

SHORT STORIES
ESSAYS
AND
MICELLANEOUS MUSINGS

VINCENT WARE

The Park

Today's my birthday. I'm one hundred and thirty years old today. But my mind is still sharp and I remember all this. Not like it was yesterday but like it's seven in the evening and all this happened at noon. That's how well I remember.

We went to the park. I was three and a half years old. Momma loved going to the park. I had a picture of her once. She was with my brother, he was three years older than me and they were playing with a ball and her stomach was large with me in there and they were at the park. And I had a picture of her holding me up as I learned how to walk and we were at the park.

So we went to the park this day. We found a picnic table and Momma put the food out and Daddy took a big bottle of pop out of the cooler and we started to eat. Daddy opened the bottle and part of the top broke. He looked at it and ran his finger around the top and then started to pour me some. Momma stopped him and then took the bottle from him. She put her handkerchief over the top of the bottle and then poured all of us some of the pop. Then she poured what was left on the ground. She opened the handkerchief and we could all see little pieces of glass. And I remember the glass sparkled in the sunlight.

We ate our food and drank our pop and when we were finished we all played with a ball. We kicked it and threw it and chased it around. After a while Momma stripped me and my brother down to our underwear and told us to go play in the water. It was a wading pool with pipes that stuck up with water coming out of the top. I remember running to the water and thinking about that glass, how pretty it was. And I was wondering what it would have tasted like. And I was wondering what it would have felt like inside me.

I didn't drink that glass that day. But I drank some of that water. And from between the time I ran to the pool and the time I ran back to the picnic table, my life changed. I caught Polio that day in that pool from that water. My left leg was crippled and my left arm was crippled. My life was different from then on. Polio made me special. And it was all because Momma loved going to the park.

Life Saver

Today's my birthday. I'm one hundred and thirty one years old today. But my mind is still sharp and I remember all this. Not like it was yesterday but like it's seven in the evening and all this happened at noon. That's how well I remember.

I was five years old. Momma and Daddy had gone out dancing. It was a Saturday night and Momma said we could stay up later and watch television. We could have some ice cream and cake. She showed us the clock and what time we were supposed to take our baths and go to bed. Momma said we better be sleep when they got home and the television better not be warm.

When they left, my brother watched television in the living room and I played records and danced in the dining room. We had our cake and ice cream and when it was time my brother took his bath. He got the tub ready for me and started running my water. We sat there and watched the water run. I told my brother how I could hold my breath and go under water and how the tub was so big I could swim in it. When my brother started to turn the water off I told him to let it run. I told him if we let the tub fill up I could dive in just like I dived from the top of the garage into the leaves we had piled up. He said he didn't think I could do it but he let the water run. When the tub was almost full I took all my clothes off and stood on the toilet and dived it.

When I woke up I was lying on the floor beside the tub. My brother said he had saved my life. I told Momma I ran into the wall and that's how I got the knot on my head.

The Trip

Today's my birthday. I'm one hundred and thirty two years old today. But my mind is still sharp and I remember all this. Not like it was yesterday but like it's seven in the evening and all this happened at noon. That's how well I remember.

When I was six years old we went to visit my Daddy's Momma and Daddy. Daddy said it would take about thirteen hours to get there but Momma said the way he drove it wouldn't take that long. We left in the evening because Daddy said he liked to drive at night. It was raining when we left and it rained a long time and that slowed us down. Momma and my brother fell asleep but I stayed awake. I stood up on the floor in the back and held on to the seat and watched Daddy drive. He had to drive with one hand and wipe the window off with the other so he could see. He had to drive like that a long ways until it stopped raining and the window cleared up.

I smelled something bad and Daddy said it was a polecat. He told me there were four legged polecats and two legged ones and he told me how to tell a two legged one. Finally I went to sleep and when I woke up we were there.

Granddaddy and Grandmamma lived on a farm with Daddy's younger sister. A little ways across the driveway was another house where Daddy's younger brother lived with his wife, my Aunt and their boy. My cousin was three years older than me, the same age as my brother. Everybody came over when we got there and we had breakfast. There were tomatoes with breakfast. Tomatoes were my favorite and these were the best I ever had. Grandmamma said they came from the garden.

After we ate, me and my brother and cousin went outside. My cousin said he would show us around. Grandmamma yelled from the door to leave the bull alone. Not to bother it. We followed my cousin down the road to a wooden bridge that covered a stream. We sat on the bridge and looked at the water. There was a grapevine next to the bridge and we ate some of the grapes and threw some into the stream. After a while my cousin said he would show us the bull. We went down the bank and walked along the stream a ways. My cousin jumped across the stream and my brother jumped and then I jumped. We went up the bank on the other side and climbed through a fence. We went up a hill and at the top we could see the bull. We looked at the bull and then the bull looked at us. Before I could throw a rock at it the bull started at us. We followed my cousin down the hill and through the fence. They jumped the stream but I didn't make it and I fell in. My brother said I would have to dry out so they put me in the sun and told me to stand there until they came back. They walked on down beside the stream. When they were out of sight I started back the way we had come and went back to the house.

Everybody was sitting on the porch. Momma wanted to know what happened and I told her I fell in the water. Grandmamma wanted to know where the other two were and I told her they were walking by the stream. Momma helped me change my clothes and she got another pair of shoes and helped me put my brace on. I was sitting on the porch when my cousin and brother ran up. Momma and Grandmamma fussed at them and Grandmamma

told my cousin to pick some beans for dinner. My cousin got a bucket and we went to the garden. I ate tomatoes while they picked beans. We walked through the cornfield and then on the way back my cousin showed us a snake. He said you have to grab it behind its head. When I grabbed it I didn't get it right and it bit me on my finger. I hollered all the way back to the house and when I told Momma a snake bit me she hollered a little too. My cousin said it was just a little black snake and wouldn't poison me. Momma washed my finger and put some Mercurochrome and a band-aid on it. Grandmamma told us to finish picking the beans and to leave the snakes alone. While they got the beans I ate some more tomatoes.

After we got back to the house my cousin showed us how to feed the chickens. Then we watched as the men fed the hogs. Daddy put me and my brother on a horse and walked us around for a while. Then Granddaddy took us all to look at his land and to look at his cows. When we got back to the house it was time for lunch. I ate tomatoes with my lunch. After lunch Grandmamma said a storm was coming up and not to go anywhere. The men went to the barn to sample Granddaddy's juice. Grandmamma called it white liquor and Momma called it moonshine. We walked across to my cousin's back porch and practiced fishing with the bamboo poles that were there. I got a hook stuck in my back. My brother got it out of my back but before he could get it out of my shirt we heard some thunder and saw some lightning. My cousin said we were under the wires from the porch light and that the lightning would hit us. He started running back to the other house and my brother followed. Granddaddy was at the side of the house and when I passed him the bamboo pole was dragging behind me. Daddy caught me and got the hook out of my shirt and Momma took me inside and washed my back where the hook had gone in and put some mercurochrome and a band-aid on it. Grandmamma made us stay in the house.

It didn't rain and after a while the thunder and lightning passed. We followed the grown folks outside to the porch. There was a hammock in the yard between two trees and I jumped in it but I didn't know how to get in and it flipped me on the ground. I showed Momma my arm and she took me inside and washed the cut and put some Mercurochrome and a band-aid on it. I got back in the hammock and watched the red and blue birds in the trees.

At dinner I ate some more tomatoes and when we were finished the men went to the barn to sample some more juice and the women went to the kitchen to do the dishes. My cousin and brother went to the front room to watch television. I broke out in a rash. When I showed Momma my arms and face she said I had eaten too many tomatoes. Momma took my clothes off down to my underwear. Grandmamma put some cream on my face, arms and legs and some on my chest. She said it would dry the rash up and stop the itching. The cream smelled like that polecat me and Daddy had run across. When the women went back to the kitchen I started chasing the cat. It went under the ironing board and I crawled after it. The iron fell on my left foot, point first, and stuck me. I started hollering and when Momma got there and saw what had happened and saw the blood she hollered some and then my Aunt hollered a little too. Momma sat me on the dining room table and tried to stop my foot from bleeding. Then my nose started bleeding. Momma told Grandmamma that sometimes when I got overheated and overexcited my nose would bleed. She told my Aunt to put some ice in a towel and put the ice on the back of my neck and on my head. My foot finally

stopped bleeding and Momma washed it and then put some Mercurochrome on it and started to bandage it. After I stopped hollering my nose stopped bleeding. Daddy walked in and then my Uncle. When Granddaddy walked in he looked at me sitting on the table and started cursing. He wanted to know what the hell was the matter with me now. I started hollering again and my nose started bleeding again. I looked at my Daddy and he looked at his Daddy.

Morning Glories and Mint

Today's my birthday. I'm one hundred and thirty three years old today. But my mind is still sharp and I remember all this. Not like it was yesterday but like it's seven in the evening and all this happened at noon. That's how well I remember.

