



Detour(s)

RobertO
Volume 14

*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 a family of friends
whose gifts can never be fully repaid.*

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

PRACTICE
8/7/18

We are all striving
for the same Grand Prize
but for none of us is it the same.

It may have common traits,
might make us feel similarly,
and even have a familiar name.

But it's not an innate aspiration,
rather something we acquire,
just like skills in a game.

And the better we get at it,
the less likely we are to win,
but there's no one to blame.

For it is not someplace we go
or something we do,
as if it was a lion to tame.

To the contrary, this prize
we've already won;
not knowing this is the only shame.

Realizing peace, joy and happiness
only come from within
creates a shift in the direction we aim.

LOVE
8/16/18

If we believe, as we're told,
heaven is here on earth,
then love is the pathway to that kingdom,
involving a journey on which we are continually
exhilarated and exhausted
yet concurrently replenished
by the blessings and challenges
accompanying intimacy,
which fosters our stability
while revealing our vulnerabilities,
bringing out laughter and tears
- not to mention our fears -
and makes our world go 'round,
propagates our species,
and gives value, purpose
and meaning to our lives.

Love is the gift we've been given in abundance,
but it does not arrive
until we consciously choose
to invite, receive and welcome it.

AGING
8/24/18
Seattle, WA

Life's challenges come,
and come again,
and again,
connected by fleeting moments of relief.

As the incline gets steeper,
and stakes climb higher,
we pray for a chance
to play the next round.

The effort ever more draining,
recovery time shorter
and less energizing,
as capacities and capabilities simultaneously diminish.

The results are more rewarding
and more-or-less self-validating
as means, not ends,
become more important.

We prepare for a lifetime
to face this most ambitious of endeavors,
which thwart comprehension
even as they invite receptivity.

QUESTIONS
8/25/18
Seattle, WA

So much is made about emotions
triggered by our aversion to the unknown,
which allow us to ignore,
by enabling us to deny,
our loss of certainty
- or avoid recognition it never existed -
by instead entertaining
illusions and delusions
conveniently arising as further distraction.

The relative nature of our "not knowing"
is a constant of life,
of which we have frequent reminders
we treat as the exception
rather than the rule,
an anomaly rather than reality,
simultaneously making life
more interesting
and harrowing
until, of course, when crises arise,
making us forget who we are,
where we're going,
how we get there,
why we're here ...
not only life's most important questions,
but the only ones.

CHOICES
8/29/18
Anaheim, CA

We find ourselves living in a world with
more religion ----- less faith
more incarceration ----- less safety
 more laws ----- less justice
more soldiers ----- less peace
 more wealth ----- less richness
 more help ----- less hope
more knowledge ----- less wisdom
 more reaction ----- less responsiveness
more possibilities ----- less opportunities
more authority ----- less influence
 more energy ----- less power
 more looking ----- less seeing
 more talking ----- less listening
more touching ----- less feeling
more cleansing ----- less cleanliness
 more facts ----- less truth
 more schools ----- less students
 more learning ----- less growth
 longer lives ----- less living
more relationships ----- less connections
more interactions ----- less trust
 more motion ----- less movement
more definitions ----- less meaning
more efficiency ----- less effectiveness
more specificity ----- less clarity
 bigger systems ----- less engagement
 more sex ----- less intimacy
 more gifts ----- less giving

RECIPE
8/30/18
Anaheim, CA

Loving and learning is the recipe
for a joy-filled life,
and so it has always been.
Seeking anything more
and expecting nothing less
avoids the "near occasion of sin",
which is a good name for a perfume,
or so my dad always said,
as it well-describes the allure
of being drawn in
by a substance without form ...
an illness for which there's no cure.

Better instead to stay grounded
with head up and eyes open
and appreciate all that occurs
as provided for our growth
and increasing our wisdom;
it's much better than diamonds and furs.

We need to not only show up,
but actually do our best;
it's not enough to merely try.
There's no gambling involved
in the sort of effort
money cannot buy.

DOMESTICATION
Undated

There is no time but the present
and literally no day like tomorrow.
Our thinking makes us see time
as something we beg, steal or borrow.

Seeing indeed involves believing
things contrary to what we've been taught,
creating healthy doubt about whatever we're "learning"
and wonder about which parts are for naught.

Some of what passes
for our purported education
is purposefully directed
toward our increasing domestication. *

This is why "Be skeptical but learn to listen"
is the Fifth Agreement suggested,
so that whatever we internalize
can be more fully digested.

In all the time we have on earth,
this can only be done in The Now.
It's our one opportunity to live and learn;
the trick is to figure out how.

