

**Who Am I Now**

**As the World Goes  
So Go I**

**Thomas Martens**



**McCaa Books • Santa Rosa, CA**



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## Preface

Sometimes when we are shaken from our norm, the disruption becomes a driving force for some new action. When a cage is rattled, the bird inside jumps and cries out. Fear has struck and there is no stronger force than fear. If there were no cage, the trapped bird would surely fly away. When I see the world around me becoming unstable, I seem to be called to action before it collapses. I don't want to fly away like the scared bird. My primary response is to stay, examine the whole picture—who, what, why, where, and when. What is actually happening and why? Where is it happening and when did it start, or when will it end? Things have dramatically changed in my world. There are often times I can hardly bear the thought of this place being the future of my children and their children.

As conditions change, it's not difficult to find those things that must be preserved, beginning with the planet itself. One of the techniques I will use in this book is to examine history. By going backwards I hope to get a broad perspective, not only of the cultures and the people who lived before, but of my own history. I don't really want to compose my personal biography, after all, we become who we are because of who we all are, the people who we are close to, and the dictates of our culture. Any biography simply cuts out a small slice of that whole picture. My thoughts and my writings are an attempt to discover who I am at this time. I would also like to find the answers to the whole picture, the current big questions.

I need to ask for tolerance from the reader, since my knowledge of English grammar, sentence structure, etc. will probably be as bad as it gets. I hope you are able to plow through my writing with patience, finding substance in my story, and still see the message. With apologies to all of my English teachers, my publisher, and those accomplished writers who may pick up this book, I will proceed writing as I generally talk.

# 1

## I am Born

I do not remember the moment of my birth or the time I spent in my mother's womb, although medical research has discovered that I did indeed hear the mumbling of different sounds, the muffled voices of family members. I could hear my mother's heart-beat, I could see the brightness and the shades of light through my mother's skin. I have forgotten the incredible moment of intense pressure as I slowly began to move away from this protected environment. I thought I was dying, I became covered in microbes, and then an intense white light appeared, I was amazed at the colors, the beauty of it all. When my mother held me in her arms I felt true love, an honest love that equally traveled in both directions. In so doing the love expanded, encompassing the whole room, affecting everyone who entered.

Before long I began the process of forgetting this exquisite miracle of birth, of beauty, of love. I had passed into a new world, and that world was slowly growing, becoming my own. I was now learning the ways of all humans, I was being conditioned to accept the thoughts and ideas of the culture that I had been born into.

As I continued to age, I was nurtured to see nature as my parents saw it. Fortunately for me, my parents had a pretty accurate take on reality and were very positive people. I was to grow up happy, as an integral piece of the natural world, an adjusted part of my society. For the next few years, I started to learn the English language with all of the verbs, nouns and adjectives, and that's how

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I would understand my thoughts, I then began to conceptualize and relate to everyone and everything around me. My intuitive nature was slowly being silenced and overcome by what I learned. In a sense it was being replaced by what I was taught to be right and wrong, beautiful and ugly. Of course all of my perceptions had been influenced by those who developed the English language.

The emotion of absolute joy and the connection of being one with everything that I was born with, became dull and non-existent. I was slowly welcoming my individuality, my ego, as I was supposed to do.

In time I began to build a shell around myself, for protection, a shelter, like a turtle or snail. The material for this shell was made up of many concepts from the stimuli that was pouring in, interpretations of what I saw. Unfortunately some of these interpretations and concepts were not true. And I became destined to carry this shell with me and I continued adding things as I grew older. The ideas that formed my shell were creating a very intricate exclusive covering that became the major part of my personality.

If there is a way that I could go back to the moment of my birth now and look out through those baby eyes I truly believe that I would be blessed with an unfiltered understanding of the true meaning of existence, I would again experience the immeasurable joy as I realized the fabric of this creation. In like fashion, if I could feel and re-live, re-experience the past and the future now at this moment, as if it were all present, the meaning of my life would change. Time would no longer exist. I would be able to understand all time. And knowledge would then probably become all knowledge or total knowledge. I would truly be awakened. Bliss, ecstasy, the words that yogis, gurus, and all spiritual teachers use would make sense to me.

Today I am a homo sapien, I am a son, I am a grandson, I am a father, I am a grandfather, I am a great grandfather, I am an American, I am a 21st century middle of the road average human, living on a planet that is teeming with billions of other life forms. Where I am now is in a time and place that we are told enjoys the



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best living conditions ever, in the history of mankind. Those of us here and now live healthier and longer than any previous generation. Supposedly, I am someone who is happier and more fortunate than any of my elders.

However, I may be a person who believes in a story that I have been telling myself about who I am. As I look to answer this question I sadly realize that I am not one with nature. I have accepted what my culture dictates and expects of me. I have become a part of the destruction of nature. My mind, my shell, my personality, my concept of reality, tells me that I am in a civilized world and that my way is rational and that I am tolerant of all others. I enjoy free speech, a free press, and a democratic rule. Regardless of all my good fortune, I am not an enlightened soul.

With all the advanced technology of today, it is accepted that we humans now realize all the answers to the serious questions about the world. Through our developments in science and physics and our sophistication in illuminated thinking, it is commonly believed that we are well prepared to face the future and reap the rewards we deserve.

Modern man will reap our just reward, but we may not like it. In reality we have not changed much from the Native American who believed that by dancing in circles around a fire, he could bring on the rain. In respect of the Native American who was absolutely more in tune with nature, he wasn't able to control the weather. On the positive side, his culture had taught him a respect for all living things and a way of life that was mutually beneficial. He didn't speak English.

Most Americans have no clue what it would be like to think in a different language, and don't even realize that language influences thought. The analytical understanding of every single thought, every relationship, is altered by the language in which we think and communicate.

In Japanese there is a word, *ikigai*. It is more than a word. It is a concept that means a reason for being. It refers to having a meaningful direction and purpose for life. In French there is a word

to describe the heartbreaking pain you experience when you can't have someone you love. There are literally thousands of such examples. In Africa the word *ubuntu* is an explanation of how you treat others, how you regard yourself in intimate relationships as well as the broad community. To have good *ubuntu* means you use your strength to help others, never taking advantage. The Indian languages are filled with words that describe behavior, *ahimsa* means non-violence toward all living things.

An exclusively English speaking person who grows up without these words has suffered a loss. In Costa Rica the Ticos often call their significant other *media naranja*, which means "the other half of their orange." I'm told by my son who spent periods in the Mideast that Americans can not understand the Koran, because it can not be accurately translated. I can not even imagine how a remote tribesman in Borneo views the world as he thinks through his language, let alone his affected differences through the socio-cultural contexts in which he lives.

My point is this, our understanding of what we witness each day, physically, emotionally and mentally is strongly affected by the words we use, and the tempo of our language. Most American brains communicate with their thoughts, so to speak, in English. We are OK with this, we are like fish who don't know that they are wet. It takes an English speaking person a year just to get some of the Japanese inflections or differences in style and tempo. The gullah language, Jamaican patois, and the many Creole dialects from Trinidad to Belize, all of these create different outlooks on our reality. Basically this understanding should make us all a little humble. Sometimes we are like people who know a little bit about nothing, and act as if we're experts on everything.

When Albert Einstein published his *Theory of Relativity*, science leaped ahead in its understanding of the Universe. This was 1905 and most of us laymen still have little ideas of what he discovered. Working in a cosmological and astrophysical world, he introduced a concept known as spacetime, a unified entity of space and time. The theory transformed theoretical physics and astronomy.

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He one-upped Isaac Newton, whose ideas had been solid gold for 200 years.

My time chart shows that I am a person who is an '87% past, 13% future' being. I can recall my past to a degree but cannot physically re-experience any of those 74 years except in some sort of a memory fantasy, and sometimes in my dreams. Yes, I am 'Here and Now.' I am 'Be Here Now'. I am 'One Day at a Time.' In the grand scheme of things, our present actions towards the future are extremely short-sighted. The time we are living in now, and our practices related to the significant changes that are being made exponentially, are far out of synch. It's very easy to become deluded by the now of it all.