When I was seven years old I dug a hole in the backyard near the fence. Momma came out on the porch and watched me for a while and then she asked me why I was digging the hole and why were my shoes off. I told her that I was going to put my shoes in the hole and cover them up. I was going to bury my shoes. Momma came out with my brother. She said I couldn't bury my shoes because I would need them to walk with her to the nursery. She told my brother to help me put the dirt back and she helped me put my shoes on.

My brother got the wagon and we started to the nursery. He brought the wagon so when I got tired or if my leg started hurting he could pull me. I had seen the nursery when we had rode by but I had never walked to it. I had never walked that far. But I walked all the way. Momma bought some seeds and some little plants and said we were going to plant some Morning Glories and Mint.

I rode back in the wagon and at home we all got down on our knees in the dirt where the hole used to be and planted the seeds and the little plants. Momma said by the end of summer the plants will have grown some and the seeds will have made some more little plants. She said when next summer came we would be able to smell the Mint and the Morning Glories would look just like the pictures on the packages. Then she told me even though I was small that I would grow too. She put me next to the garage and cut a mark in the wood. Then she did the same thing with my brother. She said by the end of next summer we would be taller than the marks.

The little plants grew some and the seeds did make some little plants but I didn't think they could live through the winter. The snow covered them up. But the next spring the Mint kept growing and the Morning Glories came back and ran up the fence and grew into flowers. Momma put new marks in the wood.

Every year near the end of summer I go back where our house used to be. It's gone now. Everything is gone. I walk back where the fence was. The Morning Glories and Mint come back every year too. I crush some of the Mint in my hands so I can smell it and I put a piece under my tongue the way Momma showed me how to do so I can taste it. When I smell that Mint I can smell Momma's perfume when she was next to me on her knees in that dirt. And when I see those Morning Glories running through those weeds I remember how Momma would put flowers in her hair and how Momma's hair would run down her back.

The Stick

Today's my birthday. I'm one hundred and thirty four years old today. But my mind is still sharp and I remember all this. Not like it was yesterday but like it's seven in the evening and all this happened at noon. That's how well I remember.

When I was eight years old I started to run away from home. I changed my mind but I ended up staying out too long. When I finally came home Daddy was waiting for me beside the porch. He had just put some rolls of grass down in the front yard and he had put up a little fence around the grass and told my brother and me to stay off the lawn until the roots took hold. He had one of the sticks he had used to make the fence and he grabbed me and hit me on my behind with it. He wanted to know what he had told me before about staying out late and not coming home. It didn't really hurt much and I was mad so I didn't holler I just tried to get away. He hit me again. Momma came down the porch and told Daddy not to hit me with a stick. She said if he was going to whip me to use a belt or a switch. She snatched me from him and told me to get in the house and wash up and then watch television with my brother. When I came out of the bathroom Momma and Daddy were arguing. Momma's brother, my Uncle, was there, the one who was three years older than her and his girlfriend was with him. He kept saying for everybody to calm down. I went in the living room and sat on the floor beside my brother but we didn't watch television we were watching the dining room. Daddy was loud, saying that he was the man of the house and he would raise his boys the way he saw fit. Momma was loud too, saying man or no man he wasn't going to hit her children with a stick. He said she couldn't tell him what to do. She said she wasn't telling him what to do she was telling him what he couldn't do. She said no grown up was going to hit her children with a stick. My Uncle's girlfriend kept saying to Momma to take it easy and my Uncle was saying to Daddy to calm down. He said everybody needed to relax a little. Daddy jumped up and told Momma he would hit her if he wanted to. He said he would punch her right in her nose and he raised his fist and went around the table after her. Momma ran down the hall into the bathroom and slammed the door and locked it. Daddy sat down in the chair beside the hallway. Momma came out of the bathroom and went into the kitchen and when she came out she had a rolling pin in her hand. She stood over Daddy and told him to punch her now. She dared him. Daddy just sat there. My Uncle asked her to put that thing down. His girlfriend kept saying stop it. Momma went down the hallway into our bedroom and slammed the door shut. After a while Daddy stood up and said he was leaving. He said he wasn't coming back. My Uncle told him not to leave and for him to wait. He called to Momma to come out. Daddy said it was best for him to leave and he got his hat and coat from the front closet and left out the front door. My Uncle knocked on our bedroom door and said Daddy had left and that he and his girlfriend were leaving too. Momma came out and walked them to the front porch and stayed there until they drove off. When she came back in she told me and my brother to get ready for bed. She made my brother sleep in my bed with me and she slept in his bed.

The next morning after breakfast I found that stick and snuck it in the house and put it under my bed. I sat on the porch just about all day. When it was time for Daddy to come home from work he pulled in the driveway. He asked me where my brother was and I told him he was in the backyard. Daddy said to get him and for us to get ready for dinner. He said he had brought some peaches for desert. After dinner Momma cut the peaches up and put some cream on them and we all ate peaches and cream.

I waited for a few days and then I took the stick out from under my bed and walked down to the end of the driveway and dropped it down the sewer.

The Smartest One

Today's my birthday. I'm one hundred and thirty five years old today. But my mind is still sharp and I remember all this. Not like it was yesterday but like it's seven in the evening and all this happened at noon. That's how well I remember.

When I was nine years old we went to visit Momma's brother. There were twelve in Momma's family, six boys and six girls. Momma's brother who was a year older than her and two of Momma's sisters, the one three years older than her and the one two years younger than her all lived about an hour from us. It was like going on a trip and depending on the way Daddy went sometimes me and my brother would see cows and horses. Some of the roads there weren't paved and the houses all had big yards with gravel driveways. They had apple and cherry trees and flowers and vegetable gardens.

Momma's brother had two kids with his wife, my Aunt, a boy, the oldest and a girl. Momma's sister who was three years older than her had three kids with her husband, my Uncle, two boys and the youngest, a girl. Momma's younger sister had two kids with her husband, my Uncle, two girls. All my cousins were older than me and my brother except for the two girls who were the same ages as us. They were all there and so were Momma's two cousins. These two women were sisters and were older than everybody. They were my cousins too.

We had a good time. Everybody danced, except for the two oldest and we all ate and the grown ups drank liquor. One of our cousins snuck me and my brother some beer.

When it got late and it was time to go Daddy was missing. He just wasn't there and nobody could really remember the last time they had seen him. Momma looked first in the bathrooms. Then we all started to look through the rooms except for the two oldest. They kept drinking. When we couldn't find him in the house we all went outside. First we looked in our car. Then we looked in all the cars in the yard. We looked under the back porch. Two of my cousins went down to the road and looked up and down but they didn't see him. I said maybe he was sitting under the apple tree. He liked to sit under that tree. Momma's brother got a flashlight and we all went over to the tree but he wasn't there. We started calling his name. When we went back in the house one of the older cousins said not to worry about him. The other one said he would show up. The music and dancing started up again but Momma and her brother and sisters with me and my brother kept looking. We started looking in the closets. We went to the back bedroom and looked in that closet and then we all just stood there. I was looking out of the window. Everybody was quiet. Then we heard snoring. I got down on my hands and knees beside the bed and my Uncle got down beside me and shined the flashlight. Momma told Daddy to come out from under there and Daddy slid out from under the bed. I asked him why he was sleeping under the bed and he said it was because he was the smartest monkey in this bunch. When we all got to the dining room one of the older cousins said she told us he would show up. Daddy made a sandwich and told Momma and me and my brother to make a sandwich. Everybody except for my

older cousins came outside to say bye and they waved and told us to be careful and we started home

Humming Singing and Talking

Today's my birthday. I'm one hundred and thirty six years old today. But my mind is still sharp and I remember all this. Not like it was yesterday but like it's seven in the evening and all this happened at noon. That's how well I remember.

Before I was born the oldest of Momma's family, her brother, moved into the flat upstairs from us with his wife, my Aunt, and their two boys.

When I got sick at three and a half years old I stayed in the hospital nine months. My Uncle started drinking while I was gone. Momma said he fell in love with that beer. When he got drunk at home my Aunt wouldn't let him out of the house so he would go down in the basement and drink. I couldn't see him but I could lie on the floor in the hallway and look through the register and see the light bulb on his side of the basement and I could hear him. He would drink and hum a little while then sing a little while and talk a little while. He would hum different tunes and sing different songs but mostly he would sing about coming to a fork in the road and sometimes he would go left and sometimes he would go right. When he talked I really couldn't understand what he was saying.

Sometimes I would fall asleep on the floor and nobody would wake me up and when I woke up in the dark everybody would be in bed and the basement light would be off and my Uncle would be gone.

When I was ten years old my Uncle got drunk at the bar on the corner and on his way home he fell and rolled down to the curb and almost under a car parked there. One of the neighbors came and told Daddy and he went down there and me and my brother followed. He couldn't get my Uncle to walk so he told us to watch out for him while he went and got the car. I sat down beside him and he looked at me and hummed a little and then sung a little and talked to me a little and I could understand what he said. He said my name and he said I was going to be alright. Then he looked up in the sky and I looked up in the sky. Then he closed his eyes and I thought he was sleep but after a little while he started humming and singing and talking. Daddy got there with the car and laid him in the back seat and me and my brother ran home. When we got there Daddy and my Aunt got him out of the car, up the porch and then up stairs.