* Miguel Ruiz

PERHAPS
undated

We didn't even notice what we didn't have
in our younger days
- emotional maturity, spiritual insights
and experiential wisdom -
which come to us only as we mature.

And we mourn gradual loss of characteristics
synonymous with youth
- physical prowess, and intellectual capabilities -
for which we lacked awareness and appreciation at the time.

How hard it is to let go of what is going away*,
familiar as it is,
and welcome what is arriving -
however uninvited or unwelcome it may be.

* Price Pritchett: U^2 - The Quantum Leap

PLEASANTVILLE
9/8/18

More difficult
than accepting
the way things are
is letting go of the way they have been.

As creatures of habit
preferring predictability above all,
we find it hard to leave behind the familiar
even though knowing all things change.

As they will, and must,
as we need unpredictability
- surprisingly enough -
more than predictability.

Imagine how bored, complacent,
dissatisfied and frustrated
we'd become
always knowing what's happening next.

At the midpoint
between knowing and not knowing
is where balance is found,
and thereby serenity.

NOTS
9/15/18

Our problem is NOT
that we don't know what to do;
it's just that it's
so hard to do it.

And it's NOT that we
don't know what to say;
it's just not easy
to get through it.

It's NOT that we don't recognize
what's happening now;
we just don't want to admit
we knew it.

It's NOT that we didn't realize
we were making a mistake;
we don't want others to think
we blew it.

It's NOT that we don't appreciate
what the Good Life tastes like;
we just don't always
know how to chew it.

It's NOT that we don't see
how it turns out in the end;
we just don't want to
so quickly get to it.

MOMENTUM
9/28/18

The newscaster asks:
"Is courage contagious?"
and answered:
"Certainly it seems so."

A brave person steps forward,
then another,
and then more,
each making it more likely
- although no easier -
for others to do the same
until silence recedes,
truth emerges,
and we are once again set free.

Progress is inevitable,
biologists tell us,
but they don't mention its dreadful toll
as each step forward
has costly consequences
only exceeded by when we resist.

INTENTIONS & EFFECTS
10/9/18

"We find peace in our hearts
only if we put it there,"
Karen quietly observed,
perhaps unwittingly unifying cause and effect
while correctly placing responsibility
where it always has been
and forever remains,
no matter how frequently,
fervently
and feverishly
we insist otherwise.

To remain engaged
without becoming attached
is an matter of balance,
calling upon us to stay calm
when forces beyond our awareness
and factors beyond our knowledge
push us toward extremes
in perception, conduct and speech
with the best of intentions
having unintended, often disastrous effects.

TWINS
10/18/18

It's among life's great dichotomies:
to remain supremely confident
and extremely humble.

CONFIDENT
in our belief
not only that all will be well
but also in the realization
it already is
exactly the way it is should be,
perhaps most especially
when it doesn't seem so.

HUMBLE
in our acceptance
of the opportunities/challenges life brings
in equal proportions
as obstacles always arise
in any direction
worth traveling.

EVOLUTION
10/24/18

We think it's people who make history,
but what if it's the reverse?
That moments make the (wo)man
by revealing their choices, noble or perverse ...

... or more often neither,
resulting from the failure to choose;
an absence of nerve or good sense
causes each of us to lose ...

... and all others too
who depend on society's progression;
when evolution fails to advance,
there is inevitable regression ...

... but this too is part of it all,
keeping us in the middle of the road;
when not living at life's extremes,
we don't expect a prince from some toad.

Whether it's nature or nurture,
time and circumstance have their say;
every moment is formative,
and there are thousands each day.

RELEASE
11/3/18

Ironically, when we allow
fear to make us
exert control on our world
life becomes more frightening. *

As our attempts to dominate
more and more
accomplish less and less,
we feel the noose ever tightening.

Even more incongruously:
when we see all unfolding
for our edification,
we find our experience brightening.

Best to do so
sooner than later,
as it only gets harder
when tensions are heightening.

* "The Untethered Soul"
Michael Singer

DECISION
11/17/18

Regardless of their age,
or situation in life,
everyone gets to decide who they are.

However awkwardly,
we all wish that for each other;
otherwise no one gets far.

From this decision
can come life's consternation,
causing us to stuck in its tar.

Or our enduring joy,
providing means for our deliverance
from a manner of living subpar.

Everything changes.
Us and everyone else.
Not all cookies come from the same jar.

That's something we all know,
but tend to forget
as so quickly down the road rolls our car.

HOMETOWN
11/8/18
Chicago, Ill.

Snowflakes dot the sky
swirled by the city's hustle
and bustle.
Streetlights glow.
Traffic hums.
Last leaves of autumn rustle.

