



BOOK SIXTEEN
Robert T.

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

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

Editor: Karen Tobin

Cover photo: utility company street messaging

*previous editions 1 to 15 @
<http://www.robertvtobin-mpa.com/personal.html>*

THE POWER OF SELFLESSNESS*

Undated

There is no place to go.
Nothing to do.
No one to be or become.

We are on a journey without a place of departure or destination,
continually arriving "as if for the first time."**

We seek to realize what we already know,
and find what can never be lost.
We are reaching for what cannot be acquired,
cultivating what cannot be nurtured,
and striving to receive what cannot be grasped.
Some doors only open when we stop knocking.

We must be strong, but our power does not come from strength;
rather from the firmness of our resolve
to remain present and centered come what may,
neither distracted nor attracted by this or that, there or then.

The experiences of life happen for all.
The only question: will they be fleeting, temporal and limited
or enduring, fulfilling, and abundant.
How we answer this question is up to us.
Perhaps it's the only choice we get to make.

Our mind tells us there is something else to say, see or do,
but actually there is nothing else except what already is.

We find balance not by imposing control,
but rather by exercising continual acceptance
in an ever-evolving world.

*Reflection on Passage #7 in The Tao of Power by Lao Tzu - 2600 B.C.

** T.S. Elliot

70th ANNIVERSARY

8/14/18

How fortunate we were
to have gotten an early HEADS UP!!!

In a culture which predicts
we are what we want;
defines us by what we get;
emphasizes strategy/tactics
rather than principles/values;
prioritizes form over substance;
and preaches we are not guilty
if we don't get caught AND convicted;
our parents instead encouraged us to
be who we are;
know who we're with
and treat them right;
take care of ourselves
and help those who need it;
take the long rather than short cut;
express appreciation and gratitude;
maintain a positive attitude;
lead by example;
and remember: nothing good happens after midnight.

It didn't make our lives any easier
... quite to the contrary ...
but did make it simpler, clearer,
and filled with more love
than we might have otherwise.

They didn't change the world -
just ours.

DELUSIONS

1/27/20

- 1) I am more important than everyone else.
- 2) Life is a linear progression, in which some ahead of me are better off and many more behind me are worse off. The reason I am not further ahead is others' conniving, or else because of my own hesitance to advance what's best for me. I move forward further and faster by pushing my agenda. Rewards and/or punishments are defined by my place in line. Others think I am lower in the line than I should be, and judge me accordingly.
- 3) My wants/needs are one and the same. Pursuing them is the purpose of life, and source of all happiness; any lack of their fulfillment is the cause my unhappiness. If some is good, more is better. If I don't like how I feel or where I'm at, there is something I need to do to change it or at least to make me feel better meanwhile. These wants/needs will increase, and my capacity to fulfill them, declines over time.
- 4) My perceptions reflect reality. Things going well indicates the rightness of my efforts and validates their ever more strenuous exertion. If things don't go well, it's because I didn't push harder in the direction(s) I want them to go.
- 5) I can have the benefits without the drawbacks of any situation. I can eat whatever I please, and say whatever I think. I don't need regular exercise to stay strong physically, mentally, spiritually, emotionally. What goes into my mind or body doesn't affect what comes out of it. My spirit, family and community will continue to support me without my complementary effort and involvement.

TRUST

7/16/20

As noted in a children's fable otherwise forgotten:
some people think seeing is believing,
but others discover it is by believing we see.

We can look back
and see every lily pad that got us here.
We just can't see the next one.

We couldn't see those previous ones either,
even though they were always there
- right in front of us -
patiently awaiting our recognition.

The next one is too,
whether we believe it or not.
And it will be the one behind us
when it's time to take the next step.

The degree to which I allow myself
to wonder if it's there
... fearing it isn't or not knowing for sure if it is,
determines my life's joy-to-stress ratio.

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

6/17/20

near Spray, Oregon

Chirping birds,
buzzing bugs
river drifting by.
Shady spot,
snoozing chums,
wispy clouds dot the sky.

Gentle breeze,
swaying trees,
an occasional car rolls along.
Finding their way,
as we all must,
to wherever they belong.

Thoughts and feelings,
hopes and dreams,
each one has its day.
This is a time
like no other.
Never again we pass this way.

ETCHINGS

7/20/20

Like Leonardo did with the Mona Lisa,
we're always perfecting
what is already sublime.
Continually dissecting
what is self-correcting,
unaware we're committing a crime.

He made but few paintings,
instead redoing the same ones
again and again;
thinking they'd be better
as if improving a feather
would make for a better hen.

Hard to imagine
how the world's smartest person
could engage in such a fool's errand.
Yet onward he went
with determination unbent,
leaving other canvases barren.

LEARNING
7/22/20

It's not where we're going or why,
but how we get there
which determines whether we arrive,
and what shape we'll be in.

That's not what we're told
or how we're trained,
which explains why so often
we can end up surprised and disappointed.

With our eyes and mind
so prone to distraction,
small wonder dissipation
is life's occupational hazard.

There's no better teacher than experience.
All students resist this lesson.

Growth and progress occur
only as a result of such schooling,
but, as previously noted,* the teacher appears
only after the student is not just ready,
but also willing
to learn.

* Gautama Buddha

PLANTING
7/23/20

When we don't like
what we're seeing or hearing,
the answer is simple:
change the channel
or hang up the phone.

