unknown? Is the risk to gain self-knowledge and determine how one fits into the world that surrounds us a worthwhile proposition? Is the desire to expand a person's understanding of humanity and enhance their comprehension of humankind's role in an interconnected world a journey that we each must undertake in our own way in order to exact a hard won scrap of perception that every civilization builds its structural pillars upon and every person relies upon in order to survive? Will a haphazard quest to obtain personal knowledge parlay my ruin or can cerebral effort jumpstart personal salvation?

A narrow hallway is all that separates rational from irrational, creativity from insanity, and intelligence from stupidity. How do I avoid dullness, folly, and gross acts of excess? How do I distinguish cogent acts of survival from random acts of inanity? How does a person hold in equipoise two variant perspectives at once? American author F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940) wrote a collection of essays entitled "*The Crack-Up*," which makes the following astute observation: "the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideals in mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function." For instance, he cites the ability to perceive that the situation is hopeless, and still be determined to make it otherwise. Sensitive people who came before me asked the same disconcerting questions that haunt me. Other troubled souls either drank themselves into oblivion or worked themselves to death in search of the elusive answer to this Fitzgeraldian question: Is it a sign of a lucid mind to place two contradictory ideas abreast and accept the merits of both propositions? Alternatively, is the deliberate act of embracing differing ideas with inapposite conclusions the warning sign of a troubled mind's impending crackup?

Aristotle declared that, "It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it." Does the intrinsic tension between opposing ideas create a lamplight of stereoscopic vision? Does the mental friction generated by antinomy, a contradiction between two apparently equally valid principles or between inferences correctly drawn from such principles, lead to war within the mind or does the natural rasping of abrasive thoughts spur the mind to create soothing metaphorical thoughts in order to attain conceptual peace? Does a person employ their cache of personal experiences to guide how they live or do they plot their life course based exclusively upon their ideas? How does a person associate personal experiences with ideas? Can a personal experience ever portray the profundity of an idea? Does an idea express what sentiment we can never equate to an actual personal experience; is an idea by its very nature characterized precisely by the fact that no sensation of experience is ever fully congruous to it? Is absolute truth and existence the same – equivalent to each other? Alternatively, is

truth and existence mutually exclusive? How does a person deal with all the heartache and tragedy that fills their life without becoming insane or committing suicide?

A person can either set goals or simply live one day at a time without any directive intention. What is an ideal person? I cannot continue living as before without evaluating my former actions and the dire consequences of an egotistical existence lacking passion and compassion. I cannot survive without seeking truth and beauty. My former self cannot hold me hostage if I intend to become all that I can be. Can a person crave to destroy himself and at the same time wish to transmute himself into a fuller being? Is destruction of a central part of us necessary in order to transform ourselves? How do perceptive people fend off their destructive impulses, through insensibility or with greatness of mind? How can an ordinary person such as me, deficient in natural talent and ignorant in the ways of the world, blunt the self-doubt and the fear that nips at my heels? How does a vegetative character such as me express the vivacity of life while counterbalancing the immutable sorrows that accompany our struggles to glean meaning in life? How does anyone function rationally knowing that his or her life will ruefully end with death?

Suffering becomes beautiful whenever a person bears great calamities with cheerfulness. Do people who love more suffer more? Is love merely a tinted simile for accepting ourselves and unequivocally embracing other people's ululating heart songs? Is hate the failure to love? Is evil merely the absence of good? Alternatively, is the root of hate and evil more than the lack of love and absence of goodness? Is darkness the absence of light, or does darkness encapsulate its own dynamism? Does the interaction of piousness and sinfulness along with the intermingling of knowledge and ignorance shadow our souls similar to how darkness interferes with light to create shades of opaqueness? What is self-love? Is it important to love oneself? Alternatively, is no self the ultimate test?

It is important to apprehend the full gamut of emotions that are available to all thinking, feeling, and compassionate human beings. Does self-love open a person's gracious heart and mind enabling them generously to love and genially to care for other people? Without self-love, does a person lack the emotional quotient necessary to feel both genuine affection and empathy for our brethren? Must I commence a fundamental transformation of the self by eliminating a toxic dosage of self-hatred? Will newly discovered self-respect place me on the path towards obtaining personal enlightenment. Alternatively, is eliminating any concept of the self the fundamental charter that I must devote all days and nights to achieve? Do I live out the remainder of my life striving to increase a mental storehouse of intellectual knowledge or by expanding a state of conscious awareness? Should my ultimate goal be to decode all the paradoxes in life or nurture a state of cognitive awareness? Should I strive to develop internal peace, silence, and tranquility? Must I rely upon the intuitive self to reconnect innate root structure and link myself to the essential means of living life deeply? By courageously striving to conquer illicit personal desires, can I develop a state of mirror-like purity of consciousness that allows a person to serve as a gracious and unbiased witness to the surrounding world?

A person whom sets goals is a hopeful person, whereas, a person whom fails to achieve their goals might despair. Why do both hope and despair fill my inner world? Who cannot despair when inducted into a world filled with cruelty? Who cannot despair when serving as the serf in a seigneur's regime that bestows legal and economic power, financial rewards, social status, and related societal prizes upon feudal lords whom exhibit the ravenous instinct for power and accumulation of wealth? Who cannot despair when

stranded alone with their personal thoughts, unable to imagine a better earthly life, and flooded with uncertainty of a redemptive afterlife? Why would not any person despair his or her failure to etch a mindset that serves to alleviate their present day suffering?

A person whom lives by faith is not bound to feel hopelessness or the agony of infinite despair. How can anyone sink into dejection and despondency when nature's generous bounty is so magnificent that it makes any selfish feelings too frail to register? Who can despair their existence when standing before the mesmerizing power of an ocean, after witnessing a mother nurse a newborn stirring in their crib, or when held entranced by the life-giving gurgle of a river? Who can deny the miracle of life after watching fresh falling snow soundlessly adorn the mountains, vales, and fields in a saintly white cloud? Who can deny that a tree full of light shares the same holy strand of the indispensable nectar of life with the humblest creature that walks beneath its protective awning? Humankind's insuppressible exuberance demands that we spring forward clicking our heels in revelry and delight when basking in the fullness of the miracle of life. Every day is a delightful gift. Walking in the dappled valley spackled in filtered sunlight of verdant woodland, we witness the diffused silhouette of humankind's ambitious gestalt to make known the indeterminate, unravel the indecipherable, and joyfully flaunt the magical experience of living in the moment free of angst.