In the past I was a joyful infant, an energetic and happy child, a student, a basketball player, a lover, a husband, a diver, a fisherman, a carpenter, an electrician, a gardener, a swimmer, a hiker, and much, much more. But I am still all of this. It is who this time regulated, ecologic member, quantumly complicated being is. What I was is who I am. I assume what matters more is where I'm going. "If everyone has a full circle of human qualities to complete, then progress lies in the direction we haven't been."—Gloria Steinem

I am a complex organism, a gathering of over 37 trillion cells formed into a motor functioning, systemized, thinking entity. I have a personal identity, yet I am an integrated small part of the whole paradigm of existence. I am the same as the other 8 1/2 billion forms of life that I live here with, all striving to exist and procreate. I am like the bacteria or viruses that were here first and that probably created me. The tiniest insect, the largest animal, all of the plants, and fungi, we exist. And the glue that holds us all together is the miracle and beauty of our relationships.

The entirety of this creation, of this planet, solar system, galaxy, universe, is held together and controlled by some sacred form of light energy, an invisible gravity that attracts all mass and pulls us together. We will probably one day collapse into ourselves, it's likely that another death/birth will happen for me as I move along. My physical body will change. My time chart will change, not sure

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how it will affect my personal identity, but hopefully I will evolve and hang on to the concept of beauty. I have a feeling that eventually my “Be Here Now” state will graduate into a larger frame where I will no longer view a day as today, yesterday or tomorrow. All days will be one.

The present will no longer be that which I am seeing. The organ I now call a brain will be replaced by something that doesn't have so many disconnected parts, connected, but actually working independently of each other. This new brain will function as a whole, possessing the ability to connect to a higher power. I may become something that will create an undivided and connected true understanding of the “Who am I now.” Perhaps I will be able to tie the Red shift/Blue shift principle that tells us we are all moving away from each other, with the idea of simple gravity, that draws all mass together.

Most of us live, actually think and function in a small part of our forebrain. The rest of the brain is there but for different reasons we seldom consciously venture outside of the forebrain. Our ego and stress keeps us there. My liver doesn't think. It performs more chemical functions than all laboratories worldwide, but it doesn't think. Like my lungs it is controlled by the brain, the autonomic system. It is told what to do by my brain without my conscious effort or knowledge. It operates with amazing efficiency, as do my kidneys, heart, stomach, bladder, etc., all in different body systems, combining to keep me alive and healthy. All of these systems are controlled by my brain. I know that there is much more to the brain than neuroscience has yet discovered.

I wonder if my brain contains an individual key that will open up the path to enlightenment, probably not. What is consciousness? Do trees have it? Do we really record and retain everything that we have ever seen, heard or felt, probably so. This mass amount of knowledge is all there. All experiences recorded, from the womb until now.

Should I believe that I am what my brain tells me I am? The respected 17th century French philosopher, Rene Descartes, made

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famous by his statement, “I think, therefore I am,” was actually working to find a statement that could not be doubted. Is the inverse of his statement also true, “I am, therefore I think.” Well, it’s not, because we know that people are alive and have no electrical impulses in their brain. So if I can exist without any knowledge, without any past, present or future, then who am I? If I’m not an individual, would I still be a part of the whole? I would then, only be the whole, I would cease to be a part of the whole.

Philosophy can often bog me down. It is only that, philosophy. Some of the greatest philosophical thinkers in history are constantly being proven wrong by the ever continuing wave of new philosophers. Much of Western psychiatry follows Sigmund Freud’s advice, he once attributed much of human subconscious psychological action to repressed sexual issues. I believe he was onto something, but I would like to say to Freud that “Philosophy is to the real world what masturbation is to sex,” an individually created fantasy. How far can the mind go to create a reality from thought? Has the conscious mind ever imagined an event with such vivid clarity that it was brought up from the past and re-lived in the present. It’s not possible as a biologic entity but it could be done as a spiritual being. It’s a little early yet for me to be talking about spiritual beings, although I am inserting the idea here, to be explored later.

Einstein worked to understand and explain the structure of the universe, the physical relationship between the stars and planets, and even galaxies, millions of light years apart. Another genius of modern physics, Werner Heisenberg was soon to discover hidden secrets about the tiny world of the atom. Together he and Einstein have explained how our universe works on a large and small scale. This knowledge should help me in some way, but I’m not sure that it does. Heisenberg claims that the structure of the atom is totally chaotic and unpredictable, an idea that Einstein openly disputed. Einstein believed that everything was in order and could be explained, predicted. His famous statement to Heisenberg was “God does not play dice with the Universe.” Yes, even these two

geniuses did not agree on things, but their ideas have been the guiding scientific light as we traipse along through our Western twenty-first century life.

There are others who are in charge today, driving this speeding train that I find myself on. In the engine room of this train, which incidentally, no one knows where it's heading, are more physicists, software developers, inventors, scientists, there might even be a few political leaders. There are many chiefs in the engine room trying to combine their ideas and drive this train. Although not even one of them can predict where it's going, One thing is for sure, it's speeding up. It's going so fast that it is now or will soon be, out of control. There is something that is trying to slow it down. That is, we the people, who are in the cars behind the engine room.

The first car is filled with people who are screaming. They are yelling for their lives, afraid of the cow on the tracks. They can see it coming. Today's train no longer has a cowcatcher, like in the days of old. This bullet train will soon smash the poor innocent cow into shreds and there is nothing that will stop it. All of their screaming is for naught. Inside they know it, but their total helplessness at this soon to become, cold hard fact of life, inspires all of the futile responses.

The next car is packed with people, every seat is taken, but no one sees the cow. They are all busy socializing or reading their books, enjoying the ride. A lot of news magazines are open, *U.S. Weekly*, *The Spectator*, *Newsweek*, ironically even the *Science News* has found its way into this car. It appears that car number three, as well as car number two must be the premium and business class ticket holders. The seats have more legroom and the passengers have paid more for their tickets. It appears as if the intellectuals and semi intellectuals are in these first two cars. And of course, the elite are here, traveling First Class. It may be a slightly more comfortable ride but it won't make a difference in the long run towards the end of this journey.

I'm somewhere in one of the middle cars with all the other people that are willingly being pulled along the route. The cars at

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the end of the train are the locked down cars. These people find themselves on a train that they don't want to be on. They have all been herded on. Many never made it on the train, they fought till their death to avoid boarding. Others are in locked rooms, some in chains. They are able to witness the beauty of nature as it flies by their barred windows. They all want to escape into the woods, to run and hide. But I'm afraid that even the woods themselves are on this train. All of nature is in the caboose trying to halt the mad runaway engine. The caboose is our only hope, our last hope.

Today I am living in a most unsettled world, we are in the midst of a health pandemic which is impacting every person in every strata of the social order. No-one is exempt and every one is affected. We have been attacked on a global scale by a new deadly virus. On December 31, 2019 in Wuhan City China an unusually large cluster of pneumonia cases were reported. On January 7, 2020 health officials in China isolated and identified a new type of Coronavirus. Within a few months this new virus called Covid-19 has infected people around the globe.

I lived through other pandemics such as MERS and SARS, both Corona viruses which attacked the respiratory system, but neither of these seemed to be as contagious or as deadly as Covid-19. Most certainly the world did not respond then as it is today. It appears today that science and reason are in a battle with conjecture and instinct to determine public policy. Of course confusion, disagreement and fear have now come to center stage. Everything that most of us cherish has been threatened, our freedom, our social civility and our access to the truth. I have become used to this. It is now almost expected from current news organizations, government officials and the vast number of opinionated social networkers.

## 2

# A Journal

JANUARY 1, 1959

My dad knows Fulgencio Batista, how he knows him I'm not sure. I don't think he's close to him, but I've heard him talk about him as an acquaintance. My dad, mom and I watched the TV news tonight and saw that Fidel Castro has kicked Batista out as President of Cuba and has taken over the country. That's not good news for us because the U.S. doesn't want Fidel in there. He's a communist.

JANUARY 1, 2020

Today I begin my journey. It will be a search, a mission to discover who I am now. I will attempt to blend the timeline from my birth in March of 1946 until December 31 of this year and I hope to find something that will be of relevance. Perhaps I will discover that who I was, is a completely different person than who I am. I have often wondered how much of what I do today becomes the me of tomorrow. I'm jumping on it, and in 365 days from now, I should have some idea.