My friend from across the street told me that one time my Uncle was drunk and he knocked on his screen door. When my friend went to the door and saw it was my Uncle he said hello. My Uncle hummed to him, sang to him and talked to him. My friend's Mother called to him from the kitchen and asked him who it was and he said it was the Uncle from across the street. His Mother asked what did my Uncle want and after my friend listened to the humming and singing and talking for a while he called back to his mother that he didn't know.

When I was fifteen my Uncle bought a house not far from us, and a car. It was the first car he had ever owned. I didn't see him much after that. Every now and

then I would be sitting on the porch and he would drive by and he would honk the horn and throw up his hand. The car was a stick shift and when he started off after stopping at the corner the car would jerk a little and I could hear him trying to get in gear. Momma said my Aunt told her he was scared of the car and wouldn't drive it if got drunk. He would leave the car and walk or they would have to go and get him.

When my Uncle retired from Ford Motor Company my Aunt had a little party for him. I went by to congratulate him and wish him well. My Aunt showed me the watch from his job. I read a plaque he had been given. It thanked him for forty years of loyal service and said in all those years he had never been late or missed a day of work.

My Uncle died three years later. The night before he was buried I went to see him. And when I saw him lying there it reminded me of him lying there at that curb with his eyes closed. And so I hummed to him a little and sung to him a little and talked to him a little.

Flip Flopping

Today's my birthday. I'm one hundred and thirty seven years old today. But my mind is still sharp and I remember all this. Not like it was yesterday but like it's seven in the evening and all this happened at noon. That's how well I remember.

The first time I saw Momma's youngest brother, my Uncle, was when I was four years old. I was in the hospital. Momma had come to visit me and she brought him with her. He couldn't come in so she carried me to a window where I could see him in the parking lot. He waved to me and then turned circles and danced.

He was the youngest of the twelve and Momma and her sisters had raised him because her Momma died soon after he was born and her Daddy died a year later. She said the girls had spoiled him.

When I came home he would come over sometimes and play his saxophone and he would get me to dance while he played. He said dancing was better than the exercises I was supposed to be doing.

I didn't see him for a while because he was traveling around playing his horn. Then he came back around and he didn't have his horn anymore. Momma said women were always chasing him and then they started catching him and he got lost.

When I was eight years old he started having fits and he ended up in the hospital. Daddy said it was the crazy house. When Momma went to visit him sometimes Daddy would go in too and me and my brother would wait in the car and other times Daddy waited with us and just Momma went in. Every time we would go I would wave at the windows and turn circles and dance in the parking lot. Momma told me I could dance and that my Uncle could see me.

When he got out of the hospital he couldn't walk straight. He didn't stagger he just walked kind of fast and drifted all over. One time he was taking me and my brother to the corner store for ice cream and I asked him why he walked that way and he said everything was good and that he had papers in his pocket that said he could walk that way.

When he stayed away too long Momma would have Daddy go find him and make sure he was alright. Me and my brother went with him sometimes. Once we found him sitting on the steps of the building he lived in drinking with some other men. My brother said he had a turban on but it was bandages wrapped around his head because he had been hit with a wrench. One time we saw him standing on a corner and Daddy parked down the street and we watched for a while and then we left.

One night I walked out on the porch and he was crawling up the steps. When I helped him up I asked him why he was crawling up the steps and he laughed and asked me where I was when he was crawling down the street.

When he came over he always told me and my brother to swim in all the oceans and fly as high as we could. And he always told Momma to let us go, that we had to swim and we had to fly. He told us to hold our heads up so we could see and to look life in the eye. He told us we had to learn how to read between the lines. And he told us to buy the world on credit.

He moved in with a woman who used to go to the clubs to hear him play his horn. She bought him another horn. I went by to see him and he tried to play and he tried to dance. They were drinking and I had a drink with them and we sang his song about flip flopping. He said he was doing good and his woman said they were doing good. She said the only problem was that he wouldn't keep his teeth in as much as she wanted.

The last time I saw him was a few years later. I rode by and him and his woman were sitting on the porch drinking. I parked down the street a ways and watched them for a while and then I left.

My Uncle lived to be eighty-one years old. He was the youngest. He was the last to go. He was my favorite.

My Street

In 1970 I wrote a poem titled "I'll Go Alone." In the poem I pondered about death, specifically, my own. I asked numerous questions, among them, what will it look like? Will I recognize it? Where will it come from? And, I wonder will my bridge be high? The bridge I was referring to was the Golden Gate Bridge. I was still a year away from actually seeing it in person but I had become enamored with it and considered a leap from the bridge as some kind of romantic, dramatic way to go. I was rather keen on drama at that time. I was twenty-one years of age.

Now, understand I wasn't planning to commit suicide. Death was simply my Muse for this particular poem. I was however, curious. I thoroughly enjoyed life then and still do. I had already come close to death several times at three and a half years of age due to serious illness and having been diagnosed with a life threatening illness at 60, although never coming close to death, the very real potential was heightened. Life has seemingly always been special to me. I'm always pleased to hear of, or read about someone who has had a near death experience profess to have acquired a newfound appreciation for life and formally declare from then on to live life to the fullest and as if there was no tomorrow. The doubt of tomorrow had actually always been the case. My pondering of suicide as a means to an end was an attempt to exert control over my life by attempting to control my death. I would be able to exert my will over my inevitable destiny, if you will.

For me that leap would have meant I had taken a number, that today I know is quite high. I would have taken and held my place in history. I don't know what the estimated number was in 1970 but as of 2012 that estimation is over 1400. The actual count is of course higher. The Golden Gate Bridge is the number one destination in the world for suicides. Even at that age I had good taste.

Now that I'm closer, at least in a natural sense, to death at 63 than I was at 21, I have a new curiosity, a wiser inquisitiveness. The bridge has lost its luster. Now I know I would have had to plunge almost 250 feet for about four seconds and I would have reached a speed of about 75 miles per hour. Although that sounds exciting there are several other factors to consider. The most important one is that I would want to be sure I could jump. And I would want to be positive of the end. I wouldn't want to be like the young man who reached his jump off point and lingered long enough for authorities to reach him and eventually talk him out of his endeavor. Obviously doubt had set in. However, as he turned and made his way back to safety he fell. I imagine he had mixed emotions as he dropped but he was successful because he died.

Then there was the young woman who jumped but survived. She broke numerous bones and had severe internal injuries. It took her months to heal and two years before she could try again. That time she succeeded. So people jump and live. I need more certainty.

I had a landlord who was in his office talking with a co-worker. After a particularly long pause the co-worker looked and saw that my landlord appeared to be napping. He had in fact died. My landlord's son told me that the doctor had told him that his father died as if he had been unplugged. Now, that sounds attractive.

My father died at the age of 87. I was told he died in his sleep. I've wondered if his heart simply stopped or was he wrenched from his sleep and then fell back dead, with closed, or opened eyes. I think to be in the midst of a beautiful dream and then to be unplugged is the way to go. That's a new goal of mine.

Yes I love life and although that declaration may have seemed absurd in my youth because of the activities I pursued, including tearing up several cars, I was simply living my life. But of course I know I haven't cheated death. I have however missed some appointments. Death still awaits me. It still remains as something mysterious and unknown. It is, as of this moment, undetermined. So indeed, I live on. Such is not the case for *My Street*.

I left home at 22 years of age and moved to San Francisco down to Los Angeles over to Las Vegas, back to Los Angeles back to *My Street*. Striking out again at 28 I headed back to Los Angeles then across to Atlanta and then back to Los Angeles. I returned to *My Street* at 44 years of age. I paused there and then moved to Tobaccoville, a village in North Carolina.

I thought in my returns to *My Street* that I was seeing some sort of normal decline. Something akin to when I saw friends upon my return, friends from my past and noticed they were growing older. But in reality *My Street* was dead.

I first moved onto *My Street* when I was a year old. I moved into a house that was built in 1929. The first night I slept in my bed the house was twenty-one years old. In parts of the eight decades I've been on this earth I've known *My Street* 62 years now. It's rather unique in that it's only four blocks long. At the end of *My Street*, or the beginning, depending on where you started, was my first school. I began school in 1954 when I was five years old and graduated when I was 14 in 1963. If we had started at my school on my graduation day and walked those four blocks we would have passed 152 occupied houses. Walk with me today in the year 2012.

Again, let's start at the school. The school is now closed. The windows are slowly being broken out and even more slowly being boarded up. The grassy area where I played football and ran from and chased the other little boys and girls, is overgrown. Where I played kickball and baseball and pitched horseshoes is gone.

With the school at our backs we walk the first block. Twenty-one houses once stood. Six are missing. Of the 15 remaining two are abandoned, stripped inside and out of anything of value. Even the windows and doors have been removed. If there was a metal fence it's gone too.