People cannot escape the looming specter of a deathwatch and the imposing emptiness that comes with the termination of their existence. People resist going silently into the night. We seek to howl at the moon and make known our search for a diagrammatic overture that voices our unquantifiable existence. Terrified of squandering our existence, we each seek to break out from our muteness and strike an accord with our brothers and sisters whom share our inherent desire to reach a global consilience. A sundry of intimate encounters with the vibrant intellect of perceptive thinkers dissolves a recluse's shroud of seclusion. Can I manufacture the needed first aid kit to arrest my internal hemorrhaging? Can I stave off my mental deterioration by exploring the written words of renowned authors? Can I map a course out of my present quandary by scouring the libraries brimming with the beautiful mind works of previous generations of eminent writers? Will diligent encounters with the incisive thoughts of outstanding essayist shred the indivisible bars shielding my indeterminate self and release me from of the monochrome cage of self-imposed isolation? Can respected writers' perceptive soul-searching create a template for my inchoative thoughts spontaneously to mature?

Each generation produces its oracles and sages, independent thinkers whom serve as cultural bearers. Every generation produces perceptive individuals whose special radiance answers the trumpet call of the pernicious challenges bestowed by their times. These compassionate mavens provide worthy insights on humankind's gallant attempt to escape its balmy pond of alienation and frigid sea of desolation. Conversations conducted by past and present essayist speaking in consonance between parallel times judiciously reflect the polyphonic cadence of robust jubilation wrought through living purposefully. The coruscating voices of the muses from times of yore manufacture the accordion spine of humankind's expanding élat anthology.

Art translates human souls. Each passing eon's public display of sophisticated hieroglyphics cast a unique depiction upon the rudimentary art of survival. Humankind cannot exist without the makeshift paradigm of innovative art, which genuine amoeba expresses elusive and unsayable thoughts. Humankind's gallery of artistic impressions

ranges from the starkness of personified cave drawings to the free ranging lexis of modern art. Collection of multihued stories of the ages portrays the vivid panoply of enigmatic *vitas* etched by humankind's self-imposed sense of urgency. Each passing generation's effusion of trope offerings seamlessly folds its shared renderings into the shimmering panorama of the cosmos, the sparkling nightscape that houses the intangible life force all communal souls.

Silken strings composing the harpsichord of life accommodate a score of emotional tidings. An orchestra of linked heartbeats strumming the melodious prose of our collective intones gives rise to sonnets of melancholy, producing an illimitable libretto stretching from the milky dawn of newborn's amaranth life to the speckled sunsets of gentle souls whom we cherish. In the forest canopied with the leafy niche of daily events, a benevolent listener reverberates in the canonical poetry of the ages humming irrepressible visceral contradictions. A squall of tears of bereavement pierces the elegiac sea of a silent night. The red-rimmed eye of sunrise greets us with a torrent of rage spilling over from frontlines of an examined life's vital quarrels. The flute of life ushers in a welcoming breeze of reassuring resonance.

A storm-filled life replete with piercing and unearthly sounds ravages the soul of any thoughtful person. In contrast, the genteel wind of restoration moves silently, invisibly. Renewal is a spiritual process, the communal melody that sustains us. Inexpressible braids of tenderness whispering reciprocating chords of love for family, friends, humankind, and nature plaits interweaved layers of blissful atmosphere, which copious heart song brings spiritual rejuvenation. For when we love in a charitable and bountiful manner without reservation, liberated from petty jealousy, and free of the toxic blot of discrimination, we become the ineluctable wind that vivifies the lives of other people. The mellifluous changes in heaven, earth, and our journey through the travails of time, while worshipping the trove of fathomless joys of life, constitute the seeds of universal poetry.

Sharing our personal stories makes us grateful for experiencing the radiance of being alive. Writing our personal stories documenting our vivid encounters with the larger world and examining our own time-tested ideas shapes the conception of our own being. Zadie Smith, an English novelist, essayist, and short story writer said, "When I write I am trying to express my way of being in the world. This is primary a process of elimination: once you have removed all the dead language, the second-hand dogma, the truths that are not your own but other people's, the mottos, the slogans, the out-and-out lies of your nation, the myths of your historical moment – once you have removed all that warps experience into a shape you do not recognize and do not believe in – what you are left with is something approximating the truth of your own conception."

Every day is an opportunity to stand in awe when witnessing the overpowering presence of nature, an apt time to pay reverence for the inestimable beauty of life. I must remain mindful to live in an ethical manner by paying attention to the threat of injustice towards other people and resist capitulating to the absurdity of being a finite body born into infinite space and time. I am part of the world, a spar in a sacred composition, a body of energy suspended in the cosmos. I seek to create a poetic personal testament to life. When I pivot and turn away from fixating upon the cruel artifices of my encysted orbit to face and outwardly embrace the cleansing swirl of heaven's windmill, I feel gusting in the shank of my marrow the thump of onrushing primordial truths, the electric flush of those ineffable couplets of life that one may not utter.

Remembrances

“The years, the months, the days, and the hours have flown by my open window. Here and there an incident, a towering moment, a naked memory, an etched countenance, a whisper in the dark, a golden glow these and much more are woven fabric of the time I have lived.”