Although I have never traveled in the Nordic countries, I am familiar with their commonly accepted social code and underlying philosophy for life known as *Janteloven*. It is a wonderful principle that permeates the culture. The idea is that focus should never be placed on individual achievements, rather emphasis should be placed on collective accomplishments. I'm not a recognizable



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figure who should draw readers in because I'm famous. I'm not a Hollywood actor, a famous entertainer, or an important sports or political figure, My story will be the story of an average guy in any typical year.

### JANUARY 3, 2013

Suzanne, Zac and I are about to board our flight back to San Francisco. We've been here in Ecuador for a couple weeks and have seen a lot. It has been my first trip to Ecuador and I especially wanted to bring Zack here. It's sort of like his early graduation gift from high school. He has done such a great job. In June he will be graduating with honors. Suzanne and I are so proud of him. Ecuador is the only country in the world that has given equal rights, equal status to nature. Nature has a say of its own in Ecuadorian law.

We have hooked up with an old friend of mine from my high school, Ron, who has been living here and is acting as our guide through the country. Our adventure began in Quito where Ron has an apartment. For two days we wandered around to see the historical parts of the city. We then rented a car and headed North to a world famous marketplace that has been the crossroads for jungle traders for over a thousand years, Otobaló.

A city of mostly indigenous people who are now selling great art, exquisite wood sculptures, and high quality woven fabric, including world famous Otobalian cashmere. The marketplace comprises 8 city blocks. In all my travels I cannot remember being in a larger market. After Otobaló we proceeded to get lost on some mountain dirt roads and drove around, possibly in circles until the wee hours of the morning.

For our next journey we traveled South through the amazing Andes and made it to Quilotoa, the largest volcano in Ecuador. From there we traveled to Ingapirca, the most famous Inca Ruins in the country. Continuing South we hit Cuenca, one of the larger Ecuadorian cities and home to a lot of retired expatriate Americans.

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It is a charming blend of old Spanish architecture and modern design. Cuenca was born in the early 16th century.

After Cuenca we aimed for one of Ron's favorite places, Vilcabamba, staying at an amazing place built by a couple Americans, Meredith and her husband Brian, who had passed away. The area is very special, we decided to stay for a few nights.

We spent the New Year in Vilcabamba and experienced the Ecuadorian custom of burning effigies. Every year a big celebration occurs where the people create an effigy, a symbol of the old year. We had been seeing these dummy-like creations throughout our trip but now understand their significance. At midnight December 31, the effigies are burnt, generally in the street and people gather around to send off the bad and welcome in the good of the coming year. The town plaza in Vilcabamba had a wonderful celebration party with live bands, dancing, and the general happy fun loving atmosphere. Besides effigies burning throughout the town, the local children were setting off fireworks. A memorable cultural experience.

The following day we left Vilcabamba and worked our way through some desert land and then miles of bananas until reaching the Pacific coastline. Up the coast we found a great little beach town, San Clemente that kept us for two nights. From the beach, we watched fishermen pulling nets in the early morning, the seabirds filled the shore and the fishermen were sharing some of their catch with the pelicans and seagulls.. It was something to behold. Nature was getting its just do.

Our nights in San Clemente were spent dining with Eduardo, an Ecuadorian who had spent 20 years as a truck driver in New Jersey, but was now back in San Clemente with his small restaurant. Eduardo had great stories and a deep intelligent basis for his present state.

Yesterday was day 13 of our trip, we left San Clemente in the early morning and drove to a monument and popular Tourist Center on the way back to Quito, La Mitad del Mundo, the Center of the World. The exact spot where the Equator passes through

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Ecuador. We arrived too late to visit the Center but we could pose on a painted line, putting one foot in the Northern and one foot in the Southern hemisphere.

We spent a few more hours in Quito at Ron's place reflecting on our trip and packing our bags. It's soon time to head to the Aeropuerto.

JANUARY 3, 2020

Yesterday Trump sent a drone to the airport in Baghdad and killed one of the top Iranian Generals. He claims this guy is responsible for attacks and deaths on our soldiers. My tendency is to believe that Trump doesn't do anything right and that this will have serious consequences, harming us in the end.

Australia is experiencing horrible wildfires now throughout their country. I fear that it will be our time when the heat of summer comes to us. I hope I am wrong about this.

It looks like this virus has its origin in a very large city of China, Wuhan. Over 40 cases were found there and it spread to Hong Kong where there are now 5 reported cases.

JANUARY 9, 2020

The World Health Organization (WHO) came out with its official announcement that China has reported a cluster of pneumonia cases of unknown cause (with no deaths) in Wuhan, China. We know that China is never transparent. Things like this make me so thankful that I'm an American and don't know what it's like to be living under a repressed government.

**JANUARY 10, 1995**

The Jungle, Barra Colorado, Costa Rica. Today I have started to build the "Jungle Lodge." For the first time in quite a while I am exchanging my life as a filmmaker for that life as a builder. I'll be replacing my camera for some tools and building materials. For the next several months I will be using my construction skills rather than the skills that made me a movie producer.

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I have been running around San Jose all week acquiring the things I will need. I'm trying to find the necessary stuff to begin the project. The building knowledge I learned in North Carolina doesn't apply here. I'm searching for familiar ways and means, but it's a different world in Costa Rica.

Tonight I was planning for a fine dinner and a good night's sleep with Joanne before heading out to the Atlantic Coast and the start of the big project, however I just received a call. The truck we have hired is now loaded with materials and will pick me up at 11:30 tonight for the trip to Puerto Viejo.

Joaquin and I are in the truck with the driver. There are two helpers in the back. The 2 ton truck is packed with materials. It's 3:30 AM, the highway from San Jose has now changed to dirt with ditches and potholes. I'm lying on a tiny ledge behind the truck seat. It's hot. I'm tired but so cramped and being bounced around too much to sleep.

It's daylight, or I should say, it's barely dawn. I have switched places with Joaquin to the front seat. We just descended the last mountain, I can see treetops and miles of flat jungle lying ahead.

It is 7:30 AM - Puerto Lindo, beautiful port, ha. No boat is awaiting us here as planned. The truck driver wants to unload everything on the ground but I'm trying to have him wait, so we don't have double work. Eduardo should have the boat here soon.

9 AM - I just hired a botero to bring me to the Delta Lodge so I can find Eduardo.

Wolf, the manager of the Delta Lodge tells me that Eduardo has had car problems and has not made it down from San Jose.

Wolf and I get in a small boat and head to Barra Del Colorado. We're floating down the river now, the damn motor died and won't start. Wolf and I have both been trying to crank it for 20 minutes. I've got blisters between my middle fingers on both hands from pulling the starter rope. It finally starts.

In Barra we found a big lancha to rent. When I arrived with it back in Puerto Lindo, all the materials were on the ground. The two helpers, Joaquin, and I loaded them down a steep bank, into

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the water and onto our lancha, many board feet of lumber, 150 sacks of concrete, 100 lbs. each. Occasionally a bag would rip, tear open as you struggle it up on your shoulder. Cement gets in your hair, down your back, in your shorts and down your boots. It mixes with water and sweat. The open blisters between my fingers are now hardened patches of concrete.

This heat is more than I can bear. I am so tired, so exhausted. It seems like forever since I slept. The driver and owner of our lancha stopped us before we could load everything. It's too much weight.

We are now again floating down the river, dead in the water. The drive shaft and transmission are dis-assembled, as far as I can tell, it doesn't look good.

It is now 8 PM. We are stuck on a sandbar in the middle of the river with no motor.

It's now 11 PM. We've all been in the water pushing. Small boats have come by and tried pulling us free.

We radioed Eduardo to come with a boat from Delta Lodge, but he is nowhere. It looks like we're going to have to unload the sacks of cement onto the river bank, walking through the water in the dark. It's the only way to lighten the boat and get free of the sandbar. I dread the thought !

## NEXT DAY

We finally freed the boat, we offloaded most every sack of cement, working until 2 in the morning, and then reloaded everything onto Eduardo's boat. I slept a few hours at Delta Lodge. It's now 7 AM and we're on our way to Samay Beach. To meet up with Saul, he is supposed to be there with his tractor and cart to move the materials again. - Saul's not here...We're unloading onto the beach. My hands are a mess. My feet are also developing blisters from the boots. Since today is Sunday, Joaquin has mixed a bottle of Coke with some guarro. I've had a few slugs but it doesn't even touch me.