A two-year-old excited
by becoming Big Brother
exudes enthusiasm unreined
as another sunrise
over the Great Lake(s)
announces possibilities yet unnamed.

Hometowns stay the same
while constantly changing,
evoking memories long forgotten,
triggering ideas and emotions
long-held, deeply felt;
some real and others misbegotten.

Yet another growing family
begins its own journey
from here to destinations unknown.
They will look back on this place
with the same sense of amazement
no matter how many curveballs they're thrown.

THANKSGIVING
11/22/18

How do we see more clearly
what we don't have
than what we do?

Why do we focus more
on the problems we have
than on the solutions that get us through?

When will we stop responding
to the falsehoods aplenty
and instead concentrate on what's true?

Where is the place
where harmony supersedes melody,*
and our wild yonder is always sky blue?

What will it take
to prevent questions like these
from getting between me and you?

* Will & Ariel Durant
The Story of Civilization
Volume IX

EXAMINATION
11/28/19

When we think there aren't many options,
there's always more than we see;
yet usually only one real choice,
and it fits our life and world to a T.

It's easy to get confused and distracted
by the glitz and glimmer,
forgetting most doesn't matter
and won't make you any trimmer.

The gift of sooooo many possibilities
creates a simple test:
to see if we can find Life's Essence,
and let go of all the rest.

And be happy with it too,
both its ups and downs;
accepting all as it is –
the smiles and the frowns.

Many don't know it's a test;
many who do wrongly think they've passed,
and push themselves to the front of the line
forgetting the first will be last.

SYMBIOSIS
12/8/18

"And indeed there are moments
when life appears so beautiful
that only an ingrate
can be an atheist."*

How incredible
(and incredibly fortunate for us)
that trees take what kills us – CO²
and put out what we need to survive – O²
and we do the same for them.

Symbiotic relationships
exist throughout nature,
and extend out into the universe as well
to the mutual benefit of all.

We might view human relationships
in the same way,
not thinking we can pursue maximum advantage
without adverse consequences
ignoring the correlation between the two.

Seeing these as gifts,
regardless of our speculations as to their source,
would have us treat both differently
than we might otherwise.

* Will & Ariel Durant

DETOUR(s)
12/12/18

The pleasure and purpose
of each passing moment
is so easily obscured
by distractions and dissipations,
seemingly impossible to ignore
except, of course,
when we manage to do so.

The enormity of the experience buried
and exhilaration thereby suppressed
finds its way forth eventually,
unexpectedly surprising
for something there all the time
patiently awaiting our discovery,
appreciation,
respect
and esteem
before passing away forever,
replaced by another moment,
and yet another
in an ever-unending stream
boring were they each not so rare,
as dazzling as they are daunting,
each unique in their own way
until followed by yet another.

SAIL ON!
12/19/18

"Sail on! Sail on! Sail on!"
so our Captain quotes the poet,
re-conjuring his 6th grade recitation
of Columbus' imagined words to sailors
when their doubt and dread intersected.

This coincides with his counsel to us all,
and to himself sailing into his 94th year
as, he says, his future is in the past
and all that's left is the fireworks.

He boldly projects a positive outlook
even at life's most harrowing moments,
giving us the best of holiday presents:
a good example.

Adding hope to faith and love,
St Paul's "three things that abide",
dad described and now defines
the arc we all transverse
from life's sunrise to its sunset,
quickly passing as if in a single day.

As ever, he exemplifies his own mantra:
"Take what you get, make it better,
and pass it along."

Those follow in his footsteps are blessed
by the well-marked trail he blazed.

And so does he,
and must we all,
"Sail on! Sail on! Sail on!"

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT(s)
12/26/18

Anyone else recognize similarities,
in terms of their purpose, character and social utility,
between God and Santa Claus?

Work with me here.

Omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresence;
proclivity toward "naughty or nice" scorekeeping,
with reward/punishment tendencies
(candy or coal and nothing in between – what's up with that!!!?);
mystical status and mythical capabilities;
remote, mysterious habitat;
innumerable "helpers" aided and abetted by parents.

Note also the necessity for both accelerated
as the Age of Enlightenment illuminated life's shadows
but didn't eliminate,
- in some ways heightened -
the sense of doubt and uncertainty that triggers fear,
causing those who lack faith,
to seek externally what can only be found within.

Some who don't believe in either of these Spirits
attribute these same powers to Nature,
claiming blessings and accepting losses
as reflections of Karma,
or gamma rays, or love ...
all things that also can't be seen, smelled or tasted
but can be felt,
and are absolutely real.

UNFOLDING
1/12/19

Our mind is
more easily drawn
to the bad stuff than the good,
giving negative aspects
more attention than they otherwise would.