—Howard Thurman

“I’m trying to figure out sequence: how paragraphs connect; how generations overlap; how ideas bleed into one another. My subjects include the interdependence of fragments; the weight of incidents; subordination and insubordination; hierarchy; demonstration and denotation; shadow and palimpsest; argumentation and allusion; name-dropping and citation; causality and the aleatory; my old chestnut, overdetermination;¹¹⁷ fact and speculation; melodrama and sentimentality; time-wasting; performance and being buried alive; cop-out and aporia; agency and knife-point; the beauty of detachment; misalignments; leaving projects dead and incomplete in the midst and not regretting the abandonment.”

—Wayne Koestenbaum, *“My 1980’s & Other Essays.”*

It is incredibly difficult to write about remembered experiences. I began by writing in spurts and quickly discovered that everything “is corroded, broken, dismantled; everything is covered in harden layers of accumulated insensitivity, deafness, entrenched routine. It is disgusting.”¹¹⁸ Memory, with all its faults, is never a precise method of recounting truth or verifying minor details that serve as a springboard for a significant incident. “*In Search of Time Lost*,” renowned French author Marcel Proust (1871-1922) wrote extensively about the role of memory in shaping human thought. “Memory, instead of being a duplicate, always present before one’s eyes, of the various events of one’s life, is rather a void from which at odd moments a chance resemblance enables one to resuscitate dead recollections, but even then, there are innumerable little details which have not fallen into that potential reservoir of memory, and which will remain forever unverifiable.”

Writing is an attempt to live an ageless existence by averring what is unproven and unprovable. A writer’s voice blunts oblivion of the author and his or her loved ones by leaving an inerasable mark that other people can trace. French feminist writer Hélène Cixous declared, “My voice repels death; my death; your death; my voice is my other. I write and you are not dead. The other is safe if I write.” Writing about the past and especially documenting the role of oneself in prior escapades is virtually impossible, because it represents an attempt to avow what lies below a grey sheet of fog, our secret

¹¹⁷Overdetermination is a phenomenon whereby a single observed effect is determined by multiple causes at once, any one of which alone might be enough to account for (“determine”) the effect.

¹¹⁸Quotation attributed to Boris Pasternak (1890-1960), a Russian poet, novelist, and literary translator best known as the author of “*Doctor Zhivago*,” (1957).

passions, string of thoughts, flourishes of envies, and unrebuked avidities. The reason that a person persists in writing is that it halts the dulling commotion that pervades modern life, allows a person to think deeply about life, and commune with oneself. We must pause, capture thoughts and emotions on paper, before the days slip emptily by and we grow old, feeble, and forgetful. English poet novelist, and journalist Vita Sackville-West (1892-1962) said, that writing enables us to “clap the net over the butterfly of the moment,” before the moment passes, “it is forgotten; the mood is gone; life itself is gone.” Writers are historians; they document the history in time, and are concerned with the continuous, methodical narrative of past events relating to the human race.

Narrative personal writing involves an investigation and analysis of facts and ideals, creation of coherent narrative description explaining what occurred, why and how an incident took place. Writing examines the ramifications of pertinent events, both large and small. Similar to any other restless act of philosophizing, writing is an attempt to understand our world. Writing enables a person to congeal the fragments of a disorderly life into a meaningful collage. It encourages us to iron out internal inconsistencies and damper an outraged heart. When we stumble in life, writing allows us to pick ourselves up and see the beauty and virtue in doing so. Writing feverously enables us to revive a depleted spirit, discover a joyous stand in the wilderness, and find a means to be at peace with the world. Writing is the product of calculated observation, active interrogation, and intensive investigation of the intuitive self, which process helps us gain or reclaim our equilibrium. Carlos Fuentes (1928-2012), a Mexican novelist, short story writer, playwright, essayist, critic, and diplomat said, at its foundation stone, writing is a “struggle against silence.” A person also writes in an effort to clear their mind of confusing thoughts and disorderly emotions before they go mad.

What we write are only partial impressions. Logical and illogical thoughts form sentences. Crazy words frequently contain seeds of truth. André Gide (1869-1951), French writer and recipient of the 1947 Nobel Prize in Literature said, “The most beautiful things are those that madness prompts and reason writes.” Akin to any other task that calls for the unionization of the mind, the body, and the spirit, propulsive writing is an act of creation and revelation. Writing inspires mental and spiritual advancement – growth of the mind and soul – through the dynamic and alarming process of investigation, reflection, and analysis. Vita Sackville-West said, “The writer catches the changes of his mind on the hop. Growth is exciting; growth is dynamic and alarming.” A writer uses a blend of signs to convey an admixture of thoughts, legendary, mythical, and complex, which enigmatic merger represents ideas launched from a variable consanguinity. Modern essay writing, resembling the prehistoric pictographs painted onto canyon walls by ancient tribal shamans and initiates, plays a medicinal role in the life of the writer and persons whom come along later and see a reflective image that speaks to them swimming amongst the streaked and discolored brush strokes on the benevolent face of Grandfather Rock. The healing powers of writing, painting, and other physical crafts represents the artist’s creative fusion of the physical, intellectual, and the spiritual challenges that characterize living an engaged life.

We are finite creates in a world of boundless space, endless time, and infinite matter. At any given moment, we are each a composition of our past memories, our present day exigencies, and our future expectations. Each passing day we modify our identity, filtering a continuum of past memories with our present day hopes and desires. The design of our future prospects shapes not only our present life, but also the furious pursuit of our dreams

provides contexture for the lives of other people who will follow our loose-limbed march through time's corridor. We search for an understanding of how to live in an age that will soon no longer exist. I am a bubble in space-time, an organic organism that will soon burst apart. I need to know why I lived. Acclaimed Russian author Leo Tolstoy wrote in 1877 novel "*Anna Karenina*," "Without knowledge of what I am and why I am here, it is impossible to live, and since I cannot know that, I cannot live either."