Saul just arrived, he seems to like the guarro.

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We have made 15 trips from Samay Beach to Laguna Nueve in the tractor. The trail leads along the sandy beach. It is narrow. There are places where you need to duck, dodging the palm fronds and the sea grape bushes. My hands have been scratched a few more times and I have a couple new cuts. Once a branch tore through my middle fingers, ripping open a cement scab. I have been driving the tractor since Saul is now smashed. He sits on the tractor fender above the wheel. The last two trips I've had to hold him with one hand and steer with the other.

We will need to find another boat to haul over the rest of our materials which are still sitting at Puerto Lindo.

### NEXT DAY

We are now lugging the second boat load of materials onto the tractor. It will be a long day. There will be no guaro, Saul must drive. We have two helpers at Samay Beach and Joaquin and myself here at Laguna Nueve to unload and air stack the boards. The tractor trip along the beach is so hot and bumpy. The breathing of all the diesel fumes makes you sick in itself. My arms and back are aching.

The final trip has been made, it's well past dark. Saul has to drive down the beach to his home with a flashlight. He doesn't look so happy. What I wouldn't give for something cold to drink. How I have missed that in these past two days.

### NEXT DAY

My feet are as bad as my hands. The new boots do not work at all. I have blisters on four toes and both heels. My tennis shoes are wet but I must wear them. Every chance I get, I try to dry out my poor feet. It is so humid, things don't dry.

Today I built shelves in Juan's house for our food and tools. After sleeping on the floor I decided to put a small addition on Juan's hose for Joaquin and I. We need room and a little privacy. I have a good start on the addition, 8x8, two pieces of plywood, the floor and roof are covered. I am leaving now for the night in Delta

## **WHO AM I NOW**

Lodge. Tomorrow I'm flying back to San Jose and Joanne, time off for Semana Santa.

Easter Week, a big celebration in Costa Rica. A have a week off, enough time to heal my cuts. The cut on one finger had become infected and swollen. With Joanne's care I soaked my hand many times. My feet were pretty bad and also swollen. I had cement poisoning from the strong lye in the cement.

### **TWO DAYS LATER**

I'm now healed up and feeling strong again. My feet are in good shape. I have two new pairs of shoes and some river sandals. I finally got clean. Joanne and I, along with her daughter Donya and family are at the beach, a beautiful hotel on the Pacific, in Manuel Antonio, the "Villa Si, Como No," a needed break for me.

### **LATER THAT WEEK**

Back in Laguna Nueve, working to finish up the small room. Joaquin's due to arrive back tomorrow with a truckload of concrete posts and some well pipes. We're digging a new well. This morning I attempted to mark a site for the restaurant. As nearly as I can measure, we cannot meet the required 250 meters distance from the sea. That would put the restaurant into the Lagoon. I've tried to call Karl, but the radio phone won't pick up a line. Even when I walk out onto the beach there is no signal.

I am still looking for Joaquin to show up, now on my third trip to Samay. I received word that he and Karl are at Puerto Lindo, no materials. The truck got stuck in the mud on the road from San Jose.

### **NEXT DAY**

The materials are here, The truck made it. Saul's tractor made it. We're short 22 posts and 2 well pipes.

### **NEXT DAY**

Work, work, work, we're all digging a well, Saul, Joaquin, Juan and I. I think soon I will turn over the digging to Juan and Saul. As

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the digging gets 3 feet down, using Saul's tractor, we're able to lower one of the *alcantarillas*, (concrete well pipes), down into the hole. I'm now at the proposed site of the restaurant, trying to establish a starting corner. Karl said, "no worries," about the 250 meter line.

There is a law now in Costa Rica which forbids construction less than 250 meters from the ocean's high tide mark. The government conducted a massive survey and set geodesic brass markers, around both the entire coastlines. As best as I can translate, these markers are called mahones, in Spanish.

Karl has brought down a banker and a lawyer and yesterday we all traipsed around the bush trying to find the mahone. An old, very skinny, frail man, a neighbor, came walking through the property and offered to help. He pulled out his machete and within several minutes he located our mahone.

There are times that come into one's life that are meant only for us personally, and on this day I experienced one of those times. Between the 5 of us, I was the only one who spoke English, and I don't believe that even this old neighbor understood the English words on the back of his ragged, hole filled tee shirt. As he stooped down, whipping around his machete, I could make out the words printed in large letters on the back of his dirty shirt. "Tight Butts Drive me Nuts." A shirt obviously given to him by a gringo who passed through at some time in the past.

I attempted to translate the words to the old man, but he just smiled, showing his gums. I failed as a translator, but I had such a moment of laughter that I'll never forget.

JANUARY 21, 2020

The Washington State Department of Health announces the first confirmed case of Covid-19 in the United States in Snohomish County, Washington. The patient traveled from Wuhan City, China.



## WHO AM I NOW

JANUARY 24, 1995

Laguna Nueve, Costa Rica. We have the well dug and a large bodega built, using palm trees as our posts, 2x6 rafters and a tin roof. It's a simple structure to serve us as a temporary barn/workshop. We have had another load of materials arrive from San Jose and Joaquin and I have completed setting all the concrete posts that will be the first structure of the Hotel.

According to the plans this will become the hotel's office, laundry and storage. The "Jungle Lodge" will be a number of independent small cabinas. After the larger main structure is built, we will begin to design and build the cabins. The work is difficult, days become hot soon after the sun rises. I've hired Juan and Saul both to help with construction and when we can't use them, they become the maintenance crew and work to make the property suitable.

The site that Karl owns here is beautiful beyond description. To the South the property backs up to the Laguna Nueve, a beautiful undisturbed natural laguna, off of the main River in this Northern Carib region, the Rio Colorado.

At present to get onto the property a small boat is necessary. From the actual laguna a tiny arroyo or stream must be forded for a few hundred meters, and at some point we have been raising the outboard motor and walking the boat.

To the West, the property borders the Atlantic Ocean, and to the North and East lie pristine jungles. The property itself has been cleared and many coconut palms have been cared for over the years. Karl bought this land from Juan and his family, who will continue to live here.

As I said the work is not easy and there have been trying times for me, wondering if I have made the right decision. One afternoon I was sitting on one of the felled coconut trees that we were planning to use for the bodega. I was very hot, sweaty and exhausted, having mixed numerous bags of cement all morning. I had a green coconut in my hand that I was drinking, and a mango

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in the other hand. I felt despondent when I thought a little deeper of my situation. Had I been doing similar work back in the States, I would be sitting on the tailgate of a pickup, in some hustling residential area with a can of Vienna sausage and an orange soda. I realized, life here is not that bad after all.

JANUARY 30, 2020

The WHO has declared a “public health emergency of international concern” regarding the outbreak of this coronavirus. It’s becoming a serious problem and I can only hope that those in charge can stop it before it bursts out like it has in many other countries.

**FEBRUARY 1, 1958**

As time passed and I moved up in grades I became an altar boy. I ate fish on Fridays. I went to confessions regularly, although I usually just told the priest what I expected he was expecting. I got kicked out of the altar boys for telling a dirty joke in school. Because of my mother, they were to let me back in, “Oh holy night.”

As I got a little older, I snatched a bottle of wine out of the church sacristy. My closest and dearest friend Billy Bush and I began our experimentation with alcohol. I remember, oh so well, the very first time that I experienced the joy of drinking.

The guilt of taking wine from the sacristy was a factor to be reckoned with, so Billy and I decided to declare a personal holiday and forget about school. At the Everglades Club in Palm Beach, we knew of a perfect little golf course pump house that would suit the occasion of our civil disobedience. The chosen spot was our private little clubhouse by the pond. We had often snuck into this exclusive golf course and spent hours at our clubhouse, hiding out, making up stories, swimming in the pond, and living suspensefully on the edge. There is some special excitement associated with violating the forbidden borders of the unspoken caste system. Ah yes, the Palm Beach social elite will please forgive me if I label them “responsibly insane.”