In the second block, where my family lived three houses from the far corner, there were 40 homes and an eight-unit apartment building. Now, four are missing, including the apartment building, ten are abandoned. The abandoned homes stripped and several have been set on fire.

In the third block there were 46 homes. Four are missing and 20 are abandoned. When the houses are stripped everything is taken. Even the aluminum siding is removed, at least as high as can be reached. Six have been set on fire.

In the fourth and final block there were 45 houses. Six are missing and 13 are abandoned. The abandoned homes suffered the same fate as the others, including fires.

Blocks of the sidewalk have been removed in front of one the empty lots where a house once stood. But the concrete must not be of any value otherwise more of the sidewalk would have been snatched up and hauled away like the sewer and manhole covers.

On my periodic returns and extended stays I've of course ridden the street but to walk *My Street* is devastating to me. On my block, on my side, as a young boy I had been in just about every house. Either I had played with the children who lived there or sat and talked with the adults who owned the homes. I had raked leaves and shoveled snow at these homes. Played in the backyards and rolled in the grass.

There's a difference in the death of humans and the deaths of streets. But in each instance life ceases to exist. What has happened to *My Street* was not suicide. It was murder.

It happened the day the street should have been paved and instead it was patched. The workers shoveled asphalt into the spring potholes after the bitter winters. They patted the asphalt down and stomped on it and rolled over the fatigued street and moved on. It's been almost 20 years since the street has been paved. And now the holes are no longer being filled. The street is nothing but bumps and cracks and holes. It looks horrible.

When the Roman's conquered a city one of the first things they did was improve the roads and strengthening of the infrastructure rose from there and then life was sustainable. Roads collapse and life collapses. When a new subdivision is built the streets are created first. And if not first certainly they are paved last but they are not left undone.

When the street I once played in died, death spread up the grass to the sidewalk onto the porches and into the houses. Yes, streets and houses and building and cities and empires die differently than humans. And what may take a hundred or a thousand years took 60 years, my lifetime. I can look back 60 and I can see ahead 50 and know that it's over for *My Street*. I don't know anyone who was here before me. Those who remain are holding on including my younger sister who still lives in and maintains the house I've known for so long.

If somehow we could pave this street ourselves, pay for it ourselves. Think of that. The huge machines, the pavers and rollers and loaders and trucks sitting in the field at the end of the block and every few years the asphalt would be ordered and then brought in and the street repaved.

People would come from all around to look at it and walk in it. Children would want to play ball in the street. And people would marvel at its newness and smoothness and they would look at the surrounding destruction and decay and understand how incompatible that was with the beautiful street. Think what

would happen. *My Street* would come back from the dead. *My Street* would live again.

Note: The above was written on March 23, 2012. As of 2017 five houses on my street have been demolished by the city. The debris has been removed and grass has been planted. On October 20, 2017 the paving of my street was completed. Additionally: On June 8, 2018 all the damaged areas of the sidewalks and driveways were removed. The sidewalks and driveways were then re-paved. There is now wheelchair access.

Note: On June 6, 2024 the Michigan Central Train Station reopened after closing on January 6, 1988. The cost of renovation was close to 1 BILLION dollars. On My Street every empty house except for 3 has been renovated or torn down. Only 2 are still abandoned. Grass and gardens grow. Where two crumbling houses once stood a neighbor bought the empty lots and made a park where people and little ones from My Street gather to barbeque, play games, bounce on trampolines and watch movies on a big screen at night in the summertime. New families from Mexico, and South America and the Middle East now live on My Street. Children play on the sidewalks. They ride their bikes. They roller-skate and create colorful chalk drawings on the re-paved sidewalks. A young WHITE man lives next door. I lived to see it all.

The Castrating Woman

Woman was put here on this earth to castrate man. Now understand I don't mean this in the literal sense. The actual act of a woman taking a sharp object and whacking off a man's penis is an aberration and rarely happens. Thankfully. I use the word to refer specifically to symbolic castration. By definition it means to emasculate, to make a person weaker or less effective, to deprive a man of his male role or identity. I'm adding to cut off, to cut down, to cut up, to cut a man away from an object of his love, or desire.

Any man who has been, while speaking, verbally cut off, any man who has been severely castigated and yelled at and cursed by a woman has, in fact, been cut down. Any man who has been berated and insulted has been cut up and rendered into pieces. And if these acts have taken place in public then he has been publicly castrated.

The weapons that a woman has, to carry out the acts of castration, are manifold and quite effective. The man who walks across the room, extends his hand and requests a dance only to be rejected has just had his hand cut off and because he has been stabbed in the leg he is made to limp back to his seat until he heals enough to try again. I've seen some men move to the first woman's friend take another whack and move on down the line. Having finally obtained a dance he can eventually walk back to his place with some vestige of pride and not have to crawl. This may seem like a trivial example but men understand and deep down inside women know exactly what has transpired.

In the early 1980s I was living in Atlanta, Georgia and I frequented one of the more popular clubs there. On this particular night I drank a couple of large glasses of Courage with a double shot of Bravery and took my customary prowling through the club. I was looking for a woman to approach, a woman who inspired me to action. And there she was! She was sitting near the isle in a booth with her girlfriends. I eased up and introduced myself and using what could be considered a weak line but was actually the truth, which was a mistake, I explained that I came to the club quite often and had never seen her there before and I asked her if she lived in Atlanta. She said no she was from a little place further south and I forget the name now so let's call it, Hell. I responded, "Oh really, born and raised in Hell?" The knife she had concealed in her throat jumped onto her tongue and turning she looked at me with daggers shooting from her eyes and raising her voice she said, "No, born and reared in Hell. Animals are raised, people are reared." She then sucked on her drink. Bleeding profusely I immediately staggered from the club and going home I threw myself across the bed and lying there I waited until the blood ceased to flow.

In the mid 1980s I was living in Los Angeles, California. I was in Chicago, Illinois with several co-workers on business. We had completed our assignment and while getting ready to hit the club I heard on the television how it was unseasonably warm for the middle of March and how more normal cold temperatures were on the way back. At the club I saw a woman sitting at the bar who appealed to me. I went to the bar and while standing next to her I ordered a drink. After receiving my order I turned to her and explained that I was visiting from Los Angeles. I asked her if she thought it would snow while I was there.

When she turned directly towards me I recognized the danger and shifted to avoid the full brunt of the attack. She said, "Who do I look like to you, the weatherman?" I almost laughed but she wasn't making a joke and I had to get to the bathroom to check the wounds. I put cold compresses on my eyes and when I was able to see again I went back out and continued the night.

Now I know, some may wonder if on these occasions I had been obnoxious. I categorically deny this. I was then and still am a rather nice man. Others may wonder if perhaps I was offensive to look at and we'll have to come back to that. Let me say that in those days, if I chose to, I could go into a club, embark upon the hunt with the goal being of a capture, wearing a four-hundred dollar suit with a thousand dollars worth of jewelry on and stepping in two hundred dollar shoes. None of that matters. When a woman goes to a club she puts on a beautiful dress, erotic shoes, enticing lipstick, seductive perfume and packs every sharp weapon in her arsenal. She prepares for battle with her goal being a clean and deft evisceration. The only time a woman is not fully armed is at work, the grocery store and in church. Still she's armed, just not with her complete arsenal.

What I wear affords no protection. Once I remove that armor and it's thrown across the chair and my golden protective ornaments and diamond lucky charms have been taken off and stashed in my shoes under the bed, I'm naked and defenseless. Then I'm in woman's world. Where once I was hard, proud and erect, I become soft, flaccid and shriveled. And when I come to my senses, weakened and spent, having once looked down upon a woman I believed I had subdued and mastered, I discover the woman looking down on me. My manhood and strength having been drained from my body.

In the mid 1990s I was living in Tobaccoville, North Carolina. One afternoon I was at work sitting in the lunchroom watching a woman who was watching a man put candy and snacks in the machine. She stared at him and I shuddered because I had seen that look before. She asked him if he was married and he said he was and added that he was happily married. She went after him and cut him down. Eight months later he was getting a divorce and the same woman had the Mailman up against the wall with a knife against his groin. Of course I mean that symbolically.

So, returning to the question of my looks. It really doesn't matter. If that were the case, the handsome movie stars would be spared. Nothing can save the rich, handsome, virile athlete from castration. No man gets a reprieve. My stature doesn't matter. From the candy man to the sanitation worker to the truck driver to the doctor, lawyer, mayor, congressman, senator, presidential hopeful, president, king and emperor, each at one time or another has been cut down and then cut up. A woman can skillfully slice the money from a man's pocket and chop up his houses and cars and then divide his finances and cut away her fifty percent, minimum, with the precision of a surgeon.

Today a man can meet a woman and pat her down and peer into her purse and run his fingers through her hair in search of razor blades but it'll do no good. If he doesn't find the weapons on her then believe me when I say they are definitely, in her. In the most dangerous of places.