By discovering our rightful and respectful place in this magnificent universe, we indelibly write our personal script into the strata of time. We come from this earth and we will return to this earth. The word human is a derivative of the word humus. We spring from the same soil that houses our ancestor's great sleep. We walk on the fossilized bones and decomposed flesh of all the people and every species that traversed the earth before our time. It is humbling and reassuring to know that I entered this life-giving sphere only after so many good people came before me to consecrate this land with their vitality and knowing that we share the universal story of struggle. It is consoling understanding that after I die Mother Earth will turn my decomposed shell into a new form of life. My decaying body will provide nutrients for life that will rise after I die. Until the soil opens up to receive me as its own child, I must take a stand and make the most out of the sunshine and rainstorms that beat down upon all people alike.

Life is a crapshoot. It is also brief. No generation is invulnerable to the formidable and grave powers of creation and obliteration that time renders. All people are subject to the vagrancies of time's steady pulse and subordinated to brute chance engendered when pulling the levers of fate found in our risk-filled environment. We can tilt the odds in our favor of living happily to a ripe old age by displaying a high degree of awareness and exercising self-control. We must rightfully display pride in our lives by claiming responsibility for ourselves and by taking on every challenge without mental equivocation. I seek to conquer personal fears and employ honest effort, energy, endurance, and enthusiasm supplemented with booster shots of intellectual integrity to become my personal master. Self-mastery, self-discipline, conscientious study, uncompromising integrity, and ethical awareness form the foundation stones of all religions and these qualities anchor every person of high character. While no personal medicine wheel is without faults and frailties, a person who exhibits an annealed temperament constantly searches inward to improve him or herself while maintaining a vigilant eye upon fulfilling their caregiver responsibilities.

A sacred quest for increased awareness commences with examination of the nature of the self. We are present on this fragile sphere for just an instant and we must make out of this existence whatever we can in whatever way we choose. Joe L. Wheeler, a historian, biographer, and story anthologist said, "Time remorselessly rambles down the corridors and street of our lives, but it is not until autumn that most of us become aware that our tickets are stamped with a terminal destination." Half way through life a thoughtful person must undertake an honest assessment of their life. I am now fifty years old. I am rapidly turning into a dry stalk, my breath is sour, and I am beginning to smell of the grave. I melancholy project that in all probability I have now existed about half the period of time that I shall remain in this sublunary world. Resembling the trajectory of other men reaching middle age, my upward ascent in life crested and now I am commencing the meteoric downhill descent. Distinct from Americas' pioneers and other luminaries whom played an important role in expanding our knowledge and deepened our appreciation of

nature, I have done nothing to advance the human condition. I have not mapped any new territory, contributed to the arts or sciences, or expanded our comprehension of mathematics or the natural sciences: astronomy, biology, chemistry, the Earth sciences, and physics. I did not contribute to medicine, cognitive science, behavioral science, social science, or the humanities.¹¹⁹ Unlike revered social leaders whom advocated peaceful relations with all people, I remained mute while domestic and international conflicts sundered communities. I created no historical existence; I exist only as an introspective being. I have not added one iota to the bank of knowledge of succeeding generations. I have not added any quarter of happiness to other people. My contribution to the human race is nil. In all probability, I will flame out without leaving a lasting trace of my mundane personal existence.

A person can learn at any stage of life. Education requires more than learning how to read a book and write a sentence. What good does it do to read and write if a person lacks the ability to evaluate and judge the truth and falsity of what they read and write? Learning how to speak and argue is of little utility to a person has nothing sensible to say or who argues in favor of falsehoods. Learning how to think is of extremely valuable because it provides the needed contexture to make reading, writing, speaking, and rhetoric useful. Thinking cannot exist in a vacuum. A person must demonstrate the talent to be a proficient observer before thinking is a viable activity. English critic of art, architecture, and society John Ruskin (1819-1900) wrote, “To be taught to read – what is the use of that, if you know not whether what you read is false or true? To be taught to write or speak – but what is the use of speaking, if you have nothing to say? To be taught to think – nay, what is the use of being able to think, if you have nothing to think of? But to be taught to see is to gain word and thought at once, and both come true.”¹²⁰

People who possess a thirst for knowledge, are keen observers, and possess a compassionate heart, hold the requisite key for learning and sharing their knowledge with other people. I do exist and so long as I can still draw a breath, I can continue to study, resolutely work towards bettering myself, and generously perform many small deeds of kindness for my family, friends, neighbors, and other acquaintances. I can still become a cooperative member and active supporter of the community. While the fang of time will eventually cut me down, akin to a child on Christmas morning, I must remain attuned to the beauty and thrall of magnificence afforded by each magical season of life.

As we age, we become more aware of the rarity and exquisiteness of beauty, and come to admire the flowers blooming amongst rubble. With each advancing decade, nature’s beauty and the magnificence of life increasingly amazes me. Maturation allows a person to appreciate the springtime frolic of youth and to inventory the knowledge garnered from a rigorous summer reflecting upon adulthood’s long pull. Ageing allows people to free themselves from the strife and strivings of their younger self. Reflective

¹¹⁹ The humanities are academic disciplines that study aspects of human culture including literature, philosophy, religion, visual and performing arts such as music and theatre, and ancient and modern languages. Social science is an academic discipline concerned with society and the relationships among individuals within a society. Social science comprises anthropology, economics, political science, psychology, and sociology. Academics regard select subjects as social sciences and other times classify them as humanities including history, archaeology, area studies, communication studies, cultural studies, law, and linguistics.

¹²⁰ John Ruskin, “*The Work of John Ruskin*,” (Library edition, Volume 39).

contemplation nurtures the cherished milk of wisdom. I shall rejoice in the commonplace acts of being. Today is an apt time to embrace learning at all stages of life. It is also an apt time to commence exercising the principles of good husbandry by beginning to making preparation for the inevitable freeze of winter.

All beings of the world are in a constant state of either coming into being or going out of being. Resignation of the soul is the final act in a one-character play. Given our genetic defect of mortality, it is impossible not to question the why and wherefore of our existence. It is understandable why each of us must ask what life is all about, and for that matter, constantly inquire what is next. Where does the headwater of our existence spring from and where will the divergent stream of life take us? Do the still waters that gently slide by compose the tranquil waters relished by lentic lakeside creatures? What lies ahead in the burbling headwaters of tomorrow? Does nourishing brain food wait for lotic inhabitants to feast upon in the turbulent rapids and airy froth of the future? Vagueness, doubt, and insecurity shroud the future. The only thing certain is that the effervescence culled from our dynamic immersion in the firth of today will expose our material composition.