## WHO AM I NOW

Parties of passing golfers regularly entertained us. They often searched curiously as to who was creating the noises. Now these golfers had not become residents of Palm Beach and members of one of the most exclusive Country Clubs in the world because they were the people most likely to be fooled by 12 year olds.

Billy and I had a way to lock our pump house door so trespassers could not enter. Being dark inside, the golfers that did approach could never see us. When one or two of them walked to the pump house, we hid in time for our mutual safety. Crouched down in strange positions, wrapped up in each other, we watched their faces as they walked over to the tiny window peering in.

On the morning of the wine adventure, we had excitedly de-boarded the public bus, knowing it was to be a special day at the club. Wrapped in a towel, we had our bottle of sacred wine. Slipping through the bushes, a short dash across the fairway, with precision timing, brought us to our clubhouse, unnoticed. On any other day our pond swimming privileges were very restricted. Today, we were liberated, we became uninhibited, it was to become open swimming groundskeepers be damned.

At our age we were not able to drink much of the wine. To begin with, this holy wine tasted like hell. It was 'gaggingly' sweet. We did drink enough to act more aggressive than normal. On this day, we invented a new sport with the golf course geese. Today these geese were to meet their 'Waterloo.' Today was also to be the very last day that we would ever visit our clubhouse.

Our sport began with catching a goose. We were able to accomplish this when we flanked one, two of us against one of them. I guess we got the oldest weakest one (a matter of natural selection) Billy got the goose and tucked him into his arms. Our plan, to jump off the roof into the pond. Taking the goose deep down under the water was the object. The goose did not take kindly to this game. In the course of our newly invented, wine enhanced action, the biting goose would harm us much more than we would harm him.

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With all the geese screaming and our ruckus, we brought on the groundskeeper in short order. Perhaps because we had 'holy wine,' we did not wind up in the Palm Beach police station on that memorable and final day at the club.

Billy and I were to remain best friends during our childhood, getting into much more mischief. Once we climbed up onto the roof of the tallest building in town with a couple large boxes of freshly shredded vegetables, compliments of the fabulous new invention, the Whacko Vegetable Shredder.

Inside the downtown department stores, as salespeople did their respective demonstrations, the chopped up vegetables, (celery, tomatoes, carrots, cabbage, etc.) made their way to Billy's and my turf, the alleyways.

Ah, the alleys, for young kids growing up in the city, those alleys were much like the trails of the rainforest or the creeks of the country woods. There was so much entertainment to be had back there in those overlooked, ignored passageways of garbage. In the alleys we became treasure hunters, we searched the huge bins, excitedly looking for objects of adventure. If nothing else surfaced, we would always drag out the long tube like cardboard rollers that became our swords. Shields were easy to find. We would have sword fights lasting the entire alley block, smashing into the bins, knocking over any small objects in our way, leaping, jumping, and climbing for position. There was no one in the alleys to reprimand us, no one that cared about our reckless behavior. We could become princes or pirates.

On the day that we found the chopped up vegetables, our sword fighting was put on hold. We had discovered the elements for a different adventure, for a new game, veggiefun.

In the hidden alleyways, we battled with our newly found ammunition until we tired of it. The next step seemed like an unspoken understanding between us. There were still boxes remaining and we were just behind the city's tallest building, which fronted the main street of town. It was like the Mount Everest Syndrome. Could it be done? Honestly, we had no idea of

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the negative side of our actions. A small amount of chopped up veggies flying down on Clematis Street, would be fine. There was something compromising about the beauty of the feat. It was to be more like a sculpture, like a museum installation, like pre-teen art.

How the heavens rained for that brief moment, how much we laughed, and how excited the challenge of escape became. We got away with it.

FEBRUARY 4, 2020

China has announced that it has over 20,000 cases of the coronavirus and over 400 deaths. It appears as if this virus is spreading beyond the borders of mainland China. 200 cases have been reported in 12 different countries.

FEBRUARY 5, 2020

Trump has been acquitted. He was being impeached for abusing his Presidential power and obstructing Congress. Somehow he got himself acquitted. Perhaps I should give him credit for something anyway.

FEBRUARY 8, 2020

It began many years ago here in our country, but it looks as if the insane violent behavior of mass shooting continues to spread around the globe, just like the coronavirus. A Thai soldier went on a shooting/murder spree in Bangkok killing 20 people.

Today Trump fired a Lt. Colonel who testified against him during the impeachment trial. The officer was under oath to speak the truth but Trump fired him for insubordination.

FEBRUARY 11, 1995

San Jose, Costa Rica. I'm back for good in San Jose. I've been here now for a couple days and a lot has transpired with Karl, Joanne and Laguna Nueve. Actually the whole world has turned upside down.

Joanne has been working for Karl for a few years and is basically his number one employee. Karl is German and owns

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a travel company that brings Germans and Europeans to Costa Rica. When Karl met and hired Joanne, she added Americans and English speaking tourists to his list of clients. This new client base has become even a larger part of the company's business, due to Joanne's abilities.

It appears as if Karl has his fingers in a number of other things and Joanne has been discovering this lately. When I got back to San Jose, for a needed break. Joanne began telling me that she thinks Karl has been laundering money.

Karl, his wife Marie, Joanne and I went out to dinner two nights ago and Marie started in on Karl about Laguna Nueve, saying that he is taking too much money from the business and putting it there. I was shocked. I thought that all the money was allocated for the "Jungle Lodge," and in a separate account. Apparently Karl is funding this as a pet project on a daily basis. That is not the way to build a hotel and I immediately saw a boondoggle happening.

Joanne is afraid of Karl's possible illegal dealings and wants to quit working for him. I'm in exactly the same place. I will not go back again to Laguna Nueve. It's been a love hate relationship. The place is exquisitely beautiful and has so much potential as a unique, remote natural wonder. I bathed every night in the lagoon. I built a crazy fence around our house with driftwood from the beach. I will hold onto so many fabulous wonderful memories in that rainforest.

One Sunday, Juan had left, I was alone and had a serious two hour battle with a terciopello, also known as a fer-de-lance, a highly venomous pit viper. He was mean and would not be scared away. We spotted each other, he was in the unmowed grass, maybe 20 meters from the house. He had his head raised up above the grass when our eyes connected. Neither of us dared to look away. I tried yelling in an effort to scare him away, with no luck. Neither of us altered that plan of attack/defense for quite a while.

For a couple weeks I had been practicing throwing a hatchet that I had brought down, and had been getting pretty good at

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sticking it into the palm tree. The time had come to see how good I was, and for real this time.

I was able to locate the hatchet and still keep my eyes on Mr. Terciopello. The story does not go as I wished, that I boldly whipped that hatchet at him and cut his head off. I boldly whipped it, but he had no problem dodging my throw. He hardly flinched. I didn't dare take my eyes away.

Of course I had no antivenom medication and I realized that if he got me, there would be no way that I could get our little boat through the arroyo, make the 1/4 mile passage across Laguna Nueve, into the Rio Colorado, etc. etc. I've said it a hundred times and I was about to say it again, "How did I ever get myself into this situation?"

I have no idea how snakes think, and I wonder what kept him in his steadfastness as the clock of destiny ticked away for one of us. Despite my yelling and throwing a few more things in his direction, he was not about to call off this committed hostile combat that we had begun and were now engaged in.

Eventually I came up with my next plan. We had a few stout long sticks of bamboo under the house. I walked backwards, without losing the gaze of my deadly adversary and located one of the poles. Now it was the "me or him" logic that took over.

I got up my courage and charged him, and thankfully I'm here to tell the end of the story. I won the battle. By beating at him an insane number of times with that pole, enough strikes must have landed on his head and knocked his brains out.

Goodbye Laguna Nueve. Goodbye to The Jungle Lodge. I'll never forget you.

FEBRUARY 14, 2020

It looks like the Coronavirus is worse than we thought. China has released the terrible news that over 1700 of their medical workers have contracted the virus. There are reportedly some 67,000 cases now being reported around the world. In the U.S. we

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now have the 14th case being reported. I hope we can somehow contain it.

FEBRUARY 22, 2020

In the last two days South Korea has reported that it has 220 new cases of Covid. Italy is also becoming infected, it has reported 62 cases. There are now over 2500 deaths worldwide. We are still not as bad as other countries.