Yet how slow we are
to apply those same rules
to what's going through our heads.

Thoughts are like clouds,
some light and fluffy,
some ominous and foreboding;
yet we attach to each
as if all are alike
- equally pertinent, perceptive and poignant.

Our mind is more like a garden.
If we don't plant good seeds
and provide proper nourishment,
we end up with weeds
and wonder why.

FITNESS
7/27/20

We exercise to nourish
our body's capacity for perseverance.

We study to expand
our mind's perspective
and sharpen its perceptions.

But we neglect prayer, meditation
or other means of strengthening
our moral and ethical muscles.

If our bodies are the vehicle
and our minds provide the map
for our journey,
our spirituality is the compass
allowing us to travel safely and serenely.

LIVELIHOOD
8/1/20

It's possible to stretch
and push our luck simultaneously,
although not recommended.

It's technically feasible
to remain blessed
while doing the unholy,
but not likely or for long.

It's no coincidence we feel well
when doing good,
and don't when we're not.

Health and well-being,
like happiness and joy
or peace and serenity,
are closely correlated.

No wonder we are most carefree
when living care-fully,
and feel most fully alive
when living life most fully.

INTERCHANGE
8/2/20

Differentiating debate from dialogue,
we find similarities in process and differences in outcome.

Both involve an exchange of ideas,
sharing and listening (hopefully!),
and specificity in articulation.

But the purpose of debate
is not just to persuade, but vanquish.
The goal in dialogue is for both parties
to learn another's perspective
and seek areas of common ground,
and be changed by the interaction.

Debate relies on tricks and traps,
snares and camouflage,
intertwining of facts and illusion,
intimation and intimidation,
all of which happens in our heads.

Dialogue requires trust and courage
as well as patience and flexibility.
It relies as much on intuition as intelligence.
More on heart than mind.

We are trained to debate,
but thrive through dialogue.

MAMMA MIA!
8/7/20

A year to the day
since your passing
leaves no one questioning
who or what or why
but still pondering how.

Not so much the diapers changed (approx. 50,000),
meals served (around 75,000),
sporting events or band concerts (close to 1,000),
and parent teacher conferences attended (almost 300),
countless stories told or heard,
hurts heal,
and crisis averted or alleviated.

Anyone who didn't think you could do all that was wrong.

The only real question was how you did so
while remaining not only calm and clear,
but also loving.

That is,
as you used to say,
"the wonder of it."

PERSPECTIVE
8/11/20

What a difference one letter makes.

We aspire to be around those who are complimentary
rather than complementary.

Consciously or otherwise,
much of what we say or do
is to secure appreciation
or cooperation from our fellow travelers.

Less energy and effort is devoted
toward relations with those
who see us and all else differently than we do
- which is, by definition, everybody else -
from whom we might learn, grow, and
dare we say it,
change and thus evolve.

Perhaps the greatest of life's lessons
is intellectual humility.
Discovering we don't actually know
what we think we do
is humbling,
but not necessarily humiliating.
It still entitles us to our opinion,
but makes it no more than that.

Seeking compliments rather than complements
leaves us with neither.

ENTERTAINMENT
8/20/20

We are all living in Disneyland,
whether we know it or not.

The only question is
whether we get on Mr. Toad's Wild Ride
with its ups and downs,
or just watch it go by
observing those aboard tossed to and fro.

Either option is entertaining,
but only one requires suspension of disbelief,
leaves us worse for wear,
and reinforces living at the extremes
rather than the in-betweens.

Perhaps the most important choice
is the one before that:
whether we seek our amusements
from external sources
or instead look within
for renewal and contentment.

NINETY YEARS AND COUNTING!

8/24/20

A teacher always remains a teacher;
that we already knew.

From them, you continually learn
- if that's what you want to do.

Oh! to remain forever a student
amazed by all there's to know,
discovering each day's opportunity
to live, learn, love and grow.

But a teacher doesn't get to choose,
for that's what they're born to be.
Helping people find their light
so better all might see.

Perhaps it's teaching that is actually
the world's oldest profession,
allowing us to make fewer mistakes
and have less need for confession.

At their best, teachers give us
appreciation for the classics,
enabling us to see what's real
and more quickly avoid the plastics.

Peggy is real-est of the real
and has been for quite a while,
through whom we see a life well-lived
in her bright eyes and beautiful smile.

We are all blessed by her teachings
and continual delight,
which help us discover our own
- thereby making our future bright.

That is what a teacher does,
making our world a better place.
This is what Peggy continues to do
with gentleness and grace.

ADDICTION

8/29/20

We focused on the destination
instead of The Journey,
expecting things will always go
the way we think they should.

We thought if we didn't get caught
it didn't really happen,
and got good at not getting caught.

We thought in terms of extremes:
all or nothing;
now or never;
my way or the highway;
who's right (us)
and who's wrong (them, of course).

Our prayers were either 911 (now please!)
or 411 (whaaaaa?),
and our timetable for response
always sooner than later.

We acted as if we were
omniscient as well as omnipotent,
and believed anyone who didn't agree with us
either malevolent or stupid.

We expected this to be heavenly,
but ended up living in hell.