The ability to castrate is inherited, having obviously been handed down throughout time. It started with Eve didn't it? Delilah didn't cut off the hair on Samson's head. It was his pubic hair, with a slight mishap in the process.

Women are the most powerful creatures on the face of this earth. It could also be argued that they are the most mysterious and confusing. A renowned doctor, the father of Psychoanalysis, a man who could read minds and look deep into the souls of humans once famously asked, "What does a woman want?" Even he was bewildered. Well I'm here to tell you the answer. It's simple. A woman wants to castrate a man. That's what she wants.

That Thing Inside

In January of 1963 I read about the white governor of Alabama saying in a speech that he wanted there to be segregation that day, the next day and he wanted segregation to last forever. Before that I hadn't thought much about Alabama. I knew it was in the South and I could have found it on a map but I lived in Detroit, Michigan and Alabama was a long way from me. It was like a different world. Both my parents were from Greenville, South Carolina and I had been there once as a child and so I had been where we called, down South. Alabama was called the Deep South. I didn't want to go there.

I knew about the Negro/colored lady who wouldn't give up her seat to a white person. I had seen pictures of her and she looked like somebody I knew. Like someone from my family, on my Father's side. But all that trouble had started in 1955 and I was just coming out of kindergarten then so even eight years later I didn't really care that much about what was going on down there.

I also knew about segregation. We lived less than a mile from Dearborn, Michigan and at that time not one Negro/colored person lived there and it was known, one better not try to live there. The mayor of Dearborn was like the governor of Alabama. Everyone knew him and what he stood for. We passed through there on our way to visit relatives and we went around there but we didn't want to live there anyway.

In 1963 I was thinking about graduating from the 8th grade and starting high school that fall and the girls who were beginning to worry me a lot.

In April of that year a Negro/colored Baptist preacher and his Negro/colored friends from a leadership council group were arrested. They were sitting in places where they weren't supposed to sit and I was reading about and seeing a lot on the news about Alabama again and the movement for rights, civil rights. I had seen that preacher and heard about him and I remembered he was around when that lady had been arrested on the bus. I wondered about that stuff going on but I didn't really think on it so I didn't feel much one way or the other and so I let it go.

In early May of that year, on the news, I saw Negro/colored men, women and children being beat down with nightsticks in the streets of Alabama. I saw white women and children screaming and cursing and spitting and throwing rocks at them. I saw police dogs ripping at the clothes and the legs and arms of people. That was the first time I understood the power of the water that could come from a fire hose as it knocked people down and turned them over and pushed them and rolled them in the streets. I saw the force of that water stand those people up against the side of a building and they couldn't move and it looked like they would be pushed through the brick wall. I saw these white policemen and state troopers and firemen doing all these things and that was the first time I remember that I felt that thing inside.

It was something so small I barely felt it. I hardly noticed. But I knew something was there. I almost tried to figure it out. But it went away and I forgot about it, almost.

In June, the Alabama governor tried to stop integration by standing in the doorway of a university. The president of the United States had the Alabama

National Guard make him move. The next day, in Mississippi, a Negro/colored man who was part of the advancement for colored people group, was shot in the back and killed. He was murdered in his own driveway and when I saw his picture he reminded me of my uncle on my Mother's side. That was the second time I felt that thing inside.

I recognized it and I wanted to say something about it to my parents. My brother was older than me maybe he would know. I wanted to tell someone but I would have had to describe it and that was hard. It was like there was something deep inside me. It was everywhere inside me, and it was big and I could only feel the tip of it, the point of it. And all of it was trying to come up and get out. And it felt like if all of it came up it would hurt me and if it got out I would take off and I would get in trouble. That's how it felt. But who could I tell that to? I didn't understand. I didn't think anyone else would understand so I kept it to myself.

Near the end of June the Baptist preacher came to Detroit. He marched in streets I had crossed. He walked with thousands of people and then he went to a hall I had been in before and in front of a lot of people, for the first time, he talked about his dream. I'm sure I heard about him being there and read about all the marching and speech making. There was supposed to have been over twenty-five thousand people who walked but I must not have really paid attention because it didn't impress me then. I don't remember feeling much about it.

In August the preacher marched on Washington, D.C. with ten times the amount of people who had been in downtown Detroit. I sat in front of the television and watched him talk about his dream again. I felt chills and I shivered when I heard him talk about being free at last. His voice did that.

A little over two weeks later, on a Sunday morning, a church was bombed in Birmingham, Alabama. Four Negro/colored girls were killed. They were murdered in church. I know I heard about it that day and saw a lot on television. I don't know when I read about it. We got the two papers that came out but I don't remember if it was in the morning edition. I guess I read about it that evening. But I know the paper was spread out on the living room rug and I looked at the pictures of those girls and I read about them. Three of them were fourteen years old. They were my age. One was eleven years old. One of the girls who was my age looked like a friend I had liked in elementary school. The younger one looked like my cousin and one girl looked like my baby sister might look when she got a little older.

I had to leave that paper on the floor, go to my bedroom and close the door so I could wipe my eyes. I didn't want anyone to see my cry. While I sat on my bed that thing inside came up so fast and it felt so strong it really scared me. The other times it had just worried me but that time I knew there was something wrong with me. And I knew I had to keep it down.

Everything changed after that. I would read a lot more about what was going on. I kept wondering why that church was bombed and I found out later. But what kind of people could do that? I thought about the others who had been hurt. Why did those girls have to die? I kept thinking about how they were my age and they would never get any older.

I read about the different groups, the one for the advancement of colored people, the leadership council, the non-violent student group, the racial equality

group and the group that was involved with urban problems. I found out there were other groups too.

I knew it was a civil rights movement. It wasn't a civil rights war because the protesters hardly fought back. I read where they sometimes threw things but I mostly saw Negro/colored people raise their hands to protect themselves from the nightsticks and fists and kicks. Those hands never struck out and if a protester's fists were made they were never thrown.

I was young then and so much has faded away but it seems strange because I really don't remember what was going on in my school, what was being talked about, what was being taught about this. My friends and I talked about cars and girls and sports. Sometimes we talked about what was going on down there. How we wouldn't be beaten like that. How wrong those white folks were. This movement thing could not be ignored.

Everyday there was something in the two main papers and we had a Negro/colored paper that was full of stories, different stories too. I read a lot and I thought about a lot of things. I knew what these people who looked like me wanted. And I felt like what they wanted they were supposed to have. I wondered what I was supposed to really be saying. What was I really supposed to be feeling? Was I supposed to be doing something? What was I supposed to do? And what was really important too was how I could control that powerful thing inside.

In November a Negro/colored man with a capital letter for his last name spoke in Detroit. He belonged to a nation, a group that was started in Detroit. He spoke at a Baptist church but he didn't talk about his dreams. He talked about the differences between house Negroes and field Negroes. He didn't talk about a movement he talked about revolution and the difference between a Negro revolution and a Black revolution. And he talked about why he didn't like that march on Washington or the people who were leading it.

Less than two weeks later I was near my locker. I had just left my gym class. There I was, a freshman in high school, hearing on the radio how the president of the United States had been shot. I think we were sent home early but I'm not really sure. When I did get home I found out he had been shot in the head. He had been killed, murdered. I felt bad about it. I liked him. He seemed like a nice man. Two days later my brother and I stood in the bowling alley and watched on live television as the man who shot the president was shot. He was murdered.

It was all getting more and more confusing. All I could wonder was how this was going to end. When would it end? Would I know it was over?

In January of 1964 I turned fifteen years old. I was thinking about going to driver's education class and getting my driving permit. I was thinking about my new girlfriend. And I always kept watching how I felt.

In March, the man with a capital letter for his last name left his nation and said he was going to start his own afro-unity group.

As the spring turned to warmer weather a federated group and the non-violent student group and some other groups started getting ready to educate voters and help them register in Mississippi so they could vote. They said it was going to be a summer of freedom.

In late June three civil rights workers involved with the registration disappeared.

In early July an act for civil rights passed in Washington, D.C. Two weeks later, in Harlem, New York, a white policeman killed a Negro/colored boy my age and two days later a riot started. A little over a week later a riot started in Rochester, New York over police brutality. I knew these riots were different than the marching down South. And I felt like things were getting worse and there was no end in sight.

It was all still so far away, at least it seemed that way. But I knew what I could feel close by. I knew that something strong was in me.

In early August the bodies of the three men were found. They were buried in a dirt dam. I looked at their pictures again. I stared at them this time. I wondered about these men. There was a Negro/colored man from Mississippi and two white men from New York. They were older than me, in their early twenties. The Negro/colored man favored my older cousin a little bit. But the white men were like strangers. And I started thinking about why they were there. What would make them leave their homes and go to Mississippi? I wasn't feeling too much until I started thinking about how they had died in the dark. The Negro/colored man had been badly beaten. They had all been shot and then stuck in the dirt. I wondered about what they thought and felt right before they died, knowing they were going to die and I thought about the people who had done that to them. That thing inside rose up. It pushed, and the harder it pushed up, the harder I pushed down.