The brain first scans
for the potentially harmful,
which helps us avoid many a plight,
but it also narrows our focus
to only two choices: fight or flight.

This causes us to miss
or diminish many options
laying in between,
instead focusing attention
on what our brain thinks we've seen.

It requires calmness, clarity,
and a bit of courage,
to take a second look*,
or we won't discover intriguing possibilities
our eyes may otherwise overlook.

* Price Pritchard – "The Unfolding"

SUPPLY & DEMAND
1/16/19

Too many people
expend too much energy
trying to get others
to be who'd they'd rather not.

They think, say
and do things
to make people forget
how many blessings they've got.

We get too busy to notice
those taking
more than their share
leave the rest not a lot.

Best not to wait
to see what's left
when we're too old,
or our planet's too hot.

To make things better
than how they are,
we need to get up
off our comfy cot.

SPHERES
1/27/19

We think of focus
as attentiveness,
when instead, as suggested,*
we might view it as non-distraction.

After all, concentration
can itself be a form of diversion,
precluding a wider perspective
that takes into account the
greater good
and
larger truth
available always
yet often lost in the hub-bub.

A narrow focus
can also deter
messages and miracles
we might otherwise miss,
or at least be less aware of their existence
and responsive to their influence.

Cultivating awareness
of the passing parade
without getting sucked into it
sharpens our perceptiveness
and receptiveness
to the power of possibility
found only in the Here and Now.

* Headspace app

MIGRANTS
Coronado, CA
2/8/19

Posted signs and lifeguard warnings
about polluted water at luxurious beaches
exemplify the impossibility
of "controlling" one's personal or political borders,
trying to selectively accept the virtuous and beneficial
while excluding the rest.

"Rome built no walls"
historians Will and Ariel Durant tell us,
"until they did no good."
Countries ignoring this lesson,
tend to repeat it.

No one who leaves home without good reason.

All the king's horses and men cannot stop them,
or make them return once departed, although many try.
Any genie who suggests otherwise is
saying going backward is the way forward.

Rather than disparagement or second-guessing,
why not see their motives at least as valid as our forebearers'?
And – what the heck –
perhaps also promote social justice
and economic opportunity here and there.

Corruption is found in many places,
often masked by protestations of good intentions
expressed in the form of finger-pointing and name-calling.

BOARDWALK
Coronado, CA
2/9/19

Sunshine, raindrops,
and everything in between.

Amputees "jogging" along in wheelchairs.

A hippy-dippy sand castle builder daily making a scene.

Endless ocean.
Relentless waves.
Sea of humanity.
Forever the same, always changing.

Celebrating a procession
of moments and milestones.
Each having their day,
and say.

Pulling us toward whatever's next,
and away from what no longer is.

WATCHING 1
Alta Vista, CA
2/18/19

Snowflakes on the hillside
quietly come and go
without concern or complaint,
making their mark
and serving their purpose
without trying to be what they ain't.

Kid on that hill
with a saucer and dog
both sliding together a few feet
- as good as it'll get -
before being reminded of a fallen tree buried
and getting themselves soaking wet.

And so it is for us all,
seeking fleeting exhilarations
amid unaccommodating conditions
while doing what we can
to avoid hidden obstacles
and ending up in worse positions.

WATCHING 2
2/21/19

Perhaps the greatest gift
we are blessed to receive
is the ability to recognize fear
in all its permutations,
seeing or more often feeling it
as the patient, pernicious predator it is.

Saving its best disguises
for our most vulnerable moments,
it tricks us into
misidentifying its causes
and misperceiving its consequences,
thereby prolonging its lifespan
while more deeply embedding its toxic influence.

To sooner detect its arrival
and better still pre-cursors
that attract and encourage its residency,
we only need to remember
the antidote to fear is our faith
in The Path that brought us this far,
and in higher powers than our own
which keeps us moving ever forward
toward probabilities increasingly auspicious
as long as we remember to remember.

ANNIVERSARY
2/14/19

We express compliments
to those we love
not to flatter them,
but rather to remind ourselves
of our good fortune
to have our pathway
illuminated by their radiance;
our experience magnified
by their participation in it;
our world brightened
by their smiles;
our thinking clarified
by their insights;
our lives enriched
by their companionship;
our highs heightened
by their enthusiasms;
our lows moderated
by their empathy;
and our experience
of life's goodness and greatness
widened and deepened
by their place in our lives
and on this planet.

Rather than try to explain all this,
we instead resort to flattery.

R.I.P. to FXT Senior
3/11/19

Neither as here as we think
nor gone as it seems,
but rather always somewhere between.