LEARN FROM LEONARDO*
9/3/20

Be relentlessly curious.
Seek knowledge for its own sake.
Retain a childlike sense of wonder.
Observe.
Start with the details.
See things unseen.
Go down rabbit holes.
Get distracted.
Respect facts.
Procrastinate.
Let the perfect be the enemy of the good.
Think visually.
Avoid silos.
Let your reach exceed your grasp.
Indulge fantasy.
Create for yourself, not mostly for patrons.
Collaborate.
Make lists.
Take notes, on paper.
Be open to mystery.

VISUALIZATION
9/3/20

Imagine
- if even only for one moment -
accepting everyone and everything
exactly as they are.

Then perhaps for two moments,
or maybe even three.

What if everyone in your house did that?
And those on your block?
Then those in your entire neighborhood,
your city, county, state and country?
And maybe your whole world?

Imagine, if only for that moment or two,
how much less stress and strain,
condescension, insecurity and resulting vulnerability.
How many fewer battles.
And wars.

At least for ourselves,
this possibility is but a moment away
awaits our choosing.

* Conclusions from the last chapter of Walter Isaacson's book: Leonardo da Vinci

ROLES
9/10/20

I. Me. Myself.
Husband. Father. Stepfather. Brother.
Grandfather. Son. Uncle. Cousin. Friend.
Writer. Musician. Lover. Adventurer. Observer.
Recovering Alcoholic. Sponsor. Sponsee.
Breather. Thinker. Listener. Dancer. Dreamer. Helper.
Human being.

I am the determiner of what I say and do,
the one who chooses whether to be
humble or arrogant,
kind or vicious,
willing or willful,
open or closed,
curious or clever,
skeptical or cynical,
strong or weak,
trustworthy or unreliable,
optimist or pessimist,
thoughtful or thoughtless,
hope-filled or hope-less,
accountable or evasive,
honest or insincere,
courageous or cowardly,
serene or restless,
joyous or cynical,
loving or fearful,
here or wherever,
and alive or dead.

I am who is writing this right now.

LAWS
9/14/20

We are brought forth
from the inconceivable,
and eventually return there as well.

The laws of physics tell us
it cannot be nothing
from which we become something.

The laws of nature tell us
we cannot be separate
when everything is connected.
Everything.

The law of the jungle tells us
we won't live long
when those around us
are dying, literally or figuratively.

The law of the prophets admonish:
"do not turn your back on your own"*
and "turn the other cheek not seven times,
but seventy times seven."**

It is not that we don't know what to do,
or when, where, how, or why to do it.

We experience real joy
between birth and death
when love is the answer
to every question.

* Isaiah 57

** Matthew 5:38-40

CHOICES
9/15/20

There's nothing easy
about doing the right thing,
it's just easier than all other options.

It is not necessarily better,
but it is much cheaper.

No guarantee it's more fun,
but definitely less stressful
- maybe not during,
but before and afterward.

Not more stable or secure,
but safer and saner
with less bitter aftertaste.

Perhaps no more memorable,
but much easier to remember
and prouder to recall.

No prizes await,
but no penalties either.

It won't necessarily get you to heaven,
but you will spend less time in hell.

RELEASE
9/19/20
Grand Teton National Park

As lightning and thunder
roil overhead
we thankfully snuggle
in our warm cabin bed.

Mountains majestic
clear up to the sky.
Finding their place,
there's no need to ask why.

Wonders preserved.
Grandeur without end.
Opportunities for awe
around every bend.

Experiencing life
at a high altitude,
with tensions released
and spirits renewed.

ODDS
9/22/20
Yellowstone National Park

Sitting atop a 30-mile wide volcanic cauldron
40,000 years overdue in blowing again.
Yep, that's thousand.

Last time it blew,
17 feet of ash were dumped in St. Louis.
Yep, feet ... 1,357 miles away*

Its impacts were not just national,
but global.
Not just adverse, but lethal.

Rarely do the things we see get us
but they do absorb our attention,
if only to keep us from worrying
about the real (and really big) ones.

Perhaps the little and big ones
are not problems but rather opportunities,
giving us one more chance to be
who we are,
where we are,
how we are,
right now.

* The Complete History of Nearly Everything
by Bill Bryson

LIFE LESSONS: TOP TEN
9/26/20

- 1) A mistake is something I haven't learned from yet.
If I do learn from it, that's a lesson - not a mistake.
- 2) Acceptance is more important than understanding.
- 3) Feelings provide more reliable guidance than thoughts. *
- 4) Debating whether the glass is half-full or half-empty ignores the obvious: it's the same amount either way.
- 5) Not all help is helpful, the most well-intended least of all.
- 6) Pain is not necessarily bad. Much of what I thought was good for me wasn't, and what I thought wasn't good for me proved to be very educational if I was paying attention.
- 7) Structure and discipline are not confining, but rather the key to liberation. Staying in the middle of the road provides a better view than when living on the edge.
- 8) I teach what I need to learn. I say what I need to hear. **
I give what I want to receive. I find what I seek.
I accuse others - often those closest - of what I'm guilty.
- 9) Physicists say there is no such thing as darkness, but only the presence/absence of light. Perhaps there is also no such thing as hate, but only the presence or absence of love.
- 10) Anger and other tensions are secondary emotions, serving as a cover for fear, i.e. the belief that I won't get what I want or will lose what I have. It reflects an attitude of scarcity rather than an abundance mentality.