Gazing into the heavens on a starry night a person sees the reflection of their own soul staring back at them. Perceiving our microscopic place in the revolving cosmos, we search to ascertain a meaning for our existence; we stretch our minds to comprehend a reason that justifies our fleeting journey in a universe composed of dark energy. Comprehension of a full-bodied meaning for living seems to lie just beyond my grasp. Perhaps I struggle dialing into a meaning for life because living entails adapting to a constant state of chaos. Can I harmonize the noisy commotion and distracting clutter in my life? I need to overcome personal inertia by learning to become comfortable with these changing times. In actuality, I have no choice but to capitulate to the evolution of facets in the world. Everything in the universe is undergoing constant change. Alike all humankind, I am also in the process of evolving. Who I was will undoubtedly affect who I will become. Who I am now is not who I will always be. The demands imposed upon us by the exterior world prevent stagnation of our interior world. We must all respond to change by either growing or dying. Even a blockhead such as me proves alterable, because inherent mutability ensures the survival of all persons. The entire world is interconnected; we are part of the cosmic consciousness. Many factors beyond our direct control influence us.

Our times and our thoughts shape us. The world is in a constant and ceaseless state of motion and transformation. The only constant is that the universe we occupy today will undergo change based in part because of our personal actions and omissions and partially because the random volitions of the world's flux are impervious to our meager intentions. We are more reactors than we are enactors of our daily shape testing experiences. Necessity demands that we interpret our physical environment and assign meaning to the mandala of experiences that resonate with our emotional cordage. Our assumptions and expressive elucidations of an intermeshed external universe make up our internal world of thought. How we perceive the world in turn makes up the continued evolution of the rust resistant self. Formulation of a mutable sense of self causes us humbly to take into account our human frailty. Active awareness of our feebleness provides us an apt sense of perspective that our personal wants and woes are trifle matters. While we routinely suppress the knowledge of our ultimate fate in order to maintain the steam to power through the turbulence of each day. The constant whisper of death advancing is what drives all people to perform acts that transcend the banality of everyday living and place an

artistic stamp upon their lives. An ethical person attempts to live in that sweet spot half way between the extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification.

The mystery of existence will always remain a mystery. All we know for sure is what the ancients knew: each succeeding generation forms a link in the braided cord of humanity. Each of our lives is shallower if we do not know and pay homage to where we came from. The past forms the world that we currently inhabit, and our actions today, comparable to our ancestors' actions of yesterday, will reverberate in the history of tomorrow. While the tools of our trades evolve from generation to generation, the way that people behave and the motives behind their behavior remains constant. Each generation must chart the same dangerous territories of the heart. Each succeeding generation must diagnosis the illnesses that imperil their mental, physical, social, and economic wellbeing. Life is brutally painful and extraordinary joyful.

Living beings must take into account both human savagery and human congeniality. The stupendous irrationality and meanness that underlies much of human behavior contrasted with the love and compassion that people unselfishly exhibit makes ordinary life both appalling and fascinating. Using all available knowledge, we must grope our way through the bizarre twilight zone cast while living amongst the great apes, an unpredictable species that is capable of displaying both immense charity and engaging in the most outrageously inhuman actions imaginable. The blessed oddity of human behavior prompts an immense swath of tolerance and produces a wellspring of sympathy for our fellow humans. The radiant minds of history's great thinkers infused with the quick of experience of today's perceptive students of life will assist light a pathway though the byzantine jungle for the preeminent torch bearers of tomorrow to claw through. Our collective and interweaved journey through this wrinkle of time shall produce the backdrop of the story of the next generation, a unique tale paying tribute to these thunderous times. A personal story through the ether of time will assuredly entail common themes with my ancestors' heroic journey across the churning seas, Rocky Mountains, dense woodlands, searing deserts, and the immense span of the Great Plains.

Only the passage of time ultimately separates each generation. Our humanity remains stalwartly impervious to political manipulations and to the social, culture and economic tidings that each generation must etch out a living. Our sense of time past, present and future is the common denominator that each generation shares because time refuses to standstill for mere human beings. Time cannot be ignored or shunted, but must be respected for the indomitable power that its relentless pressure applies upon each of us. The unyielding power of time sneers at each of us regardless of our race, religion, creed, nationality, gender, age, or sexual orientation. Potency of time is irreducible, it is irreversible, and it is inerasable. Through the periscope of memory, we can dice snippets of time's atoms into infinitesimal pictures of mere moments; we can harness select prized memories to build a molecular mind's magical playhouse. The capacity of the human mind for memory enables people to preserve, retain, and subsequently recall knowledge, information, and experience. Replaying snapshots of the past enables us to comprehend the magnitude of the present and take account of the inevitability of our future.

Alertness of times passage is horribly frightening, because it infuses us with the unshakable perception that the passage of each day brings us closer to death. Awareness of our lost youth and charged with foreknowledge of our fate is terribly burdensome. Nonetheless, awareness of inexorable forward march of time and comprehension of our

transience is a key component of our humanness. Awareness of time serves as a constant jab in our flank. It shapes our sense of being and toys with our mental equilibrium. In order to maintain a modicum of sanity needed to continue the vigorous fight for survival, we busy ourselves with repressing and then remembering that our ultimate fate is death. Living vigorously necessitates sparring with the forerunning concept of death. At times, it seems necessary to refuse acknowledging the tragic brevity of our existence while we greedily chase our innermost dream of experiencing and voicing the ecstasy of life. We dual constantly between the conflicting emotions wrung from expressing our enthusiasm for life, and capitulating to the dire ramifications of growing despondency given our keen awareness that we are operating under a death sentence. We begin in earnest and gladness, but we must be ever vigilant to avoid unraveling in despondency and madness.