We celebrate new babies "birth"
as if they weren't alive and kickin'
months before their "arrival" on the scene,

and bemoan a loved one's "loss"
even though they remain with us,
influencing every lesson we glean.

Celebration and mourning
mark the high and low points
of the ongoing Circle of Life,

reminding us constantly
of nature's ebb and flow
- its blessings as well as its strife -

whose uncertainties are distractions
from realitite we ignore
until they cut like a knife.

BRIDGES
3/16/19

We're building our bridge
as we cross it,
each plank falling into place
just when we step toward it
as if knowing we would
and it won't if we don't,
as if sensing our hesitation.
No sense wasting precious resources
when doubt and fear coincide.

So it's not the bridge
but our forward momentum
that carries us across,
dotting our i's
and crossing our t's
as we go.

No need to wonder or worry
if the nails or wood arrive;
whether the structure is sturdy;
or footings well-anchored;
and it's not helpful to do so.
They are if we are.

VIVOS CON DIOS!
3/16/19

Some sing-a-longs cannot be heard.
Some sights cannot be seen.
Some facts cannot be believed
and some ideas never fully understood.

Some lights never get lit,
and some never go out.
Some mountains never climbed,
and things most important never die.

It's what we cannot touch
that we most feel.
Toward what we will never reach,
we continue to strive.
What we'll never know,
we continue to learn.
What we most desperately want,
we already have.

The Circle-of-Life keeps widening
eventually encompassing us all,
alerting us to awaken
before we sleep.

ASSETS
3/18/19

Among life's greatest skills ...

... to help someone learn what they don't know
without making them feel stupid.*

... to move further into the unknown
without becoming more afraid.

... to see things, people and situations as they are,
not as we wish they were.

... to accept what we cannot understand,
and understand what we cannot accept.

... to not let our contemplation of possibilities
be influenced by their degree of probability.

... to be who we are,
unswayed by what others think we ought to be.

* Wisdom from a job interviewee

Got woke last night
by a simple idea much trickier than it sounds:
i.e. change occurs at the intersection
between opportunity and necessity.

Staying clear enough
to recognize any change as it arises
becomes more complicated
as its necessity increases,
heightening stress, if not trauma,
because either – and especially both –
affects our perception
and intensifies likelihood
of our own self-deception.

Another complicating factor:
timing is of the essence
in opportunistic moments,
requiring us to be quick
yet not hurry*
even as we are slooooooowed
by nature's resistance to any change
– even a good one,
reducing its likelihood
as distractions of attention
cause loss of concentration,
and thereby dissipate our efforts.

It's a wonder any opportunities get seized.

* John Wooden, UCLA Basketball coach

5 YEARS & COUNTING
4/20/19

How much faith life requires,
in addition to hope and love,
to persevere despite the odds
without needing a push or shove.

We never find what we are not seeking;
this much is guaranteed.
When sight, mind, heart and spirit are not unified,
our chances get slimmer indeed.

Relying on laws of attraction,
and light/heat generated thereby,
we find our way along the Illuminated Path;
all we needed to do was try.

And try, and try, and try again
to live our life on purpose,
remaining committed and closely connected
no matter what's going on in The Circus.

Having found each other and coming this far
creates optimism about our chances
to have at least one more day as good as this,
filled with meaningful glances.

GRANDSON'S BIRTHING DAY
5/4/19

There's no greater barometer
of civilization's viability
than our children's children,
who will carry the torch
into The Unknown,
- or at least The Uncertain -
toward the places we can't see
or even imagine,
materializing opportunities we can't even fathom,
and experiencing life more fully,
emotions more deeply,
and relationships more loving
than we thought possible
if we thought about it at all,
which we are often too busy to do
until days like today
when time stops,
another milestone passes,
and we realize our grandson
is one step closer
to becoming who he already is.

You go Gus!

RANDOM THOUGHTS

5/23/19

When the people who matter don't care,
and those who care don't matter,
how often we worry about the latter
rather than focus on the former?

How do we stay open to everything
without getting sucked into anything?

Who knew we should pray
for the removal of fear
rather than for reduction of reasons to be afraid?

Which is the more important question:
Who are you? or Are you who you are?

Happiness = kindness + empathy + balance + enjoyment *

When we are looking for others to accuse,
there is no shortage of suspects.

Rarely is any crisis as bad as it seems
when you are in the midst of it.

Never dance with the gorilla.

* - Headspace app ... check it out!

SPECULATION

8/17/19

How would we act if ...

... we already are
the person we are trying to become?

... we've already arrived
at the place we are trying to go?

... we already know
that which we are trying to learn?

... we're already feeling
what we wish to experience?

... we already see
what we've always been looking for?