FEBRUARY 28, 2020

Stock markets around the world report the largest single-week declines since the 2008 financial crisis. President Trump held a briefing at the White House, and said that there was little chance of the virus causing significant disruption in the United States. Without a doubt, another missed call by our fearless leader. I must warn readers at this stage that I expect my personal opinions and feelings about President Donald Trump will be noticeable, conspicuously flagrant, blatant and outrageous throughout this book. I don't believe I will be able to be purple. That's the way I see it. Trump's actions are definitely shaping my outlook.

FEBRUARY 29, 2020

Today's news....The state of Washington has reported a death from Covid. It has now come to our shore as a killer.

MARCH 4, 2020

Japan has begun a process to quarantine anyone coming to their country from China or South Korea. Australia went a step further and has refused entry to anyone from either of those countries. The virus has begun to snowball throughout the planet. 107 people are reported to have died from it in Italy.

MARCH 6, 2020

Professional sporting events are being affected around the globe. Fans are being stopped from going to the stadiums. Iran is freeing over 50,000 of its prisoners to save them from mass infections. Worldwide we now have over 100,000 reported cases.



## **WHO AM I NOW**

**MARCH 9, 1951**

Today I celebrate my 5th birthday with my family in Kankakee, Illinois. The weather is very cold and I am seeing snow for the first time that I can remember. We have a nanny that lives with us and cares for me and my sister. Her name is Ada, she is Black. This time period is about as far back as my memory will allow me to go.

**MARCH 9, 1979**

It's my birthday. I'm 33, I made it. I've always considered this year as special. It's the year that Jesus died. He chose 33 to be his final age.

Sunny and I just realized that she's pregnant. We have been together for about a year now and we will soon be having a baby. Holy Cow, I'm going to become a birth father. I've been fathering Abel, but this time the baby will have my genes. I won't be able to love this baby any more than I love my Abel, I know that for a fact.

I better hurry up and finish the log house. Today it's snowing hard and I'm sitting in the little shack with a nice fire going. My mule Shadow is under cover, protecting himself in his stall. Sunny and I will probably get married.

**MARCH 9, 2002**

Back in NYC, it's been quite some time since I've walked around this place. I've come up here to celebrate my birthday with my friend Judith Adler. We met in Costa Rica on a bus several years ago. Today we plan to spend time with a realtor looking at expensive properties. Judy has a friend from Holland who is quite wealthy and wants to get an apartment here in Manhattan. We'll be looking at places on the upper east side, Central Park West, etc., a far cry from my past experiences of sleeping on the floor, in dumps on the lower East side of the Village.

When I first arrived here in NYC I was wearing a pin on my shirt that read Dump Bush, Judy quickly pointed out that it was politically incorrect. In light of the fact that almost 3,000 people were killed back in September, I immediately pulled off the pin.

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In March of 2003 my feelings about Bush had formed. He is an evil man putting his personal desires above respect for human life, above the truth.

On March 19, Bush began the war with Iraq, he launched an attack labeled as Operation Iraqi Freedom. He boldly called this first phase of bombing “Shock and Awe.” Our American Forces flew over 1700 missions and in 3 weeks reportedly killed 6,700 civilians. In the 21 days between March 20 and April 9, when Baghdad was seized by Allied forces, 320 civilians were killed each day. His reason for the war was to get rid of an evil dictator that held weapons of mass destruction (WMD’s), endangering us and the rest of the world. Saddham Hussein was an evil dictator for sure, but there were no WMD’s. And Bush’s true purpose was to get Iraq’s oil and set up bases in order to gain control over the Mideast. (note) My son Abel was on the front line during this war. He had 18 deployments to Iraq. How could I not hate Bush.

From the perspective of NYC residents and a respect for their condition, I pulled off my pin. They are suffering through the worst deadliest terrorist attack in American history. Until now I have been unaware of how patriotism is offering some sort of solace to the many grieving families here.

Signs of the changes in NYC are everywhere. Judy nor I have any desire to visit the sight of destruction, at the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan. I can definitely feel the pain and anger that permeates the streets. A climate of grief and a desire for revenge exists. This is a far different New York than had existed before 9/11.

MARCH 9, 2020

The WHO declares the outbreak of Covid-19 as a pandemic, the first to be caused by a coronavirus.

Today is my almost ‘Big One,’ that is, a milestone birthday. I look at next year as being the ‘Holy Shit’ birthday, 75 will be a rather significant step. I felt as if my 50th birthday was an exceptional one, 49, nah, not so much. I guess it’s the same way I feel today, 74, no big deal. I’ll just plodge along this year in normal fashion,

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waiting for next year. By then this Coronavirus will all be in the history books. Hopefully, I will then have a memorable celebration before I have the long wait for the Big 100.

My close friend Brenda is visiting me from Florida and she has made a cake, filled the house with decorations and plans a big Brenda Dinner. Brenda loves cooking and is one of the best at it. She and I have been friends since the mid 70s. We were lovers once but have settled our relationship as best friends. We met in North Carolina and have much in common from those days. As coincidence has it, we both left North Carolina at about the same time, and found ourselves out here in Northern California. She settled in San Francisco and I came further north to Sonoma County.

Brenda arrived in North Carolina as a hippie mother of three, living in a converted bus with her then almost/husband Gary and their three kids. They had been working in the world of State Fairs all over the country. Gary built the games and Brenda was a great 'hawker' calling in customers. After her move to California, her subdued North Carolina style of life was about to change, set into motion again. In San Francisco Brenda began life as a sales person for the Asian yellow pages, she then became a bartender, then Mistress Sadie, a sex phone worker. She eventually began a balloon business with her partner Ronnie. As an artist she designed amazing sculptures out of balloons, made lots of money decorating for businesses and personal events. Brenda created something with long skinny balloons that she called a splash. It's a large group of 2 by 40 inch long balloons slightly twisted and tied together. A splash can be varied in color, it can be hung or even worn on a person's back. Brenda and Ronnie's business became the one to see each year at the SF Pride Parade. SF Balloon Magic didn't have a float, rather, they had hundreds of their friends with splashes on their backs marching and skating along the Parade Route. The balloon industry around the world has picked this up and it is now a common creation in every corner of the globe. "Way to go Brenda."

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If, as we jump into a new field, there is a bar of excellence, a new limit to be reached, some such thing as the top of the bar, well I can tell you, because I've seen it over and over again, this little girl from the mountain backwoods of West Virginia is the one who strolls in and raises that bar.

Brenda and I have continued our friendship and for 15 years have remained very close. We turned the streets of San Francisco and the woods and rivers of Northern California into our playgrounds, our campgrounds. Four years ago Brenda's mother died and left her a house in Florida. She quit tying balloons, paying outrageous SF rents, and headed south. The change has not been easy for her. Central Florida ain't San Francisco.

### MARCH 10, 2002

My visit is over and I will soon be heading to La Guardia. Yesterday was quite a memorable day for my personal history book. Judy and I with the help of Amy, a young, gorgeous South Carolina transplanted real estate agent, toured many upscale, elite Manhattan properties. Of course, 'location, location' translates into the view most properties we visited had: panoramic views of the Manhattan skyline or beautiful vistas of Central Park, the East River, etc. Some of the properties were impeccably furnished, one with a Grand Piano. It was quite the experience as my social status often came into conflict with my imagination. This phenomenon was generally regulated to manageable, by beautiful Amy's strong Southern accent. Somehow when a thing does not seem in place, it draws attention away from an escaped reality.

By early evening we were again in a taxi. This time heading to a popular Jazz club where musicians jammed in improvisation. Amy fired up a joint. I took a couple hits, my thoughts wandered. When my turn to talk came up, I began on the topic of why people are judged by their outward appearances rather than what's inside of them. "What would it be like to be blind," I said, "like Ray Charles or Stevie Wonder?" The taxi came to a halt. We had arrived. We walked in and sat at the bar. By coincidence, a blind Black singer

## WHO AM I NOW

was on stage finishing his set. He approached the bar. “May I sit here?” I was to meet Frank Senior. “How are you doing? I feel great today.” he said. “Today’s my birthday,” he continued, “Yeah, mine too,” our connection began.