Our essential humanity is dependent upon humankind's ability to join the past and the future with the present. Recollections and future projections grant us the ability to cogitate, analyze, and evaluate. Contrasting memories enable us to ascertain what is true and false, and determine what is charming, attractive, stunning, or sublime. Remembrance of the past serves to comfort us, awareness of the future offers us hope, while our dutiful engagement in the present is capable of arresting our complete attention. Passage of time and the memories it creates provides us with our final sense of self. The power of imagination, awareness of the self, and the ability to place ourselves in the future are allied.

Imagination and recollection of cherished memories of the pastimes are closely related. We do not recall memories verbatim. As our perspective changes regarding our place in the world, we shift through our recollections and revise our memories. People possess the ability to edit their memories by repressing unbearable episodes and highlighting incidences that generate fond memories. How we perceive and comprehend ourselves in the past, the present, and the future shapes our evolving sense of self. Humankind's ability to repress unpleasant events and humankind's ability to act as the solo editors of our germinating awareness of the world that we occupy is ultimately responsible for activating our metamorphosing sense of identity.

We all experience different degrees of memory loss as we age or suffer brain damage, disease, or psychological trauma. The loss of memory (amnesia) can be either wholly or partially lost. There are two main types of amnesia: retrograde amnesia and anterograde amnesia. Retrograde amnesia is the inability to retrieve information acquired before a particular date, usually the date of an accident or operation. In some cases, the memory loss can extend back decades, while other persons may lose only a few months of memory. Anterograde amnesia is the inability to transfer new information from the short-term memory into long-term storage. Both types of amnesia can occur simultaneously. Americans are now living longer, and more and elderly Americans are reporting memory loss including persons afflicted with early onset of dementia and Alzheimer's disease. Cognitive impairments reduce the patient's ability to reason, retain information, and recall experiences and they suffer disruptions in patterns of thoughts, feelings, and performance of routine activities. Persons with severe memory impairments oftentimes are unable to recognize the faces of their family members and they lose the ability to recollect their personal autographical being.

Memory is an exquisite beam of the human mind that spotlights human existence. We must treasure our memories just as we cherish our dreams because without dreams and memory human life would be sad, brutal, and meaningless. The luminescent afterglow of

remembrance reveals the evanescence of our world, and it underscores the temporality of time and the fleeting nature of human life. No person is more ruthlessly cheated than someone strip-mined of his or her ability to recall the vibrancy of the past. After all, what would any person be if robbed of all sense of long-term memory? Without memories, all that any person would know about life is if he or she was hungry or thirsty, cold or hot. Without memories of the past and shredded of any illusion of a future there cannot be a frame for our existence. Without a sense of memory, we lack cognition of the very essence of our being. In absence of our memories, there can be no introspection, no ethical awareness, and no devotion, loyalty, or love. Without memories, there can be no sense of what is attractive or repellent, or any appreciation for what is sublime. Without the strums of memory to sound the depths there can be no appreciation for what is beautiful as opposed to ugly. Without memory, there would be no baseline to evaluate integrity, proportion, and *Caritas*.¹²¹ Imagination requires memory as a counterpoint. Art would be nonexistent without dashes of memory and splotches of imagination to provide context.

Personal memory – the palest of all lights – is the wellspring of personality and creativity. Memory is the also the cornerstone of culture and the basis of community and family relationships. Without memories of our thoughts and actions, we would not recognize our individual self. Without personal memories, there is no personal character or soul of a nation. Without contextual memories, the concept of universal principles of goodwill and the individual desire to perform noble selfless acts would be moot. There can be no symmetry in any human relations without memories to provide a baseline foundation for reflection and contemplation. It would fatally tax a person's desire to achieve fairness in their personal dealings without memories of prior acts of greed or benevolence to provide structure for judging the merits of their current behavioral options. Without the haunting of memory to remind us of our propensity to hate outsiders and readiness to overlook the disfranchised, there would be wholesale discrimination and unchecked commission of infamous crimes.

Memory is the essential cornerstone of humanity. There would be no spiritual platform for enactment of public policy directed at uplifting the poor without remembrance of our munificent traditions and customs. Without the ability to recollect the why and wherefores, there would be no tolerance or wondrous love. Without oral memories of the instructions issued by our prophets and patriarchs, there would be no reminder of their charitable calling. Memories prompt us magnanimously to provide for and protect our family, love our neighbors and enemies, and pray for unsavory souls whom persecute us. Without memories of our prior actions and omissions, there would be no confession, and no repentance. Without memories of our personal transgressions, there would be no tolerance for other people. Without memories of heroic action of our predecessors, there would be no sterling examples to exemplify and guide honorable human behavior. Memories are what we rely upon to understand what it means to be human. Shared memories of affection and kindness and recollections of selfless acts fuse the ties of families. Collective memories establish community culture.

Human beings are self-motivated. The two desires that spur human action are hunger and love. Without memory, humankind would no longer hunger for love. Deprived of all

¹²¹ *Caritas* is a Latin term that refers to clearness, costliness, the attitude of understanding and kindness to others.

forms of memory, people would act only to satiate the immediacy of their base cravings. Without past memories acting as guidepost, humankind's dynamics diminish to the entropy of commission and reaction. The desire to achieve lastingness would be frivolous without appreciation of our joint history. In absence of historical awareness, there could be no culture dialogue or community inwardness. Absent historical awareness, there would be no evolving community consciousness and there would be no social engine capable of generating any communities' battery of self-determinacy. Self-improvement would be frivolous without forging an intimate relationship with our historiology as well as familiarity with the account of select people's exhibited character traits that we might wish to emulate. Notions of personal pliancy and individual lability¹²² would lose its root structure without the prongs of memory to provide the necessary griddle and supporting trusses to configure and provide cohesion for our developing sense of selfhood.