... we've already discovered
the world we're seeking to explore?

... we already have the faith
we've been praying to receive?

... we've already achieved
what we're here to do?

DISTINCTIONS

8/24/19

It's been suggested*
happiness and satisfaction
are conditional experiences
creating ever more reliance
on externalities
for our sense of well-being.

Joy and fulfillment,
on the other hand,
are not as much
pursued and acquired
as they are received;
not gathered but welcomed;
not chits to be accumulated,
but blessings to be shared.

* David Brooks – The Second Mountain

CAVEATS

9/14/19

We've received a gift
(but don't know it)
the chance to shine
(so don't blow it)
and face fears
(try not to show it)
that block our light
(we hover below it)
putting us all in the same boat
(without oars to row it)
finding ourselves adrift
(no rope to tow it)
but then we recall an idea
(having previously sowed it)
that began to blossom
(if we hoe it)
into a beautiful flower
(ribbon-and-bow it)
reminding it's all up to us
(although we woe it)
and ever so it remains
(until we "yes" and not "no" it)

DEPTHS
9/16/19

It doesn't take long, Karen observes,
to get from the top of the mountain
to the bottom of the hill.

Or even lower, in some sad cases,
as we learn of those
who couldn't find the brake pedal on the way down
and came to the end of their road
too fast and too soon.

The surprising thing is not that it happens,
but rather that it doesn't happen more often
as the rising number of Deaths by Despair
become a scarier statistic
than our own increasingly errant weather,
inequitable economy
or dwindling supply of clean air and water.

The choice ahead
is not between Republican and Democrat,
but rather between
realism and cynicism.

REVOLUTION
9/22/19

Just as the sun
brings light and warmth
to every aspects of life
without discrimination,
it's been suggested*
so too can we
in the same manner
carry love and kindness
into each corner of our world.

The greatest revolution in history
and revelation in spirituality,
occurred when "an eye for an eye"
- the law of the land for millennia -
was (supposedly) supplanted
by "treat others as you wish to be treated"
or, better yet: the way they do.

That's still a work-in-progress
two thousand years later,
but ever more applicable
as we remain challenged to
"love our enemies"
"judge not ...",
and have only those without sin cast the first stone.

How quickly our world changes
when we look only for the best in others
and only give them ours.

* Headspace app

PRAYERS OF GRATITUDE & CELEBRATION (first draft) 10/12/19

Frank and Noreen defied the laws of physics, economics and medicine, but they closely – you might say religiously – adhered to certain principles and values we celebrate here today.

We ask all those present in either body or spirit to join in honoring these ideals by which they lived.

(1) We give thanks to God for giving Noreen and Frank the gift of FAITH, which they used not only to move mountains, but also to guide aspiring youngsters, struggling parents, frustrated sports coaches and music teachers, daunted school principals, at least one court judge in a BB gun case, and more than a few church pastors

to do the right thing, most especially when it's hard.

ALL: We thank God for Noreen and Frank's gift of FAITH.

(2) We give thanks to God for giving Noreen and Frank the gift of HOPE.

Their often shaken but forever unshakable belief in the possibilities the future holds; in the inherent goodness of people; and in our capacity for positive influence in the lives of others; these became their guiding star, are now our shining light.

ALL: We thank God for Noreen and Frank's gift of HOPE.

(3) We give thanks to God for giving Noreen and Frank the gift of LOVE, which they so generously shared through a listening ear, a memorable quote, a warm hug, a hot meal, another ice cube in your glass, and countless other ways of expressing unconditional appreciation.

ALL: We thank God for Noreen and Frank's gift of LOVE.

(4) We give thanks to God for giving Frank and Noreen the gift of WISDOM, which they somehow conveyed without ever making anyone feel stupid.

We now get to share with others the WISDOM so freely given to us.

ALL: We thank God for Noreen and Frank's gift of WISDOM.

(5) We give thanks to God for giving Noreen and Frank the gift of ACCEPTANCE,

which they spread through the respect they brought to every person they encountered ...

especially those most challenged or challenging, who received more positive affirmation than they thought existed and felt it was not only earned, but deserved.

ALL: We thank God for Noreen and Frank's gift of ACCEPTANCE.

(6) We give thanks to God for giving Frank and Noreen the gift of FORTITUDE.

Some of us might not be here otherwise, and none of us will get where we're going without it.

These gifts allowed them — and allow us—

to persevere despite long odds, imposing obstacles, and many a scary situation ... not just believing but knowing the future is forever bright.

ALL: We thank God for Noreen and Frank's gift of FORTITUDE.