After that I thought more about the white people I had seen on the news and in pictures, the ones in the movement, the workers and protesters. I thought about how they were marching too. I had seen some get beaten, knocked down. Now they were getting killed too. I realized how much they were part of all this. They struggled too. And they didn't have to, not really, so I thought.

I had gone to elementary school with white kids. Played with the little girls. Played with and fought with the little boys. I had white teachers then too. Now, in high school, I had white friends, boys and girls. Again, white teachers. I knew white people differently too. I went to the hospital regularly and I had white doctors and nurses. I had known some nearly all my life. I knew white people who cared about me. They really wanted to know how I was doing and wanted me to do well, be good.

What was I supposed to feel about these white people who were marching in the streets and now dying? They were the same color as the ones doing the beating, the kicking and the killing. They looked like the governors and mayors. They looked like the politicians in Washington. But now, all this that was going on was all mixed up. It wasn't just whites against the Negroes/coloreds or Negroes/coloreds against the whites. It was also whites against the whites. It was all a mess, everywhere.

In December the Baptist preacher became known all over the world when he received a well known prize, for peace.

In January of 1965 I turned sixteen years old. I got my driver's license and my father let me drive his older car. My friends and I still talked our young boy, young man talk. My brother, two years older than me started talking with his friends about the draft and the war in Vietnam.

In February the man with a capital letter for his last name was killed while giving a speech in New York. He was murdered by people his own color.

In early March people from the leadership council group and people from the non-violent student group marched in Selma, Alabama to protest the killing of a Negro/colored man who was shot by a white state trooper. They tried to cross this bridge and the police and troopers stopped them. They beat them back. They beat them down and they used the water hoses and tear gas on them. Troopers on horses charged the people and trampled on them. It was a Sunday and blood ran in the streets and on that bridge that day.

I saw it that night on television and I saw the pictures. It was hard but I held it in. I kept it down and I believed I had it under control. But I felt it.

The Baptist preacher came to Selma and two days later he led the people back to the bridge. They crossed it and then turned around. They needed help to make it to Montgomery. That night three white ministers were beaten by white men with clubs and the one from Boston died.

Less than two weeks later several thousand left Selma to walk to Montgomery. People of all colors and races walked that day. Four days later they were joined by twenty-five thousand more from all over the country. They were protected by a couple thousand soldiers from the U.S Army and almost that many Alabama National Guardsmen, along with Federal Marshals and the FBI. They marched almost ten miles a day for eight days. They finished that walk. And when they got to the state capital building the Baptist preacher said he knew everyone there was wondering how long this was going to go on and he said, not long.

Later that night a white woman who had been driving marchers home was shot in the head and killed. She was murdered. She was from my state, my city. She was from where I lived. She was from Detroit. When I saw her picture I had to think about it for a little while until I realized she reminded me of a nurse at the hospital. I didn't want to feel the way I felt. I almost cried. But I held it in and kept that thing down, barely and I was getting tired of it.

Two weeks later crosses were burning on some lawns in Detroit.

In August the new president signed a bill for voting rights and less than a week later Negroes/coloreds/Blacks were rioting in Watts, California. Those people weren't singing about overcoming anything. They were burning everything they could. And they were yelling about power, Black Power.

I understand it can be easier to see while looking into the past than it is when looking into the future. And I know sometimes it's difficult to see clearly just looking around. But I look back on those years believing I knew then they were unique times. I saw a lot and I learned a great deal. I saw the lowest expressions of human beings and the highest examples of humanity. I saw moving images of real heroes of all ages, some younger than me. And I saw still pictures of true martyrs of all ages, again, some younger than me. And it took years but eventually I learned what it was, that thing inside of me. And I came to terms with it.

Old Fools

There's no fool like an old fool is a saying I heard on occasions when I was young. I would hear that from my mom or an aunt or an older cousin or one of their friends. It was always a female speaking of a male and that saying would always leave me perplexed. I couldn't really figure out what it meant and when I could determine whom they were talking about I didn't recognize anything unusual. But what caused me to wonder was the nuance with which it was uttered. There was always a special flavor to that saying. I know now there were subtle meanings within the words. There was a tinge of warning with a sprinkle of caution. Sometimes I heard a very slight splash of mirthful admonishment or the words contained a smidgen of sympathy.

In reality I had seen and known old fools when I was young. I knew but didn't know and that's true of much of life. Knowing but not knowing.

But now I've lived in parts of eight decades and just as I expected and hoped, I understand more now than I did then. I know now but didn't know that I was on the road to being an old fool but along the way I hit a couple of things and skidded into and out of several ditches and finally veered off that path and onto another road and ended up here, where I am. It took a lot to get here and not just a lot of time.

I'm going to share something with you and there's no obligation, no charge. This formula that I present to you is infallible. It has been observed and tested and documented. It will stand the test of time until time has been altered significantly. It will last long beyond me.

I've discovered a marker and although the principles surrounding this identifier have only been prescribed to males of the human species as with just about anything, there are exceptions.

Here it is:

Any male between the ages of five and twelve who wears his hat backwards will be childish.

Any male between the ages of thirteen and nineteen who wears his hat backwards will be silly.

Any male between the ages of twenty and twenty-nine who wears his hat backwards will be clownish.

Any male between the ages of thirty and thirty-nine who wears his hat backwards will be frivolous.

Any male between the ages of forty and forty-nine who wears his hat backwards will be foolish.

Any male between the ages of fifty and fifty-nine who wears his hat backwards will be ridiculous.

Any male between the ages of sixty and seventy-nine who wears his hat backwards will inevitably be an old fool.

There you have it and thus we can comprehend their uniqueness. Old fools cross the spectrum. In their essence and thus all that they think and do they are childish, silly, clownish, frivolous, foolish and ridiculous.

Please note: If you spend a lot of time with one or a group of old fools especially in a setting of merrymaking where alcohol and/or drugs are present, depending on your ideas of excitement, you may laugh and have fun but there is a high degree of probability you will eventually have a comprehensive and thorough conversation with someone in the medical profession such as a doctor and/or nurse, usually in the emergency room and/or someone in the legal profession such as a police officer and/or a lawyer and/or a judge. With old fools there's and/or/in addition to/with on top of.

The male child under the age of five gets a pass because he's too young and probably had assistance getting dressed and the male over the age of eighty gets a pass because he's too old and also may have had assistance getting dressed.

What was most fascinating as I discovered this formula was in finally reaching a sense of clarity on how aspects of humanity are carried on. Ideas, attitudes, fears and actions exist today which have continued since the days when humans believed the earth to be flat. These attributes are handed down.

In the past there was always more than a utilitarian purpose to clothes and hats. Not simply coverings or accessories there was symbolism and ceremony and social status. We can see how styles and materials have been developed and passed on. At one time the hat did more than protect the head. The design of the hat, properly worn, shielded the eyes from the interfering or blinding sun. That hat allowed one to see. Now the hat is directional and predictive. The hat points to not just where one is going but also to that which one will be. Observe that little two-year old child riding in that stroller. His hat is on backwards.

Calendars

I like calendars. Near the end of every year I look forward to buying a new one. The pictures are important so sometimes it takes a while for me to find the right one.

I've bought them with the artwork of Jacob Lawrence to Van Gogh. I like pictures of clouds and sunrises and sunsets. I also like mountains and even golf courses. I don't buy them with pictures of dogs or cats or horses. It's not that I don't like animals but I don't want to look at them nearly every day for a year. Birds are nice. Of course I would like to fly. I like pictures I can kind of roam around in, even get lost in them.

Right around the first of every new year I sit down with the old calendar and transfer to the new one everything and everyone I want to carry with me to the new year. I've been doing this for a long time so I have entries that have been with me over twenty years now.

It started with birthdays, my own first. It's not that I didn't know when it was it was just that I wanted to acknowledge it. It's in early January so I write my name with a little dash and then a B, for born. Sometimes I box that day or color it. Birthdays are important. Everyone celebrates the holidays but each person's birthday is their special day. Right now there are ten birthdays in January. I hope for more.

I used to send cards or notes but now I call. I like to say happy birthday to my friends and relatives and sing 'happy birthday to you.' Everyone enjoys being remembered like that. Some are amazed that I didn't forget. Of course I've never told them that it's right there on my calendar.

So, birthdays were first. My mom's and dad's along with aunts and uncles and cousins are there. Also a few former girlfriends, who I don't call because that wouldn't be wise, can't call because I don't know where they are. But I remember them and wonder how they're doing. I always hope they're doing well. Seeing their names makes me think about them. I'm thankful for the former girl friends I'm still close to and who I'm able to sing to on their birthdays. When I go through the months like that, writing names, it's as if I revisit these people. The times we had still have.

Quite a few people have passed away through the years. Mom and dad are gone along with all my aunts and uncles and some older cousins. Now friends my age and even younger are leaving here. They all have another day with their names and a little dash with a D, for died and two digits for the year. I even have two entries for one of my best lady friends. There's a B and an M, for murdered. There's only one of those.