Without the aid of memory, human cognition would be nil. Without memory, there can be no thinking, no learning, no accumulation of shared knowledge, and no philosophy. Thinking requires the capacity to recall. Thinking is what enables human beings the ability to understand cause and effect, recognize patterns of significance, comprehend the unique context of experience, measure personal activities, and respond to the world in a meaningful way. Knowledge is memory based. Learning demands the acquisition of studious observations and learned information, the ability to recall a slew of previously held factoids on command, and logically and intuitively to extrapolate from such objective facts. Without memory, there could be no morality. Awareness of humankind's ineluctable sense of impermanence requires the ability to comprehend times passage through use of stored memories. Without the epic sense of being that memory supplies us, there would be no understanding of eternity, we would remain ignorant of the unremitting thump of time, and therefore, we would be forever unaware of humankind's wretched transience.

There can be no intellectual, spiritual, or emotional life without the substratum of memory. Without cognition and awareness of beauty and appreciation of our limited time on planet Earth, humankind's sojourn would be a colorless collage composed of the base acts of a biological mass endeavoring merely to survive. Without the ability to recall striking memories, our emotional life would be stillborn. Absent authentic memories, our life struggles would seem purposeless: human beings would exhibit no capacity to reflect awe when witnessing the bounty of nature's plenitude or be able to take in and express intense reverence for all that is sacred. Without memory, there would not be a dais to support faith or any ability to imagine a God; the concepts of good and evil would be nonexistent; and the past and the future would become less relevant than the choice between salt or pepper, and paper or plastic.

Blessed with an analytical mind, human beings are able to evaluate our personal and shared experiences. The battle for survival as individuals and as a species ensures us that humankind is subject to perplexing choices in life. We are independent actors as well as slaves to the whimsy of fate. Physical sovereignty, social and economic freedom, coupled with self-will to choose how we autonomously respond to our fate allows us to handpick the course of action that reflects what is important to each of us. The liberal combination of evaluation and selection grants each self-ruled person an opportunity to wring the most value out of their life. We live a worthy life by creating a lasting legacy of goodness and

¹²²Lability refers to something constantly undergoing change or likely to undergo change.

by passing on our accumulated wisdom to other people who personally know us or learn about us through shared stories. Without the ability to recall and tell the narrative stories of our people there would be no paradigmatic structures around which we can organize our experiences. Deprived of all ability to recall there can be no grand narratives; there can be no knowledge of profound periods of communal continuity; or awareness of the epic ruptures in the history of a person, family, clan, sect, state, republic, or nation.

Without the mellifluous notes of memory, there would be no songs to sing, no ballads dedicated to past afflictions or affections, and no church hymns celebrating the trials and tribulations of saints, martyrs, and holy deities. Without respect for memories for days gone by, we would lack impetuses to write poems or produce literature reflecting the bitter hardships and ineffable joys of human life. Without a reference to the past serving as an ethical compass pointing the way forward, we would be oblivious to the inequities committed by foes and the glorious deeds performed by our ancestors; we would lack the essential evenhandedness required of every caretaker; and we would be poor stewards of this planet. The loss of memory severs us at the stem from one another. Without the bond of shared memories, we would each remain forever unconnected to our brothers and sisters. Without the twigs of memory, we would lead a life as dry and disjointed as withered leaves scattered by a cruel wind.

An inherent beguiling mystery drapes human nature. The unique human brain is the most complex biological enterprise in this entire universe. The mind of the human race is a fusion of matter that supports the cognitive faculties that enable consciousness, thinking, reasoning, perception, and judgment. The brain's synergistic neurological processes enable a person to possess subjective awareness and project their intentionality towards their environment, perceive and respond to stimuli with agency, and draw from their consciousness including thinking and feeling. Despite all the scientific inroads, we cannot explain how and why humankind acts as it does. We must continue to study our objective manifestations of personality and exhibited behavioral traits. Our sense of self-awareness, self-assurance, self-assertion, and directed intention allows us to script our role in the future outcome of the organism known as humankind.

We came from some place and we are trending in a particular direction. Without memories, we do not know where we come from, and we cannot project our future trajectory. Without a keen awareness of our history, we cannot pose any meaningful hypothesis or engage in any useful speculation regarding the future of humankind. Without knowing where humankind came from and failing to contemplate where humankind is going, we could never touch upon a comprehensive understanding of the mythology and mystery of human nature. Such a spectacle would preclude us from comprehending what it truly means to be human. Melodious memories assist us to feel in our bones what being actually entails in its full aesthetic splendor.

Silent remembering is a form of prayer. No fragrance is more enchanting to re-experience than the aromatic bouquet gleaned from inhaling the cherished memories of our pastimes. We regularly spot elderly citizens sitting alone gently rocking themselves while facing the glowing sun. Although these sun worshipers might appear lonely in their state of serene solitude, they are not alone at all, because they deeply enmesh themselves in recalling the glimmering memories of days gone by. Marcel Proust wrote "*In Search of Time Lost*," "As with the future, it is not all at once but grain by grain that one savors the past." Test tasting the honeycombed memories of their bygone years, a delicate smile play

out on their rose thin lips. The mellow tang of sweet tea memories – childhood adventures, coming of age rituals, wedding rites, recreational jaunts, wilderness explorations, viewing and creating art, literature, music, and poetry, sharing in the mystical experiences of life, and time spent with family – is the brew of irresistible intoxicants that we all long to sip as we grow old. The nectar mashed from a collection of choice memories produces a tray of digestible vignettes that each of us lovingly roll our silky tongues over. On the eve of lying down for the last time in the stillness of our cradled deathbeds, we will swaddle ourselves with a blanket of heartfelt love and whisper a crowning chaplet of affection for all of humanity. After all, we been heaven blessed to take with us to our final resting place an endless scroll amassing the kiss soft memories of time yore.

Time is that pridian river of eternity peacefully passing from today into yesteryear. Our febrile life is a microscopic flare in the rivulet of flowing eternity. In the wink of an eye, all quaint days of the past, the present, and future will meld together into the bottomless unknown of perpetuity. Only trace evidence of our invertebrate existence will anoint future generations. In the crinkle of time, our houses will crumble apart. Companies that we worked for will go out of business or merge with other nameless conglomerates. What will survive us are our children and our words. Our children cart our chromosomes and carry the mitochondrial DNA of our ancestral chronicle in their articulated hollow.