CLOSING PRAYER: Creator of beauty and Giver of light, we thank you not only for Frank and Noreen's presence in this world, but also for their continuing influence through the values and principles they brought to life. These now live on through all of us who have been exposed to their capacity to be kind, to find the good in the worst situations, and to harmonize in songs of joy.

BEAMING
10/12/19

The amazing thing
is not that they're gone,
but rather that they were
here in the first place.

Not that they found each other,
became who they are,
and accomplished what they set out to do,
but that they did it all with such grace.

A lighthouse, it's said,
doesn't tell boats what to do;
simply shedding its light,
they allow sailors to persevere come what may.

So it was with them, and now us
who face life's two-fold challenge:
doing the right thing
while doing it the right way.

Simple, but not easy,
they'd be quick to acknowledge,
with compassion for those
missing the mark.

Ever onward despite obstacles
real and imagined,
we go as they went:
bringing our light to the dark.

FACTS
11/27/19

We are all dying of something,
more or less,
sooner or later,
another undeniable fact
we ignore
or deny
in all manner of ways
until by pain we're wracked
into ways of living
more awake and aware,
realizing there is nothing we've lacked
except, perhaps, the realization
subtle
yet significant
that we've allowed ourselves to be hacked
by thoughts and perceptions,
instilled
and embedded
by a quarterback who deserves to get sacked
and a paradigm no longer serving
our needs
or interests
but won't change 'til a corner we're backed
only then do we see
it's up to us
and not them,
and immediately we become more relaxed.

CHESS
11/12/19

How slow we are to acknowledge our lives
as much resulting from luck as pluck.
So much of what is attributed to bravery
occurs because "Honey, I forgot to duck:"*

Behavior celebrated as courageous
often reflects a dearth of other choices;
sometimes words are more honorably recalled
when others lost their voices.

The silence most deafening results
not from the absence of noise.
It arises when its opposite is required,
when values like civility are treated like toys.

It's when times seem darkest,
we are closest to the dawn,
for, as we know, every "Checkmate!"
begins with a well-played pawn.

* Ronald Regan

RELATIVITY
11/19/19

Among our most basic assumptions
is the existence of objectivity
- the belief contradicted by science
that we are unbiased not only
in our impressions, perceptions, analysis and conclusions,
but also in our problem definition,
information search,
choices about source reliability,
and solution selection.

Perhaps even more powerful:
its underlying expectation,
also proven false,
since rationality is NOT the basis for our decision-making,
i.e. an ordered set
of principles and priorities,
based on accepted facts
shared by all;
which guide our determinations
regarding findings and conclusions.

Recognizing the falsity of these presumptions
would eliminate much miscommunication,
resulting misunderstandings,
and most conflicts ensuing therefrom.

PERCEPTION
11/26/19

Our sister Noreen points out
one of the greatest challenges
to living a life of meaningful purpose
is to see ourselves as we really are.

A mirror only seems to reflect an accurate image.
In reality, it conveys an exact opposite,
making our right hand look like it's our left.*
How much more confounding is it
to look at what we cannot see?

An equally daunting challenge is
to feel feelings as we are having them,
and not as an echo
of past experiences just catching up with us
or future projections to be materialized or avoided,
both of which distract us from Real Life.

Perhaps most difficult:
to listen to what's being told to us
by others or even ourselves,
rather than what we prefer to hear.

It takes too long to recognize these challenges
as our true occupation and full-time job.

* as noted by Miguel Ruiz

INTERSECTION
12/4/19

Life occurs, it's said*
at the intersection of
intention, emotion and sensation,
of which we are at least partially,
sometimes pathetically unaware;
but perhaps also blissfully so
were it not for surprising, unsettling events,
arising without warning
or any chance to prepare;
instead, we churn ever onward,
blaming and complaining
about things being not as they should,
thus finding cause for a war to declare;
small wonder
already low expectations
only erode further
by sowing seeds of despair;
this makes all more potent
our intentions, emotions and sensations,
whose influences determine
whether communal well-being we'll share.

* Headspace app

REQUIEM FOR SOMEBODY ELSE (as adapted from elsewhere)

There was some sad news recently that will affect us for a long time to come.

You probably heard about it -- the passing of a person who seemed to have lived longer, done more, got around farther and caused more trouble than anyone I know.

Yes, it's true. Somebody Else finally died.

I for one am really sorry to see him go. After all, I've been depending on him ever since I was a kid growing up in Chicago. Whenever it was time to do the dishes, it was always Somebody Else's turn. Whenever I was supposed to take out the garbage, shovel snow off Grama's front sidewalk, or go pick up the milk and bread from the Treasure Island grocery store, I was pretty sure Somebody Else could handle it.