* Miguel Ruiz
** Gloria Steinem

CLARITY
10/4/20

They say Monet's vision got clearer
as his eyesight got worse.
We hope this is true of us all.

Early in life,
we fixate on externalities,
obsorbing their nature
and maximizing their number
while trying to manage their implications.

Later, as matters within
start mattering most,
our attention is attracted to things
of which we were previously aware,
having passed largely unnoticed, or
perhaps more accurately, unacknowledged.

Seeing more clearly changes
what we look at
and what we see,
allowing us to respond
rather than react.

CONUNDRUMS
10/17/20

How much we disparage those who,
when we were in a pinch,
threw us a boat anchor
instead of a life preserver.

Yet from them
we learned to swim.

How many other things
seem to be one way
when they are the other?

Not knowing any better,
we soldier ever onward
least likely to ask for help
when we needed it most,
most blissfully unaware of needing it
when our way isn't working.

ONE YEAR HENCE
10/9/20

They're where they belong - together.
Joining other family and friends,
they have peace that's well-earned,
now knowing love never ends.

Which reminds us of what we already knew,
and puts us where we belong:
in our hearts rather than heads,
on our lips a song.

It was either a day, a year, or lifetime ago
we said our last goodbye
with a tear, smile, lots of laughter,
and stories none can deny.

We're now closer than ever
to them and one another.
How much better would our world be
if all were treated as sister or brother?

Their message of love
took a short time to tell.
When internalized, it quenches
like water from a well.

So they're now in the sunset,
just like he said they would.
About them it truly can be said:
they did the best they could.

BALANCE
10/27/20



QUESTIONS

11/3/20

Some collect stamps,
shot glasses or experiences,
but all held their collective breaths
as the quadra-annual opportunity
to exercise citizenship duty
put the presidential question to rest...

... Or at least perhaps
for a moment or two,
while it is determined who's best
to take us from here
as we move relentlessly onward
to meet the oncoming test(s).

Will it be with humility,
listening and hearing,
or evermore thumps on the chest?
Will we continue treating each other
like schmucks, punks and outsiders
rather than honored guests?

It's another chance
to find our part
in the way things become messed,
and do what we can
to be the change we seek *
and sharing that by which we're blessed.

* Mahatma Gandhi

PERSPECTIVE

11/4/20

Much of what we think
is seen objectively,
we look at subjectively
- perhaps even non-rationally.

In fact, our perspective
is cool, calm and collective
in inverse proportion
to the importance and severity
of the situation,
as matters of direct interest
and/or personal concern
skew our thinking
in ways we literally can't know
or even think about clearly.

We need others' help
to find out what we don't
- and can't - know,
and to learn more about
what little we can do about it
... preferably before we need to.

ASCENSION
11/15/20

It's easy to see Life
as happening to others
subjected and subjugated
by its twists and turns,
ups and downs,
fits and starts,
while ours somehow blessedly is not.

Easier still to ignore the advice*
to expect disturbance
as forces and factors around us continuously swirl
amidst temptations and distractions
which pull us toward things we can't control
and away from that which we can:
our attention, attitude and action.

The dictionary definition for any problem
- "that which is unwelcome" -
hints at its solution:
welcome whatever is happening
and there's never a problem.

* Swami Chetanananda

SWAMP
11/18/20

Reality TV.

Is there any more contradictory phrase,
truth in packaging,
or sign of the times?"

Part car crash,
part Roman Colosseum,
part carnival slideshow;
it is that from which,
apparently,
we cannot turn away.

As with other temptations
which drain rather than replenish,
perhaps the only true option is abstinence,
as all other choices bring us closer
toward that from which we need to separate.

Reality TV also epitomizes another cultural contradiction:
"guilty pleasures".

COMING & GOING
11/18/20

We're told* that happiness
is not a condition
but rather a sensation,
an experience that comes and goes
and might come back again another time.
Or not.

This makes happiness
something to be enjoyed and appreciated
as it's happening.
It might be welcomed as a guest
who is not expected to become
a permanent resident,
whose departure is un mourned
but not unnoticed.

This makes happiness
a lot like love,
something whose appreciation
is not dependent
on its presence
or absence.

* Swami Chetanananda

CIRCLES
12/17/20

Attesting to where we come from,
and where we are headed,
some of us receive important medical test results
by being informed:
"there's bad news - you're positive",
while others get told:
"here's the good news - you're negative".

How far we have drifted,
relying upon cognitive dissonance
at a time when our lives literally depend
on clear communication.

Striving for clarity
in times of chaos,
we boost confidence by masking insecurities
- our own as much as another's,
fear of being wrong primary among these -
thus further perpetuating confusion.

It's the ultimate conundrum::
only by stepping back,
and looking/seeing and communicating clearly,
can we move forward.

PHYSICS
1/1/21

Why is it harder
to be who we are
than stay where we've been?

And easier to keep going
in the direction we're headed
than a new habit begin?

Inertia, Newton said,
is the strongest
of universal laws,

keeping us and the planets
right where we are
as if we're stuck in its claws.

Acting differently
requires we defy
forces of economics as well as gravity.

But remaining unevolved,
with opportunities/resources untapped,
is the ultimate form of depravity.

WARNINGS
1/3/21

There are bumps on the road
for a reason, Karen says:
to let us know
we're going off track,
need to slow down,
and/or move in another direction.