Frank and I bonded immediately. I told him that I had just been talking about seeing the world as a blind Black musician. I would never be Black, but that night I was to see the world as a blind man. We talked about many different subjects, we laughed, drank and decided to celebrate my final night in NYC together. Judy felt like going home, so Frank and I made our way to more jazz clubs in the Village. I realized how easily Frank navigated with his cane and memory. I closed my eyes, slightly held the back of his arm as he had been doing to me, and let him take over as our evening’s guide.

We went to a number of different clubs and Frank led the way. I kept my eyes closed. I had my wish, to experience the people I was coming in contact with, without seeing them physically. We talked with all the bartenders and many of the people at the different bars. At one point Frank asked me what the singer looked like. I had been envisioning a young, pretty blond, but after forcing my eyes to open, I saw an older grey-headed, Black woman. The drummer’s appearance also was so unlike the image I expected.

I lost my cell phone yesterday, but I wouldn’t trade the experience with Frank for a hundred cell phones. I’m sure that we shall remain friends.

(Note) Frank began a business soon after called New York in the Dark where he repeats our experience and guides people around New York in blindfolds.

MARCH 12, 2020

It is not business as usual anymore for us Americans. We are locked down in our houses, restricted from traveling and required to practice social distancing. Should we venture outside and into a crowd, we must by law adhere to the government guidelines. We are living in such a partisan environment, where everything from

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our birthing decisions to our death wishes seems to come under dispute. How we connect to this present situation is our choice. We can talk or we can listen. We can tell or be told. We can make noise or be quiet, advise or learn. We're told that "We will get through this together," and that we need to "Keep flattening the curve." We're asked to "Stay safe, work from home," and "Stay safer at 6 feet apart." Of course laws are in place requiring everyone to wear masks to stop the spread. "Stay in place, maintain your space, cover your face." Even the pot sellers are suggesting that we "Stay strong, be calm, and buy cannabis online."

I am not complaining about any of this, I'm taking it in stride as I try and guess how I really feel. I have friends who are telling me that it's all a big conspiracy, convinced as they are that the higher power has begun its move to kill us all or at least to take away our freedom. Some believe that a mysterious evil 'they' created this virus in a lab and released it upon the world. Many of my fellow Americans choose to follow the advice of another political faction that is on the right side of today's very tall barbed wire fence. They have been led to think for a number of reasons that it's all a hoax.

MARCH 13, 2020

President Trump declares a National Emergency, suspending U.S. entry of foreign nationals who have been in China, Iran, and the Schengen Area of Europe in the past 14 days. In late February, when the stock market was beginning to fall over coronavirus fears, President Trump held a briefing at the White House, and said that there was little chance of the virus causing significant disruption in the United States. Without a doubt, another missed call by our fearless leader.

MARCH 14, 2020

Earlier I mentioned that it was a little early to be venturing into spiritual matters, and here I am opening up that 6 panel steel door of politics, the door with hefty locks, and double deadbolts. Some people have all the keys to get through that door, but I don't, that's

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for sure. Fortunately the door has one of those little peepholes with the tiny magnifying lens. That's how I look through and get my take on everything. Everything is distorted. It looks like all the people I see are from the funny house. When they get close and look back at me their faces balloon out and their bodies shrink to nothing. Rather fitting considering the value of their position. I should say their position as it relates to me. They could be right or left lawmakers or simply the mass of followers that stream in to fight and defend.

What is really exciting is when some group wants in but doesn't have the key to the door. First they'll knock, then they'll begin to beat on the door. Sometimes one of these balloon face people will open the door and try to talk some nonsense into everyone on the other side, but that's generally futile. Then the group leader will bring out the battering ram. All of this will be done with the banner of justice flying high. The foot soldiers are right behind, but all of the unseen ranks are somewhere nearby, it is essential. Usually mob mentality feels secure when it is surrounded by a school of other mob mentalityists. The forebrains in power action.

The other day I drove past a large Tesla plant and I saw many people, worker people, waiting to get into that big door, to work, and return to a semblance of normalcy. And then down the road I passed San Quentin maximum security prison. They also have a big door and I imagined all those people, prisoner people, who wanted to pass through that door. Some people today were wanting to get in while others wanted to get out, and they were both searching for the same thing, freedom. Some were locked in and some were locked out. The government law said that the worker people couldn't get in until the world was safer. The only way that the prisoner people's door would be opened is if the door behind them was locked. There would be no turning back for them. "Here's your freedom buddy, go make the best of it!"

Just before crossing the long bridge approaching San Quentin I passed by the occasional homeless soul, wandering and bobbing across the street, oblivious to my car and most everything else. It



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was as if he were partially blind. His eyes didn't work like mine. What he was filtering through his eyes did not reach his brain in the same way. He looked rather determined to reach some destination that more than likely wasn't going to change his life much. He was going about it in a twisted sort of way, and I wondered how much he knew about the exquisite miracle of life. I wondered if social networking was part of his biological makeup and if he was affected by our covid-19 world. I wondered where he would sleep tonight and if he would be safe, how many times he would wash his hands today. I wondered about his circadian rhythm. Because of the tyranny of fear that has been oozing out of our digital blue light units, I was aware that he was existing in a high risk group and that he was on a lockdown breach at the moment. I drove on, putting all this into my 'past file.'

Exactly how long does it take until the present becomes the past? Is it five seconds, three minutes, a day? This is important I guess, since the present is all we have, at least that's the most plausible understanding of our position on the timeline. If I could venture ahead into the future it would make my present free of any decisions. Any fork in the road would no longer present a choice that I need to make. Everything in my present would be predestined. In conclusion, knowledge of the future would destroy free will. I don't think that's good.

MARCH 16, 2020

I'm at my good friend Julie's hotel in Palo Alto. We intend to celebrate our birthday together. My birthday was last week but hers is today. News began coming that President Trump was setting guidelines for the public, including limiting gatherings to fewer than 10 people, avoiding discretionary travel, and avoiding eating and drinking at bars, restaurants, and public food courts. Julie's planned flight to Hawaii seems to be in danger. We canceled dinner plans, she rushed to the airport, I headed back north to my home.



## WHO AM I NOW

It takes over two hours to drive to my house in Sonoma County from Palo Alto. I listened to the car radio and began hearing of the fear that was generating concerning the virus. Not only from the medical experts, but economists worrying about the effects that businesses might bear. Shelter in place orders would soon be coming.

MARCH 19, 2020

The Governor of California, Gavin Newsom, announces the Public Health Officer's "Stay Home Except for Essential Needs" order, requesting all individuals living in California to stay home or at their place of residence, except as needed to maintain the critical infrastructure sectors. Gavin is the former San Francisco mayor, he's hated by Republicans because he's quite liberal and puts his priorities in an order that Republicans think is backwards. I like Gavin a lot. I once did an interview with him that appeared on television in SF.

MARCH 20, 2020

Stay at home orders now apply to over 20% of the population of the United States. It appears that soon everyone in the country will be ordered to stay home. I can choose to be passive or aggressive. I don't have much faith in the government to handle this crisis. Rumors are all over the internet that this is no more than a fantasy, a gross conspiracy. I can choose to believe the Conspiracy Theorists, but why?