Our children are an integral component of our stories as we are of theirs and, therefore, each child acts as the knighted messengers to carry their forebears' stories into the future. To deprive our children of the narrative cells regarding the formation of the ozone layer that rims the atmosphere of our ancestors' saga and parental determination of selfhood is to deny them of the sacred right to claim the sanctity of their heritage. Accordingly, all wrinkled brow natives are chargeable with the sacrosanct obligation of telling their kith and kin the memorable story of the scenic days they spent as children of nature splashing about in their naked innocence in the brook of infinite time and space. We must scrupulous document our family's history as well as scrawl out our personal story.

Chronicling a family's story, recording shared memories, melds generations together. Reminiscences of our ancestors connect us to people whom no longer exist. Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893), a French writer of short stories said, "Our memory is a more perfect world than the universe: it gives back life to those who no longer exist." We live in a mental apartment house occupied by our memories of other people. Our personal emotions expand when we recall the past and share treasured recollections with our loved one. Virginia Woolf said, "I can only note that the past is beautiful because one never realizes an emotion at the time. It expands later, and thus we don't have complete emotions about the present, only about the past."

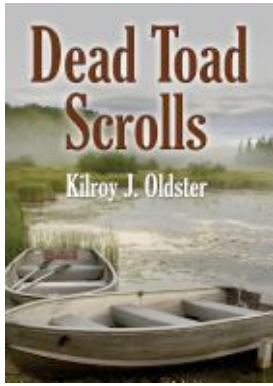
Telling our personal story constitutes an act of consciousness that defines the ethical lining of a person's constitution. Recounting personal stories promotes personal growth, spurs the performance of selfless deeds, and in doing so enhances the ability of the equitable eye of humanity to scroll rearward and forward. Every person must become familiar with our communal history of struggle, loss, redemption, and meaningfully contemplate the meaning behind our personal existence in order to draft a proper and prosperous future for succeeding generations. Accordingly, every person is responsible for sharing their story using the language of thought that best expresses their sanguine reminiscences. Without a record of pastimes, we will never know what were, what we now are, or what we might become by steadfastly and honorably struggling with mortal chores.

We must intensely work towards attaining wholeness by living an authentic life devoted to witnessing and appreciating the inexhaustible beauty of the natural world whether our discipline is painting, signing, composing poems, writing philosophy novels, or essays, or performing other acts of inspired creation. We live in a temporal world where time is transient; the entire history of our world is a mere blink in eternity. Our happiness is equally ephemeral. Contemporary Japanese writer Haruki Murakami wrote in his 2005 novel *"Kafka on the Shore,"* "The pure present is an ungraspable advance of the past devouring the future. In truth, all sensation is already a memory."

The human species is devoted to learning in order to improve our collective condition and individual lives. We must draw freely from both knowledge and imagination in order to reach the apex of human potential. Albert Einstein said, "Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world." Reading historical books, recalling vivid memories and copious usage of human imagination enable a person mentally to travel between wide ranges of eras. Marcel Proust wrote *"In Search of Time Lost,"* "For man is that ageless creature who has the faculty of becoming many years younger in a few seconds, and who, surrounded by the walls of the time through which he has lived, floats within them as in a pool the surface-level of which is constantly changing so as to bring him within range now of one epoch, now another." Remembrances can also be horribly frightening because unexpected burst of recollections can alert us to the world of scorned feelings. All of the despised sorrows that we have repressed remind us of the death of loved ones and cause us to lament our own lack of longevity. As with love, it is a great disservice to our lovers, family, community, and oneself to live in fear of the past, present, or future.

The human mind construes the meaning behind our existence. We cannot disconnect ourselves from reality. We must face and liberally construe our world – the past, the present, and the future. Dreaded human insecurities, tangled thoughts, and mixed emotions conspire to prevent us from experiencing reality and inexcusably hesitate in venerating all aspects of being. Marcel Proust advised *"In Search of Time Lost,"* "And so we ought not to fear in love, as in everyday life, the future alone, but even the past, which often comes to life for us only when the future has come and gone – and not only the past which we discover after the event but the past which we have long kept stored within ourselves and suddenly learn how to interpret."

Reality does not create the entire womb of human life. We have eyes that witness truth and beauty. We are creatures that think, plan, dream, and remember. The lambent luminescence supplied by human memory reveals that we live in a dream world. Human imagination tied to memory tells us how to live today and forevermore. Romanian playwright Eugène Ionesco (1909-1994) said, "Just as dreams do, memory makes me profoundly aware of the unreality, the evanescence of the world, a fleeting image in the moving water." The only moment that truly exists is whatever is occurring now. We must not despair the evanescent nature of time or our brief existence; we must embrace our delectable moment on earth. Life is a fantastic dream where we rejoice in the incomparable beauty of this misty world of ethereal sensations and sentiments. Buddha said, "It is better to travel well than to arrive." We must swim with the tide and rejoice in life of memory, dreams, and the beauty that is transpiring before our very eyes. Indian Buddhist teacher and philosopher Nagarjuna advises in *"The Diamond Sutra,"* to enjoy the dream world, "Thus shall you think of this fleeting world: A star at dawn, a bubble in the stream; a flash of lightening in a summer cloud; a flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream."



Narrative self-reflection regarding the timeless questions of humanity: syncretic investigation of time, community, religion, nature, justice, ethics, art, psychology, philosophy, illness, death, hope, fear, faith, friendship, love, hate, loneliness, fatigue, failure, shame, remorse, regret, and the role of memory, consciousness, language, free will, and identity. Examination of the ontological mystery - the baffle of being - and the cultural influence that school, sports, music, literature, television, films, politics, and law exert upon positing of an American's psyche.

Dead Toad Scrolls

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