But, going so fast,
we often miss the signal,
ignore the warning,
or simply defy the odds
by forging ahead
until encountering brighter flashing lights
or hitting even bigger bumps.

The universe or the gods
(depending on your theological perspective)
communicate with us constantly,
often through others
... especially those we don't like,
and/or are telling us
what we don't want to hear.

Paying attention to these signs
- especially when we don't want to -
makes for a sooner, safer arrival
and much smoother ride.

PRIVILEGE
1/10/21

Turns out most people do inadvertently
what we think they're doing deliberately,
and any trouble we're avoiding
by not examining our (mis)impressions
only makes matters worse.

Yet we go to great lengths
to deny others the courtesy of knowing
they're stepping on our toes,
inhibiting their opportunity to step back
while yelling at them for not doing so.

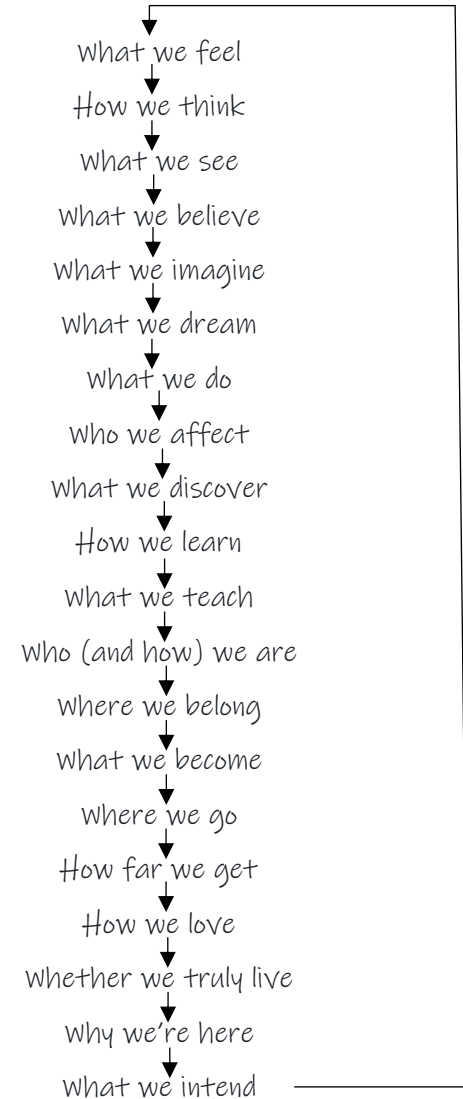
Everyone is free
to do what they want,
except when others are adversely affected. *
We also have the responsibility
to accept the consequences of our actions.
"I meant well" or "Because I feel like it"
are valid explanations,
but not legitimate excuses.

No one complains that traffic lights
inhibit their independence.
We no longer bemoan loss of our previous right
to smoke at a restaurant table.

Rights and responsibilities
exist in equal measure
in accordance with public health
and general well-being.

* John Stuart Mill

CHAIN REACTION
1/15/21



REFLECTIONS

4/4/21

The hardest thing to follow
is our own advice to others.

The easiest thing to do is fall in love.
Any two fools can. *
It's more difficult to become intimate.

The easiest thing to lose
is our conscious contact
with the highest powers of the universe.
There's no assurance we'll recover it.

Our lowest point is always higher
than it might've been,
and our highest point always lower
than we thought it was.

The longest way is always
shorter than it looks,
and the slowest way faster than it seems.

The furthest view is always clearest,
and the closest is the most distorted.

And it's true about the first being last,
and those striving to get the most receiving the least.

* Tom Robbins

UNFOLDING

4/7/21

Everything happens eventually.

It's only a matter of time
unfolding ever so patiently
but doesn't necessarily rhyme ...

... but ultimately it's for the benefit
of us and all concerned,
though to it we're often oblivious
since truth is slowly learned ...

... and only when we're seeking it,
awake, alert, aware,
while looking lightly and loosely
for it's impolite to stare ...

... and unhelpful as well,
as what is obvious is not always seen
or heard, smelled, said or touched.
Truth is something we glean ...

... after much hard work
by nature as well as man
as our Garden of Life keeps growing
according to The Plan.

ARRIVING
4/8/21

The paving stones of faith
trace the path from fear to freedom,
with each step an experience of experiment,
our revelations forming the milestones.

No compass or map
can provide a sense of direction,
or signs with bright lights
showing the distance to our destination.

No shortage of potholes,
but plenty of twists and turns,
as the ups-and-downs, stop-and-go,
make each step it's own adventure.

We get more serene
as we become more centered,
holding on to our seats
while keeping both eyes on the road.

With all the detours and distractions,
no wonder so many get lost
on a journey going nowhere lasting only a moment.

After all, we're already here.