*THEY*

*I've got some friends who're scared as shit.*

*They think that this is really it, Coronavirus, the pandemic are nothing but jokes.*

*They're not real, it's a government hoax.*

*People aren't dying, it's just a flu. They're no more sick, than me or you.*

*Ask yourself, how do you feel, and then you judge if this is real.*

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*Do you personally know of anyone dead? Do you blindly believe what the news has said?*

*Go to a hospital and then just ask, is there really a reason to wear this mask.*

*I'm telling you", they say to me. "If you listen to them, you won't be free".*

*This is step one, locked in your house.*

*"THEY" are an evil cat, and you're a hopeless mouse.*

*"THEY've" done all this without firing a shot, and just look now at what "THEY've" got.*

*Our freedom has gone to walk the street, the markets are changing, as to what we can eat.*

*The irony is, it started like this, "THEY" made it hard to shit or piss.*

*I mean, like really, it's rather crass, taking away the right, to wipe our ass.*

*That's a little much, even for me.*

*I'm not paranoid, but now I see.*

*"THEY" are extremely bad, "THEY've" shoved this on our plate.*

*It's time to act, before it's too late.*

*Who do we fight, who are "THEY?"*

*What can we do, what can we say?*

*Is every government in on this lie. Is what they tell us, what we should buy?*

*If my friends are correct, the governments are blind, and one day soon these puppets will find, "THEY" are the ones that are in control, the government is simply filling the role.*

*This all sounds crazy, I don't want to believe it.*

*But I just might be lazy, I can hardly conceive it.*

## WHO AM I NOW

*Is my head in the sand, ignoring what my friends say?*

*Should I be taking a stand, and fight the "THEY." Do I get out a gun, and never again be happy, and fight everyone who doesn't feel crappy?*

*If there's ever been a God, who has some say, we need you now, to lighten the way.*

*God, I really don't know what to do, I try to stay open, and listen to you.*

*I pray, I meditate, once in a while.*

*My record of good, you might have on file.*

*Are you in on this, are you planning the route, are you the "THEY" that they're talking about?*

*God you know we've fucked up our chance, to make this planet a place we can advance.*

*We've destroyed the land, the ocean, the air.*

*We've polluted the world, way beyond repair.*

*No wonder you want to start brand new, I'd do the same, if I were you.*

*That's all I'll say, to the God above, the thing that brought us Divine love.*

*Now there's a chance that you don't really exist, and I better get ready to roll up my fist.*

*The "THEY" that is here is kinda like the Pope, the religious dude, who preaches for hope.*

*He wants you to think that everything is in control.*

*God will handle the bad things, that's his role.*

*We just gotta have faith that God's really steady, but if he's not even there, then I'm getting ready.*

*Hey Nelson, hey Gandhi, help me find the "THEY," the invisible power, who's controlling the way.*

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*I wanna revolt, to stage a coup.*

*I wanna fight, and get rid of you.*

*Show your face, you dirty scum, what do you think, that I'm a bum.*

*I'm listening to my friends now, and you're dead meat, there's no Coronavirus, and I'm putting on the heat.*

*I'm gonna get you, you son of a bitch, I don't care, if you're powerful, and rich.*

*My name is T Bone, you hear me callin." You better get ready, to start your brawlin.*

*My temperature's rising, I'll fight to the death, my lungs are filling, I'm losing my breath.*

*Uh oh, what's happening, I'm down on my knees, I'm feeling weak, I'm beginning to freeze.*

*It's Covid 19, well mother fuck, wouldn't you know it, just my luck.*

*So now I'm dead, most everyone else is still there, running around without a care.*

*Things are re-opened, it slightly changed their life.*

*To me it doesn't matter, I don't have the strife.*

*Soon my friends will be dead, just like me.*

*Then, and only then, they will see.*

*The truth about "THEY" will come to light.*

*Clear as day, or dark as night.*

*Whatever.*

I woke up this morning and wrote that silly poem after talking last night for three hours with Judy, another of my ex's. Judy and I were young boyfriend and girlfriend for a few years, beginning in 1964. She's a good woman and a serious Conspiracy Theorist. The Conspiracy Theorists have been at this for a very long time. Most

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recently, one of the big ones, was that the government planned the 9/11 event. Conspiracy stories date back to the 17th century. During that time period most theories usually involved a vile group of people that were trying to undermine and take control of the established power.

In our talk last night Judy brought up today's dominant theory, this one is the 'Mother' of them all. The 'They' are the super rich. There are a few books out on this subject which I really don't intend to read. Maybe if I woke up one morning and one was sitting on my end table I might read it.

Just because societal power is dominated by the wealthiest of the wealthiest, does not mean that those rich people are Illuminati Satanists, though that is a thing that the conspiracy theorists believe.

Those who like the conspiracy ideas also live in fear of governmental domination, like the days of old. This idea that the existing governments are the bad guys and they are trying to gain stricter control over the masses began with Johannes Guttenburg. He should never have invented his printing press, spreading these opinions at the 'speed of flyers.' Now with the advent of the digital age, social networking platforms make ole Guttenburg's contribution look like a tiny dribble in the 'Sea of Conspiracy.' Manuscripts that made it into the newspapers, or leaflets of scary conspiracy actions, that were passed out in city squares hardly compare to today's methods of information distribution.

A phenomenon, called illusory pattern perception, is what scientists now call the reason that people believe in conspiracy theories. Often people feel threatened and will create a reason for their fear even though in reality it doesn't exist. Then the snowball starts rolling, reading about one conspiracy theory makes people more likely to believe in another one. There have been studies showing that 50% of most Americans believe in at least one conspiracy theory. There is a method of controlling the impulse to believe in or expand on some unproven theory, and that is known as critical thinking.

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As horrible as this sounds, the conspiracists might very well have been responsible or at least contributed to the anti-semitism and massacre of millions of Jews during WW2. The theories circulating at that time were that the Jews controlled all the international banking, and thus ran the world of finance. Their goal was world domination. Hitler believed this, and convinced the German people that it was true. Even others like Henry Ford supposedly had half a million copies printed of ideas supporting this theory. The first time I was exposed to conspiracy theories on a grand scale was after John Kennedy was assassinated.

It may be that conspiracy appeals to desperate people. People searching out the essence of any important story as it suddenly jumps out at them. It slaps them in the face and immediately affects their existence. It challenges their intelligence and rears up at them, demanding action, not simple compliance. Without personally being involved in the planning of this action they are offended, knowing that something is wrong. They will not walk a straight line as they are being told, but they will make a sharp turn at the first opportunity, turning to the internet for the deep seated possibility that something is up.

And oh yes, with the internet at their fingertips they will surely find what they are looking for, and then some. Facebook, YouTube have become sanctified troves of video treasures. Like minded citizens with gathered facts backing up any and all conspiracy theories are there, lying in wait for more views, more hits. Conspiracies for sale, take your pick, join the crowd.

The sad part of all this is that all those people searching are only wanting the truth and hoping to spread it around like messianic altruists. They want to help the ignorant. The conspiracy theory situation is much like the strongly divided political parties that have developed in our country, where both sides believe in the veracity of their platform.

Diametric opposition in these beliefs tells me however that one side must be mistaken. My response to this, since neither side will ever back down, and since I gracefully look at my position in time

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(my age), is to quietly ignore it all. At least that is what I try and do. Why spend such valuable time as I have left in this beautiful world with such conflict. Why look at this anthropogenic position with a mentality of hopelessness. Perhaps there was a time that I would rush to the front line of this battle, hoping to declare victory for my side. But not now, not anymore. “I never allow myself to have an opinion on anything that I don’t know the other side’s argument better than they do.” — Self-made Billionaire Charlie Munger

One of the more popular conspiracy theories of the day states that the Gates Foundation has actually released this virus onto the world with the evil intention of controlling the global population. For me to think that Bill Gates and his wife Melinda, who I know have worked relentlessly to help the poor of the world, are now my staunch enemies, is ridiculous. This conspiracy theory gets worse. It claims that Bill Gates is in cahoots with big pharma and big government and plans to secretly insert microchips into the entire population with the forthcoming Corona Virus inoculations. Apparently there is a viral documentary, *Plandemic*, which explains this theory in detail. It began life on a QAnon Facebook page and was shared by Republican politicians before it was banned on social media sites.

## MARCH 24, 1962

My dad has formed a partnership with one of his fishing friends, Peter White, a building contractor. They are planning to build two houses in Riviera Beach, my dad will put up the money. One of the houses is for General Garcia and the other is for General Tabernilla. They were both important members of Fulgencio Batista’s former regime in Cuba. Dad told me that Batista is staying at the Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach.

Last night I got out my telescope and tried to see into the rooms at the Breakers. From our house we have a clear view right across Lake Worth.

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MARCH 24, 2020

The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 2,112.98 points to close at 20,704.91, an 11% gain, the largest one-day percentage gain since 1933. The S&P 500 Index rose 209.93 points to 2,447.33, an increase of over 9%. The only explanation that I can see for this is that Wall Street brokers are not in panic. Like all addicted gamblers, they feel that they will win soon.

MARCH 26, 2020

Our lockdown is having profound negative results on our economy, as expected. Initial unemployment insurance claims have risen to over 3.2 million, a tenfold increase from the week prior and the highest level of initial claims in the history of the series (since 1967). According to the press release from the Department of Labor, nearly every state providing comments cited that all this is the impact of the Covid-19 virus.