I carry over the weather I've gone through but usually only for a couple of years. I can see that last year or the year before, it was 115 degrees in Las Vegas or I was in Detroit and it snowed 13 inches. In North Carolina it was 5 inches of snow and people panicked and bought up all the milk and bread. When I'm in the South I like to make note of the first really beautiful day of spring when I look around and realize the flowers and trees are blooming. When I hit that day in the current year I can look back and compare and accept that there's really nothing I can do about the weather but try and enjoy it if I can.

I've felt earthquake tremors and hurricane winds blow and thought I would burn up or freeze. The weather is amazing but a year is enough or two at the most. I do carry over one entry from May 5 of '95. It says Texas with a dash and the word hail. I was driving across country and I almost pulled in after eleven hours and I had planned on driving thirteen so I did those miles and when I left the motel the next morning I saw the headlines and read of one of the worst storms ever that had come where I had passed through, where I had almost stopped. Hail the size of softballs had fallen. People had been killed and cars and buildings damaged. When I write that entry and when I see it in May of every year it reminds me like a suggestion or a command to **always keep going and stay on plan.**

I carry over trips and vacations for a year or two, longer if something really special happens. I wait until I get back home and write where I went with the word 'start' and the return day has the word 'finish.' With trips and vacations it's the returning that's most important. When I make it back I always feel, no matter what, it was a positive experience. I use a magic marker and color every day I was gone. I make those days yellow, or orange or pink. When I hit that month the days are lit up. I can think about it a while and it's like taking that trip again. The colors look nice.

Sometimes I have to remember why I put something down and it's usually because a seemingly minor event tried to change the course of my life and I had to struggle to get back on track or an incident assisted me further along. The major events are obvious and deserve their entry. The day the doctor told me I had cancer is there. That was definitely a significant phone call. And when I write that day on the new calendar I remember what I thought and feel again how I felt. That's what it takes, to be able to think about something in order to feel it. Carrying that day over keeps it with me. I know people say all the time that they will always remember something, that they will never forget. Memory doesn't work that way. What they really mean is that as long as they're able to remember they won't forget. They have to go through a loved one forgetting who they are or a loved one forgetting their own name. It happens. So much can slip away and disappear. Then, when we want to say what we should have said and do what we should have done, we can't. It's too late. That loved one is gone or even sitting close by they can't hear you and you have to shout out all those things you were supposed to share with them so long ago. Or, we simply forget the words we were going to speak. I learned and am reminded, like a suggestion or a command that when it comes to matters of love, **say it now, do it now.**

My calendar, at the beginning of each year, when I reach that day forces me to remember that when my doctor said the word cancer my first thought was, 'so that's what happened,' as if I knew how I was to die. My second thought was 'well, I've done mine.' Because indeed I knew I had lived my life. I knew at that moment I had lived life as fully as I possibly could. And then a sense of surprise washed over me and I was stunned, numb. That was it.

It took me a couple of days to decide what to put on my calendar. I decided on Big C with a dash and the word News. It seemed to me cancer deserved a capital C. I started to put a B before News for bad but I changed my mind. I didn't know if it was bad news or not. I thought about the day I have marked in July. It's the second day of that month with a dash and the number '52. I had contracted Polio the summer of that year when I was three and a half years old.

I was one of nearly fifty-eight thousand that year. It had affected me physically, and emotionally and it had taken me almost forty years to discover that not only was it the most important event to happen to me, it was also the best thing to happen to me. That July day was when doctor Jonas Salk had his first real test of his vaccine. It couldn't help me but it worked and now there's a possibility Polio may be eradicated from this earth in my lifetime. How wonderful that would be. I left the B for bad off. Besides, B was already taken.

After talking to my doctors I knew it was going to be a trip but it was definitely not going to be a vacation. I thought about making entries to mark my radiation treatments but there was going to be six to eight weeks of them and I probably would have just put an R with a dash and a number and there was a possibility of weeks of chemotherapy so I didn't put anything. The treatment center had given me a calendar with all my appointments and times so I used that one.

Twenty-five months later, after hearing from my doctor, I was contemplating what to put on my calendar again. I settled on some more capital letters. I put Big C with a dash and the words Final G News. I used G for good. The trip was over. The cancer was gone. Once again I had made it.

My life had been on hold or pause, if you will, and I knew I could start living again and when I come to that day I always remember how relieved I was, how good I felt.

Calendars, in one form or another have been around from way long ago. They're linked up with the sun and moon and I like the sun and the moon and the planets and the stars. Calendars help us to understand and control time, as much as that's possible. And although they differ from the timekeeping of clocks, to me they're also similar. Life and time is wasted and taken for granted by some. How meaningless the wonder and beauty of life becomes as they rush around so that for them a day passes as a minute and an hour is a month and then when the years and the clock stops, the trip is over, forever.

I also use my calendar like most people. I have appointments noted, along with things I need to do and things I'd like to do. I begin my mornings by checking my calendar and see what's there. Is there someone I need to call that day? Is there someone who departed that day and I need to give to them a thought or two? Then I acknowledge I've lived another day by letting yesterday go. I used to X that day off but I didn't like to see all the X's as the days and months passed. I wasn't trying to X yesterday away, to cross it out, so I started to use a line. It's a squiggly line that runs from the top left corner to the bottom right corner. I like the way that looks as time passes. It's like, that's how I made it through the day. I wandered and roamed, with a purpose, through it and at the beginning of each year I see my progress. It's not straight but it's constant.

When the new year comes and I sit down with my old and new calendar I have aspirations and plans and hopes like most people do at that new beginning. I hope no D's come that year. I hope for cures and discoveries that are wonderful. I hope to meet new people to add, new people to call and sing to. I hope for lots of days colored yellow and orange and pink.

I hope to do, think and feel many things that I enjoy, that I'm inspired by and that remind me that I'm alive. I hope to squiggle through it all again.

I hope that sometime in the first week of the next new year I'll sit down with another calendar with nice pictures and do it again. I like calendars.

Let's See

Let's see.

There's 28.3495231 grams in an ounce.

Two ounces is about right.

That's 56.6990462 grams.

If I gain 14.17476155 grams a week that's 2 ounces a month.

Two ounces a month is 24 ounces a year.

There's 16 ounces in a pound.

So, in one year I would gain 1 and a half pounds.

Let's see.

I'm 25 now and I weigh ...

In 10 years I would weigh ...

In 20 years I would weigh ...

Okay.

I'm gonna retire when I'm 55 so I would weigh ...

Ten years of retirement I would weigh ...

Wait.

Maybe I can cut that 2 ounces down a little.

I need someone to check these numbers.

Let's see.

Good S#x

Mr. C: How old are you now?

Zee: Twenty-three.

Mr. C: Twenty-three. Single and no kids. Running your own company. You've got your whole life in front of you. You can make your own path. I remember when you were born and now here we are sipping on champagne together. Let's see what the bubbles have to say. Before I answer your question let me share some things with you. When we went to the barber shop this morning what were the fellows talking about? A little politics, some sports, mostly s#x. Then when we went to the car wash what was the talk?

Zee: Some sports, some politics and s#x.

Mr. C: That's not exclusive to men. When women are sitting around getting their hair done and nails manicured, soaking their toes, they're talking about s#x. Who's f###ing who and how much d##k they're getting, or not. You see, 79.999 percent of what's wrong in this world is related to s#x. Give or take a 9 or two. Now you may think I'm like the man who was sent to a psychiatrist and the doctor told him he was going to show him some pictures and the man was to say the first thing he saw on the picture, the first thing that came to his mind. The doctor shows him a square and the man says "a room full of n##ed women." Doctor shows him a circle and the man says "a room full of n##ed women." Doctor shows him a bunch of squiggly lines and again he says "a room full of n##ed women." The doctor told him he had a fixation on s#x. The man says, "me with the fixation you're the one who keeps showing me the n##ed women." I'm not like that. I'm not imagining this s##t. I'm dealing with reality. Look at the world. Look around you. The movies. Television. The music. The things people are writing about. Have another drink. Pace yourself. Our ride will be back at eleven to pick us up and we'll go by a friend of mine's martini party.

Zee: Party sounds nice but I don't really drink martinis.

Mr. C: Me either but she'll have something there for me that'll get us through. I remember when I was 14 years old. Standing behind my high school with a few of my friends and a couple of older guys, seniors. This girl walks up, she was older than me, and she asks one of the guys if he wanted some gum and he says no thanks. Then she asked him if he wanted some p##sy. It was like I went deaf. I never heard what he said. A friend of mine later told me he answered h##l yeah! I know this. That was the first time I had ever heard a female utter that word. And the way she said it I could feel it from the top of my head to the bottom of my feet. It ran all through me. She said that word like she owned it, that thing us young boys were talking about all the time. She possessed it and she knew it was something special. And I knew this too, I was glad she hadn't asked me because that word and the way she said it made me feel a lot of things and it was years later that I understood that it mostly scared me. There's nothing in a man's upbringing where he's taught how and when to turn down an offer

of some p##sy. It's okay to say no thanks, to understand all p##sy is not for you.