A-B-Cs of GRATITUDE
4/6/21

Acceptance ... we can take it with us wherever we go.
Beauty ... we find it everywhere we look for it.
Consciousness ... a gift that keeps giving.
Delight ... available every moment.
Effort ... it only happens on our own side of the street.
Fear ... it reminds us that we're perfectly imperfect.
God ... our word for the wordless.
Healing ... provides an opportunity for renewal.
Intuition ... how The Universe speaks to us.
Joy ... a state of being.
Kites ... it's our only job: to keep ours flying.
Love ... easier to give than receive.
Miracles ... happening every day.
Nature ... reminder of The Power keeping us here.
Opportunities ... always blessings, often in disguise.
Pleasure ... best enjoyed in moderation.
Quiet ... a place of peace and harmony.
Renewal ... always available, but often not accessible.
Serenity ... the pre-requisite to peace.
Trouble ... it's how the gods gets our attention.
Understanding ... it comes later than sooner.
Virtue ... our greatest - and most elusive - asset.
Willingness ... this key unlocks our self-made jail cell.
X-Ray ... a tool for ongoing introspection.
Yesterday ... prepares us for today and tomorrow.
Zoo ... watch out for shit-throwing monkeys.

RETURN FLIGHT
Texas to California
5/9/21

Visiting elsewhere brings attention
to differences in state of mind,
but also to reassuring similarities in the
music of life,
love of family,
and closeness of friends.

Flying into the sunset
toward a familiar destination
but circumstances unknown as,
despite advancements
in knowledge and technology,
the future still unfolds
only one moment at a time.

Discomfort aside,
would we want it otherwise?
Choosing the boredom of predictability
over the exhilaration of discoveries
large and small,
and learning acquired thereby?

The people and places are different
wherever we go,
but their direction is the same:
ever onward.

FORTUNE
5/22/21

Passing a lone fisherman
on Aquatic Park pier,
I wanted to ask: any luck?

Then I realized his would not
be a matter of luck at all,
resulting instead from patience, poise,
and, of course,
practice, practice, practice.

Every fisherman makes his own luck.

To the same degree
that we underestimate
the influence of luck in his case,
we overstate its effect
in our own situation.

We resist the idea
of randomness
as an influential factor
in our personal or professional lives.

We don't think we need luck
because we already have it ...
so we believe.

As in all things,
truth lies somewhere in between.

ENROUTE
Phoenix airport
5/24/21

It may seem we're going forward or backward,
but Einstein tells us they're one and the same.
Yet our minds tell us otherwise,
as if it was some sort of game.

Wherever we go, we're already here;
the only time is now.
Our bodies change and our location also,
but we can never leave the Tao.

There is no choice except to accept.
That's how it's always been.
Blowing our chance to receive this gift
is the only Original Sin.

In our journey from there to here,
it's best not to miss a step.
Alive in the end as we were at the start
and never beyond our depth.

EVERYBODY/NOBODY
6/1/21

Everybody wants unconditional love.
Nobody enjoys giving it.

Everybody thinks they have what it takes.
Nobody can say what that is.

Everybody says they'll pay the price.
Nobody knows how much it will cost.

Everybody wants to go to heaven.
Nobody wants to die. *

Everybody is trying to find happiness.
Nobody knows how to hold on to it.

Everybody and "everything comes and goes". **
Nobody thinks it will happen to them.

Everybody is looking for something.
Nobody knows what it is.

Everybody thinks they can, and that they will.
Nobody knows for sure.

Everybody gets where they're going.
Nobody knows where that is.

* Breakeer Morant
** Joni Mitchell

"FREE" ADVICE
7/17/21
Chicago

Most people rarely
take another's advice,
and almost never abide by their own.

Another's way may be better
or at least less costly,
but satisfaction is no more guaranteed.

Its full benefits are derived
not by following advice,
but by ensuring it's heard and considered.

Carefully considering
alternative options
assures the best way forward.

Wherever we're going,
we're already here,
so there is really no reason for hurry.

HOMEWARD
7/20/21
Chicago

It is one of life's few inevitabilities,
yet many are surprised,
- shocked even -
by death's arrival,
none more than it's recipient.

Which is surprising in itself,
considering how many believe
in some sort of afterlife
at least as good as this one.

It's human nature to avoid,
ignore or deny the unknown
- indeed the unknowable.
We focus anywhere else
except upon what we don't understand,
cannot comprehend,
and/or have difficulty accepting.

Which is unfortunate,
since embracing our unavoidable end
rivets attention
on the only time there really is
- the ever-fleeting Present Moment -
before it passes us by.

SEPARATION
7/28/21
Joseph, Oregon

I am with you now,
as I was then,
whether down low
or in flight like a dove.

We are always together,
especially when apart,
animated by
the power of love.

Its blessings resplendent.
Its influences pervasive.
Its benefits are gifts
we receive from above.

Accepted with gratitude,
appreciation and joy,
arriving without
push or shove.

I am always with you.
It's a choice I make,
which fits
like a hand in a glove.

With all the appreciation
nature's beauty inspires;
and the peace
symbolized by that dove.

SEARCHING
8/10/21

We are advised* to be aware
not so much of bad thoughts
as bad thinking,
i.e. how our conceptions
and resulting perceptions
lead us astray
and, thereafter, awry.

This explains what often goes for naught:
the myriad of times and ways
we're admonished to prioritize
being good rather than feeling good
even as the functions of our mind and body
block receptors for such guidance.
And the devious and deviant thus become
- as ever so aptly named -
hard wired.

Not discovery or acquisition,
but the very act of searching
is the true object of our desire.

* The Spirituality of Imperfection
by Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Katchem

FREEDOM
8/18/21

Past conditioning and future concerns ...

Each sufficient to consume all our attention.
Both combining to distract us from the present moment
... the only time anything actually happens.