When I didn't have pocket money to buy those gooey Hostess cupcakes at the school lunch counter, or at the grocery store by the lakefront where I was a beach lifeguard --- they called it "Stop and Save" but Somebody Else told me it's real name was "Stop & Hock" ... or when we snuck on the "El" train or tried to pull a fast one at Ma Frank's by getting six penny candies for a nickel ... I was sure that Somebody Else would pay for it all. And a little later, when I had the good sense to leave my shoes out in our family's living room floor with a bag of marijuana stuffed in them, I couldn't understand why my mother wouldn't believe it was Somebody Else's.

I later heeded advice to "Go West Young Man". Lacking a good compass, I took an indirect route from Chicago to San Francisco via Phoenix, but darn if Somebody Else didn't stick with me every step of the way. I figured easy money would come my way, but Somebody Else always seemed to get it. And I assumed smart, sensitive, sensible, sensual women would flock to my door, but -lucky guy that he is - they went to Somebody Else's instead.

As I got older - as opposed to more mature - I never felt the need to make my bed, clean the kitchen, or clear my desk, expecting Somebody Else to do it. In fact, once I noticed the dishes were stacking up in the kitchen sink of my college apartment. I was positive Somebody Else made the mess, and you know what? My roommate thought so too, and I didn't think he even knew the guy! This went on for about ten days and it started getting smelly, but we were both very patient figuring Somebody Else would surely clean it up, but he never did.

And wouldn't you know: whenever I drank or smoked too much, often saying or doing something stupid shortly thereafter, the next day always I wondered how Somebody Else could do such a thing. For example, when a friend took me out for my 30th birthday, I remember thinking you'd have to be nuts to go near a drink called a "kamikaze" but Somebody Else apparently thought it would be no problem. And the first and second drinks were not ... but I was having my fourth one at the time. It all turned out ok... Somebody Else had a friend who worked for the police department and they made sure I got to jail ok.

When I started having kids, I didn't want them to ever meet this guy so we moved from the Bay Area to the Sierra Foothills just to make sure. But you know what? Whenever something would break or someone got hurt, my kids were sure Somebody Else did it. And by then, it seems like the whole darn country knew this guy. Whenever it came time to send our young people off to war, or pay taxes, or even vote for god sakes, everybody expected Somebody Else to do it. And since he was getting so busy, he wasn't available when it was time to stand against injustice, intolerance or dishonesty.

With the Internet and supersonic jets and power bars and all, it was only a matter of time before Somebody Else became an international - maybe even intergalactic -- celebrity. We started destroying the rain forests, melting the polar ice cap, and leaving junk orbiting up in space, confident Somebody Else would take care of it. Likewise, we stopped doing unto others, turning the other cheek, and not judging so we would not be judged, expecting Somebody Else would do it for us. Then we started casting the first stone, stopped acting like their brother's keeper, and kept trying to get a splinter out of our friend's eye rather than the log in our own, thinking Somebody Else could handle all those things as well.

Fortunately, and finally(!), I came to the previously ignorable conclusion Somebody Else was getting too busy to keep my act together and everyone else's too. After all, I could no longer blame Somebody Else for everything. This realization didn't come in time to keep my family intact, but soon enough to keep my kids from having bad memories of me and provided their mom opportunity to find a new life and more compatible companion.

Not that I'd completely given up on the guy, of course. I kept expecting Somebody Else was going to do the 12 Steps for me, get to meetings when I figured I was too busy, find me a sponsor, and do my service work. And I thought he'd also paint my house, split my firewood and sow, weed AND water my vegetable garden. And, since my way of thinkin' continued loooooong after I'd quit drinkin', I persistently held tight to the idea Somebody Else was going to make me happy, healthy and wealthy.

And you know what? In an odd way, Somebody Else actually did all of those things just before dying. It was Somebody Else who suggested I exchange my willfulness for willingness; who pointed out how humility is the best way to avoid humiliation; and noted that getting angry is like taking poison and thinking the other person would die. As I started making my own choices instead of Somebody Else's, I found myself becoming grateful for my own life instead of wishing I had, well ... you-know-who's. The last thing Somebody Else taught me: I'd never get everything I wanted, but already had everything I needed.

News reports said Somebody Else's death was caused by a lethal combination of unstated assumptions and unrealistic expectations caused by too many demanding too much in exchange for too little for too long. But before expiring, his last words were: "Yes you can."

Turns out none of us knew he had a twin - Nobody Else - whom I'm sure will ably fill these vacated shoes. Now, instead of looking for Somebody Else to bring peace on earth and good will toward all, or to raise the support for constructive response to growing societal concerns, Nobody Else is undoubtedly the right person for the job.