Zee: I've never thought about it like that.

Mr. C: Before I left high school I saw the young women getting pregnant and fighting over the guys. The young men fighting over the women, going to jail over them. I knew a couple guys that got killed f###ing around with the wrong woman. This s#x thing looked like trouble to me and no one told me what it was all about. Why was I doing it? It just seemed like it was something I was supposed to do because everyone else was doing it. When I left school I got a little job, found my own place. I dropped out of that chase for a while. Then my partners started coming by, wondering what I was up to. One of my good friends looked at all the books I was reading, the writing I was doing. He saw the guitar I was trying to learn how to play, the paintings I was working on. In the basement I had wood and wire and metal and stuff, trying to make sculptures. He told me I would lose my mind locked away like that, reading those strange books. He said I was thinking too much. I felt like I was doing what I wanted to do but at the same time I felt different, as if I was walking against the crowd, struggling against the whole world. I got back into the streets, hanging out, going to the clubs. Back after that thing. It took about five years before I realized I was dying. I could have hollered like the mouse that kept f###ing with the cat until he got caught and speaking of the cat he yelled out "help, help, this pussy's killing me!" I was on my way out so I moved away to the other side of the country. I knew I needed help so I started reading. Books on different therapies and psychologies, self-help books. Finally I found this doctor who told me in his books what I needed to hear. He explained that my thinking, at a very young age, had somehow become s##ualized. As I got older, thinking for me had become like foreplay and discovering an answer, reaching a conclusion was like getting a n#t. 79.999 percent of my s##ual energy was placed on things other than s#x, give or take a 9 or two.

Zee: Mr. C are you serious?

Mr. C: I s##t you not Zee. The older I got the more I was attracted to works of art, sculptures, music but especially words. Words were something special to me. It sounds like a cliché but I loved them. It was the way they looked and sounded when I tried to say them out loud. I started reading when I was three years old and the dictionary was my first favorite book. Then the words came together in my head and the stories took me away to different places and I met all these people and all those types of things thrilled me like a woman thrills you. I just hadn't understood it, those feelings I always had. I accepted that for me, chasing knowledge was better than chasing p##sy. I kept reading, working on myself. Things started clearing up for me. 79.999 percent of my problems were resolved, past and present, at that time.

Zee: Give or take a 9 or two.

Mr. C: Exactly. The problems that remained I could handle. I was free to be me. There's a difference between doing and being.

Zee: I've never heard anything like this.

Mr. C: There's other's like me. I just didn't know anyone else when I was your age. I remember I told this young lady about the books I read and how I could feel this planet moving through space and that I liked to look at the stars and think about life and she said I was crazy and that I needed to quit smoking so much w###d. She told her girlfriends there was something wrong with me. She was right. I was sick and still am but I'm okay. The truth is I feel more secure holding a book in my hands than a woman in my arms. Now don't get me wrong women are the most fascinating creatures on the face of this earth. You see that woman at the bar, the one in the red?

Zee: I saw her. She's beautiful.

Mr. C: Yes she is. The way she walks and smiles the shape of her body is not just amazing it's exciting. Her a## is magnificent.

Zee: Yes. That's definitely a case of b##ty being in the eye of the beholder.

Mr. C: And if I thought about her in a particular way my d##k would get hard, even now, at my age. But when I look at her I wonder what kind of person is she? Could we laugh together? Would she like to watch the sunset with me? Or even better yet, the sunrise? But most important to me is, does she like to read? Her beauty inspires me. Yet, instead of wanting to do something s##ual to her, with her, she makes me want to create something important, build something that will last a while, write something beautiful. Here comes another bottle of the bubbly. We'll start on this one and then get something to eat.

Zee: Sounds good.

Mr. C: Think about this. What is s#x for? It's for making babies. That's its pure purpose and all those other things it's supposed to do, to add to a person's life, is a bunch of bulls##t. All that's supposed to be so very aesthetically gratifying from physical s#x is an illusion. What human beings are seeking is unattainable and what they get is like a tease. That's why they try it over and over again. Like I said, I didn't know and still don't know, after all these years what a person thinks they're going to get out of it. I had a lady friend tell me one time, that after s#x a person should be relaxed and at peace. Actually that sounded pretty good. I thought I should put my woman to sleep, make her pass out. It gave me something to shoot for, if you will. Really, I'm just trying to make it on through this s##ual world. It was a real conflict when I was your age. I still wrestle a little but it's not like it used to be. The older I got the more I understood what I was struggling against and what the battle was for. I just wanted to live my life in peace. My own path means that when I'm in New York, or London or Paris, I'll go to symphonies, hang out in museums, get lost in the libraries. You know that feeling you get when you walk into a n##ie joint, a t##ty bar, a s##ip club? That's how I feel when I walk into a bookstore. In each of my houses I've got a little recording studio, a place where I can paint and make stuff and of course a library. That's where I f##k around. That's how I spend 79.999 percent of my time. Give or take a 9 or two. That's how I relax. Now, let's order. Oh, but I'd be remiss if I didn't answer your question that started all this. Let me put it this way. I haven't had any p##sy in almost two years. But I am having good s#x.

Evolution

There's no such thing as human beings evolving. There is no human evolution.

In the 1st century BCE, a very well known and supposedly very wise man said his father's times were worse than his grandfather's times. He said the children of his father's times, which was his own time, those children were even more worthless and corrupt than they ever were before. In addition he said that all the younger people do in his own time is waste time and squander money.

Around the 4th century BCE a very well known and supposedly very wise man was recorded, through his writings, as asking what was happening to the young people? He said they disrespect, disobey, despise, ignore and run around in the streets with wild notions that decay their morals as they contradict and terrorize their teachers because they believe they know everything and are quite sure about that.

In the 13th century AD it was a common declaration that the young people thought of nothing but that, and only that, which was important to them.

In the 14th century it was said the ordinary language was no longer being spoken because young people couldn't talk. Very little of substance was being newly written and that which was being written was not only incomprehensible it also was illegible because young people couldn't write.

In the 1600s the young people were supposedly insolent, impudent, flippant, impertinent and cursed and swore and called each other nicknames and communicated out loud, filthy ideas and lewd thoughts.

In the 1800s adults said the morals of the youths of that time were tenfold worse than before.

In the 1920s it was stated that there was as never before an attitude by young people that was best described as extremely thoughtless, rude and utterly selfish.

In the 1930s editorials in newspapers claimed that young people ran around in vulgar mobs.

In the 1940s, because of what was occurring, young people were said to be obviously obsessed with violent movies and fast cars.

I was born in the 1940s and I'm here to tell you. Through all of the dangerous, fucked up things I did I'm lucky to be alive. The average life span for an African American male in Michigan is 69 years of age, less if it's narrowed down to Detroit. I'm actually a dead man walking. The seventeen-year-old youths of

today are doing the same stupid shit I did 60 years ago.

Where's the advancement?

Where's the progress?

Where's the evolution?

Sticks and Stones

Father: 34 years old. (African American; Black; Negro; Colored)
Mother: 33 years old. (African American; Black; Negro; Colored)
Daughter: 7 years old. (African American; Black; Negro; Colored)
Son: 9 years old. (African American; Black; Negro; Colored)

The little girl comes and stands outside of the father's office door, which is open.

Daughter: Hi Daddy.
Father: Hi Baby.
Daughter: Can I come in?
Father: The door's open, come on in.

The little girl skips in and moves to stand at the right of her father's chair. She looks at his computer screen.

Daughter: What are you doing?
Father: I just finished some work I had left over from earlier. Where's your brother?
Daughter: He was just behind me.

The son appears at the doorway.

Son: Hi Dad. Can I come in?
Father: Sure, come on in.

The son enters the room and stops on the other side of the desk from the father.

Father: Are both of you done with your homework already?
Daughter: Yes.
Son: Yes, we've been done.
Father: So what have you been up to?
Daughter: We were in the basement.
Son: Watching Momma crochet.
Daughter: She was telling us all about the N-word.
Father: The N-word?
Son: Yeah.

The son spells.

Son: N I G G E R. That sounds like ...

The son spells.

Son: ... B I G G E R.

The daughter enunciates.

Daughter: Nigger. Bigger. Bigger Nigger.

Son: And then there's ...

The son spells.

Son: N I G G A.

The daughter speaks clearly and precisely then faster.

Daughter: Nig uh! Nig uh! Nigga! Nigga!

The father thinks a moment. Then nods his head.

Father: OK. OK. I hear the difference.

They both smile broadly and the little girl stands there and does a brief little shimmy dance.

Son: Momma said sticks and stones may break our bones ...

Daughter: ... but names can never hurt us.

Son: Words can never hurt us.

Daughter: Bad words or bad names.

Father: That's right. And don't you two ever forget that.

Son: I won't.

Daughter: I won't.

The father rises from his seat.

Father: Come on. Let's pop some popcorn. We'll take some to your mother and watch her crochet.