Learning to be aware of each,
yet responsive to neither,
is a story which takes a lifetime to tell,
involving mysteries and magic along the way.

Staying centered and serene
are acquired skills
involving dedicated practice,
their acquisition recognized only in hindsight.

If it's true that all of life
involves the pursuit of pleasure
and the avoidance of pain, *
then our liberation must be found
somewhere in between.

** His Holiness, the Dalai Lama

JUSTICE
9/2/21

Perhaps the only thing we know
is that we don't know; *
of that, evidence continually emerges

which we ignore, deny
or divert via blame
while the water around us surges

along with fire and brimstone,
tornadoes and pandemics,
or countless other scourges

as the power elite
and the leaders they anoint
dally in financial splurges

until dwindling returns
and escalating costs
eventually lead to purges

when the interest of the majority
and the need of the planet
slowly and surely merges.

* Socrates

MESSAGING
9/6/21

All arts emerge
from their own place in time,
shaping its tone, color and texture
as well as ours.

The times define
- and magnify -
content and context
of artistic messages emitted,
even as they inhibit reception.

But to see, we must look.
To hear, we must listen.
To have faith, we must believe.
To achieve serenity, we must be at peace.

None of which happens without love,
which is more essential
as it becomes less available.

As all mediums become mixed,
the message becomes clearer
to those open to its implications.

FOND ADIEU
10/16/21

For the most part,
brother Dan went through life
thinking of himself as
a great guy living at a great time
in a great life doing great things
in a great world with great people
learning great lessons
via great experiences
of great importance.

But there is,
as with all things,
a definite downside
to this approach:
i.e., those moments when
none or only some of those things
are true.

There were good reasons for him
to approach things his way,
life being a combination
of tragedy and comedy
in which the bad guys
often seem to prevail
and the best and brightest
can be mutually exclusive.

This makes life
not so much a guess
as a bet,
and one thing about Dan's:
he was all in
with all he had
all the time,
risking the consequences
which come with the benefits.

All things considered,
We all get where we're going
- sooner than we think,
later than we deserve,
and better than any plan
we might have conjured ourselves.

Like all blessed people,
Dan was sometimes wrong,
occasionally in doubt,
but rarely at a loss for words,
always seeing his as a winning hand
while helping you better see yours.

COINCIDENCE?

9/8/21

Last night, I couldn't find my copy of Victor Frankel's book "Man's Search For Meaning", which I thought Karen might get a more uplifting view after reading about Nazi death camps.

At a meeting this morning on the 11th Step*, we were talking about how we're always getting messages from many sources but don't hear them when we ignore every 1st grader's lesson: stop, look and listen.

Walking home from that meeting, I recalled a quote:
"We are not human beings having spiritual experiences,
but rather spiritual beings having human experiences." **

Passing a neighborhood swimming pool closed for the season, I saw a stack of books and clothing articles in what looked like a "lost & found" box. I walked right by it, then went back to see if there wase anything interesting to read. It didn't seem so
- all teenage romance and adult fiction novels -
except, at the bottom of the pile, where I found Frankel's book.

As the Universe tried to give me the very book I was seeking,
I almost neglected to do my part by stopping to pick it up.

Upon opening it, I found it had only one folded over page, which had this statement in italics: *"it does not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us."*

I have seen and heard this sort of thing many times,
but rarely so distinctly.

* STREP 11: Sought through prayer and meditation to increase conscious contact with our Higher Power.

** Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

OBSERVATION(S)

9/18/21

Not getting where we're going
doesn't mean it wasn't worth the trip.

We're correct in thinking we can do it,
but wrong in believing we can do it alone.

It's easiest to forget
what is hardest to remember.

It's most difficult to hold on to
what was never ours,
or to find something
that can never be lost.

It's on the path of least resistance
we encounter the biggest obstacles,
and where adverse forces
exert the most influence ...
fear the greatest among these.

Beauty indeed resides
in the eye of the beholder,
which makes seeing clearly
our most important responsibility
... although rarely our top priority.

It's not what lies ahead,
but what we have not left behind,
that holds us back.

It's not the accumulation,
but rather the application of knowledge
by which wisdom is acquired.

PILGRIMAGE

11/10/21

Leaving Maui

Oh! To experience the pleasure and pain
and privilege of being a pilgrim.

To see everything every day
as it is for the first time
– both for us and for it.
Each moment, an exploration.
Each step, a new revelation.

We constantly encounter
not only with what we don't, but cannot know.
And what no one else does either.

Our brain's familiarity bias
uses any shred of data
to fool us into believing
our so-called "normal" life is exactly that
– routine, mundane, matter of fact –
when it is anything but.

This gives a level of confidence
in our opinions and judgements
unjustifiable otherwise.

None of us have been here before
nor will pass exactly this way ever again,
making our life is a continual pilgrimage.

PREDECESSORS

Undated

With their splendor of colors,
trees' dropping leaves mark the season.
They aren't dying – they're just changing,
and for perfectly good reason.

It's by quality, not quantity,
a full life gets measured.
It's only real indication of value:
how much one is treasured.

By that criterion alone,
every life is complete.
Every scoreboard shows victory,
with no such thing as defeat.

How long the game goes?
No one knows with precision.
Being present while we're here
involves conscious decision.

Not content to just point,
those gone beyond lead the way.
Leaving a path marked by love
is how they now have their say.

As those leafless trees
are reborn every spring,
we honor those who have died
when our best we bring.

DATELINE NYC
12/2/21

There are certain things that have happened in my life which I would not believe, had I not been there myself.

The most recent of these was upon showing our 12th row tickets to the Broadway showing of "To Kill A Mockingbird", whereupon we found they were for the following Friday's show.

Chagrin doesn't nearly describe my feelings upon being directed to the ticket booth where we were assured the show was entirely sold out.

It was suggested we stand by, as maybe - told in a tone in no danger of getting our hopes up - someone would show up with extra tickets at the last minute.

The incoming crowd trickling down as showtime approached, we asked if standing room tickets were an option - albeit not a particularly bright one, given the show's two-hour running time - but there likewise was no chance of that possibility.

Minutes before curtain time, we were alerted some tickets had become available. Since exchanging our current tickets for them provided a substantial refund, I was sure these new seats must be scattered up in the balcony, but was glad to have them.

I had trouble focusing upon entering the theater, so relieved to be inside that I couldn't even see the new tickets placed us on the ground floor, five rows from the stage.

While a perfectly understandable explanation was later provided about unused "house seats" normally saved for prominent guests, I am more inclined to accept the "Christmas Miracle" explanation.

THE ART OF NON-ACTION*

We often perceive non-action as inaction when doing nothing is the hardest of things.

Our experience of polarity reflects our left brain's efforts to separate into parts different aspects of the same thing.

This (mis)impression of duality is manufactured in our heads, as what we see as empirical fact is actually a mental construct.

Experiencing and enjoying our lives now and not at some remote future point requires an enormous amount of seeming non-action. Breathing, noticing, centering, loving, forgiving, appreciating ... all of these take a lot of work, but minimal activity.

When performing music, the first decision is not what to play, but when. So too it is in life, where awareness, observation, and assessment is required to discern what response lies in the best interests of all concerned.

Our initial perceptions and reactions usually won't help given our ego and nervous system's influence when under stress.

This makes a pause-for-the-cause advisable in most situations.

Too often, the power of the rational/logical approach overpowers our intuitive and instinctive response, denying us their benefits thereby derived.

Hence Lao Tzu's encouragement to appreciate the art - as well as science - of Non-Action.

*Reflection on Passage #48
in Lao Tzu's The Tao of Power

ODE(s) TO TEACHING & LEARNING

2021 Teacher Appreciation Week

"I am not a teacher. . .
I am an awakener."

Robert Frost

"Learn what you are,
and be such."

Pindar

"The important thing
is to not stop questioning."

Albert Einstein

"The mind is not a vessel to be filled,
but a fire to be kindled."

Plutarch

"When the whole world is silent,
even one voice becomes powerful."

Malala Yousafzai

"Change your thoughts
and you change your world."

Norman Vincent Peale

"Who in the world am I?
Ah ... that's the great puzzle."

Lewis Carole

"In a gentle way,
you can shake the world."

Mahatma Gandhi

"One repays the teacher badly by
remaining only a student."

Neiteche

"Life has more imagination than
we carry in our dreams."

Christopher Columbus

"Have the courage
to use your own
understanding."

Immanuel Kant

"The only true wisdom
lies in knowing
you know nothing."

Socrates

"And, if my heart be scarred and burned,
the safer, I, for all I learned;
the calmer, I, to see it true."

Dorothy Parker

"There is always an easy solution
to every human problem -
neat, plausible and wrong."

H. L. Menken

"Dreaming, after all, is
a form of planning."

Gloria Steinem

"If you want to build a ship,
don't drum up the men
to gather wood, divide the work
and give orders.
Instead, teach them to yearn
for the vast and endless sea."

Antoine de St. Exupery

"To be yourself in a world
that is constantly trying
to make you something else
is the greatest
accomplishment."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

"The highest forms
of understanding we can achieve
are laughter and human compassion."

Richard Feynman
Manhattan Project physicist

"You are that which you seek.
There is nothing to do but realize it."

Swami Vivekananda

"Your real problem
- the only problem you have -
is to find your real calling in life."

Emmet Fox

"An understanding heart
is everything in a teacher,
and cannot be esteemed highly
enough. One looks back with
appreciation to brilliant teachers,
but with gratitude to those
who touched our human feeling.
The curriculum is
so much necessary raw material,
but warmth is the vital element for
the growing plant and for the soul
of the child."

Carl Jung

"Those who ask are a fool
for five minutes, but those
who don't ask remain a fool
forever."

Mark Twain

"I learned long ago,
never to wrestle with a pig.
You get dirty,
and besides,
the pig likes it."

George Bernard Shaw

"It's not having experience
that make us wise,
but reflecting on those experiences
we've had makes us become wise.
Helps us become whole.
With wisdom comes an authenticity
that allows us to become
what we might have been."

Jane Fonda

"The heresy of one age becomes
the orthodoxy of the next."

Helen Keller

"Those of us who are in this world to
educate, to care for, young children have
a special calling: a calling that has very
little to do with the collection of
expensive possessions but has a lot to do
with the worth inside of heads and hearts.
In fact, that's our domain: the heads and
hearts of the next generation, the
thoughts and feelings of the future."

Mr. (Fred) Rogers

"You look at it, but cannot see it. Grasp it, but it is out of your reach."

Lao Tzu