

WRITING ON THE INSIDE

OF MY EYELIDS

by
Patrick Kellerman

Edited
With a Biographical Introduction
By
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Prologue

Eulogy given at Patrick's Funeral by Robert Kellerman

Today we are celebrating the life of William James Patrick Kellerman.

My brother.

Most of you here today wouldn't, of course, have known Patrick as a child or even in his youth. Patrick's world as a child was dinosaurs, science fiction and fantasy. These were the things of imagination. Imagination is what drove Patrick and is the fundamental characteristic that defined him.

Patrick always approached life doing his own thing, his own way. When fitting in meant everything to most teens, Patrick did what he wanted and did it on his own terms. Whether this was his love of and great involvement in theatre, the clothes he wore, (many of you wouldn't know, but Patrick made famous the puffy Pirate shirt long before it was the topic of humour on a Seinfeld episode), or his unique moves on the dance floor, fitting in did not matter to him.

When turning 16 meant new found freedom by getting a driver's license (every male teen's ambition, right?), Patrick had no interest. Rather, his preferred mode of transportation was his bicycle.

Looking back, I know he probably had a lot more fun than I ever did, but more importantly, he showed me that it was OK to do what you wanted, and he helped to open my view of the world, which otherwise would have been much narrower.

This was his *credo*, to take on life on his terms, which he continued to do throughout his life, despite the many obstacles that were placed before him. So if Patrick had a goal, or if there was something that sparked his imagination, he would work *very* hard to make that goal a reality.

Patrick, then, was a risk taker. But when relating to the needs and activities of others, Patrick was the consummate worrier, always concerned about the well being of others and never about the implications to himself.

As a brother, Patrick was always there for me, and would come to my assistance whenever I got in over my head. Sometimes, he did this in what seemed to be a begrudging manner. But that was his way. He wanted to make it clear that I had screwed up, and that I better be wiser the next time.

Patrick had a wicked temper as a child, but thankfully as he matured and mellowed, his temper was diluted with a strong dose of humour. Nothing, no one, or no subject matter was exempt. Whether it was the most intrusive medical procedure he would repeatedly be subjected to, or the politics of the day, Patrick could always put a humorous spin on it, often having us all in stitches over his rendition or analysis of a situation.

More often than not, Patrick himself was the victim of his own barbs. He was known to take himself a little too seriously at times, pontificating about whatever the subject matter of the moment. But he could recognize this and make great fun of himself. And if he didn't, and someone else did, he took just as much pleasure in that.

As with anyone who has battled a debilitating disease or disability, it would be easy to look at this person's life and bemoan what could have been. This could have particularly been the case for Patrick. Patrick was such an imaginative, outgoing - even flamboyant person that offered the world so much, that it could have indeed been easy to think of all that lost potential.

But anyone who knows Patrick would never think that. Because Patrick isn't what could have been. Rather, in remembering Patrick, one thinks of what *was*. Patrick was what everyone within the human experience is, only magnified. Because he lived the human experience to the fullest. All the joys and sadness, successes and failures, battles and pain. He lived every emotion. Not only did he live them, but he embraced with courage some of the most difficult challenges imaginable.

And now through his death, Patrick *is*. Patrick *is* the gateway of fantasy and wonder brought about by his storytelling and that will forever be in the memory of his children, nieces and nephews, and the many other children who were lucky enough to hear his stories.

Patrick *is* the voice that continues to echo because he demanded to be heard if any person, government or institution was not treating him or others with disabilities with the respect, dignity and recognition that they deserved.

Patrick *is* the compassion illustrated in acts such as trying to bring humour into the lives of the many health professionals who cared for him daily, as he felt it was *his* responsibility to try and break the monotony of their day and make someone else's day

better. All the while when his own daily existence was so difficult with hours upon hours of monotony.

Patrick *is* all the professions, skills and knowledge, vision, creativity, wisdom, worry, and love, acquired through a rich life and which he freely passed on to others.

Patrick *is* the feelings we haven't and probably never will experience, if not expressed so wonderfully in the writings that he left for us.

Despite all of the difficulties in Patrick's life, the only burden too unbearable for him, particularly in recent years, was his inability to more actively contribute to the raising of his children. Patrick *is* the father who will eternally love and adore his children, Rebecca and Cailum, and his partner Deborah, and who now, through his spirit, will be able to contribute to their lives each and every day. From something that deeply troubled him more than anything, he has now been freed.

Patrick has traded his wheelchair for a bicycle.

Patrick *is* the part of us whose souls he has touched. He is the indelible imprint that has been left in the hearts of everyone he shared his life with. As difficult as it has been for so many at times, he is the human experience and has taught us all so much. We are all blessed to have been a part of his life and we are all the richer for it.

Patrick *is* my brother.

Foreword

If you ever passed by me on a sidewalk, you'd have to be a pretty unusual person not to take a long, slow, surreptitious, sideways glance. My wheel chair is large, with its seat tilted back at a rakish angle. A large tray sits in front of me, covered with all sorts of unusual looking control mechanisms. I am sporting oversized dark wrap-around sunglasses. Hanging off me are usually one or two small children, and in the background hovers my wife, making sure that I don't play my favourite game, zooming into traffic. In short, I am one strange looking fella'

Were you to spend any time talking to me, it would quickly become obvious that, despite my disabilities, I am one of the happiest and most cheerful of individuals. This attitude is reflected in both my journal and the poems and stories I have written. Despite my near complete blindness, despite eye strain headaches as a result of computer viewing, despite the immobility of my hands, despite the complications posed by a growing family, the urge to write and to write well is for me all-consuming.

A BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION

Patrick died January 11, 2004 at the age of forty-five from the effects of multiple sclerosis (MS). I never thought the day would come when I would be enormously proud of him because he was disabled. Like most mothers I reveled in the sight of my son growing up handsome, strong, enthusiastic and self-confident. For a long time after MS struck him I would think of how he used to be. I would picture him energetically striding down the street and me, trying to keep up with him, matching my two steps to his one, how he had been preparing himself so energetically for a successful career in theatre, and of what great fun he was to be around. Or, remembering my loss of his first father, Bill, I would try to steel myself for when Patrick would no longer be with us. I would try to picture how I could tolerate losing him. It was years before I began to appreciate the new man Patrick was becoming.

Now as I reflect on him, in the closing years of my own life, I realize how well he has prepared me for whatever lies ahead, for as he used to say with a twinkle in his eye, "there are only two kinds of people - the disabled and the not yet disabled".

Patrick became a wheel-chair user after he lost the use of his legs. Soon he had so little vision that he was legally blind. His eyes were so sensitive to light that most of the time he had to wear dark wrap-around sunglasses to ward off the headaches to which he was prone. MS brought with it loss of bladder and bowel control, but even these symptoms were not as hard to bear as the fatigue that continually plagued him. By his last three years Patrick could neither feed him, nor turn his body in bed. Despite all this, he

never let himself be defined by his MS. With what strength he had, he was determined to be an interesting and supportive partner to Deborah, a fun-loving and caring father to Rebecca and Cailum, and a productive policy analyst and advocate for the disabled. In his last five years Patrick turned this same determination to creative writing.

Earlier, MS had caused Patrick to take a detour in his life. He started out in theatre, and his yearning for the creative arts never left him. As a student and young man he had tried writing plays and short stories; he had always loved to dabble in poetry. It was, then, quite natural to him to take up writing seriously when, at forty, he retired from the paid work force. During those last five years, despite his near blindness and losing the use of his arms and hands, he completed four short stories, seventeen poems and a lengthy poetic fantasy, as well as a number of essays and memoirs. He taped a half dozen children's stories and wrote a series of letters to his children. Several other short stories remain incomplete. During that time Patrick kept a journal with 172 entries that recorded his serious attempts to write, the endless frustrations of mastering his computer, his reflections on people, radio, television, politics, his moments of elation and his times of agony. His greatest ambition was to have some of his work published as a legacy to his children.

And so I am prompted to put together his book. It is not only an attempt to deal with my own grief. Patrick wanted to connect with people. He loved to tell stories, to make people laugh and cry. He loved an audience and he was a great performer. I want the public in on the story of what he was like, what he did and how he did it.

I remember one evening in Halifax years ago, at the Buskers' Festival a young man high atop a unicycle doing impossible stunts kept calling out, "Look at me Ma!

Look at me!” He grabbed the audience’s attention. We laughed as we recognized the little kid in each of us wanting to show off. Like the acrobatic busker I put his book together wanting to show off Patrick. His feats of daring-do were as extraordinary as the acrobat atop his unicycle I want to be his “circus barker” and say, “Hey folks! Look at him! Look at Patrick!”

I want the reader to see what Patrick accomplished in five years of struggle against nearly impossible odds. As a former actor he already knew what it was like to be on the line when you were performing. A fellow artist friend, Tom Stroud, felt that Patrick’s whole life was spent living on the edge, not knowing precisely when he was going to die but, very conscious that his life was foreshortened, and living in the tension of that time. As Tom witnessed Patrick’s body deteriorating he felt that the more Patrick declined the more he became himself.

No, for me it’s not enough to leave his writings only for his children and his immediate family. Patrick wanted to connect with others, to show us what’s possible in situations of near impossibility. My own grief over his death has evolved into the desire to write about his life, particularly about his last five years when he truly was living on the edge. His was a great performance.

Even more, I want readers to be reminded of the potential in disabled persons like Patrick that goes unrecognized, is often not encouraged and sometimes never even developed. Patrick never lost a sense of gratitude for his good fortune in being able to write and for the support he received. He was conscious that, among disabled persons, he was privileged.

Patrick was born March 17, 1958, into a family of six children whose parents were social workers. He was our fourth, preceded by three sisters and followed by his brother and a younger sister. His eldest sister, four and a half year old Karen, went up and down our street in North Vancouver, telling all the neighbors that she had a new baby brother whose name was “Saint Patrick”. I’m not sure about the “Saint,” but in later years I thought of him fondly as our leprechaun.

He was a sunny happy child, easy to raise and even tempered. I can still see him lying on a blanket at a family picnic in Stanley Park, a fat and cuddly three month old surrounded by his sisters, three laughing jumping little girls; a two year old pushing his little red wheel barrow, following at the heels of his dad in the back yard in Vancouver; a five year old skipping stones out across the water on family camping trips, calling out to his dad to see how far he could throw.

Tragedy struck when he was seven. His dad, Bill Kellerman, died suddenly of a heart attack. After this terrible loss, Patrick began to have wild temper tantrums. He would lie on the floor like a two year old with arms and legs flailing whenever he felt very frustrated. Over the years he learned to master these storms but he could show a fierce temper on occasion. Patrick became my passionate son.

His younger brother, Robert, was his favorite wrestling partner and his sisters acted as ‘the petticoat government’. To the girls he was “loud and in your face”. He certainly generated excitement wherever he went. And his instinct for mischief never waned. Patrick was sort of a cross between ‘Denis the Menace’ and Calvin in “Calvin and Hobbes’ in the comics. In later years he even saw himself reflected in Calvin and drew from the character in his children’s stories.

We had numerous tales about Patrick to tell his own kids, which we gathered up and recorded in a special book for them after he died.

There was the time with his friends when he surreptitiously took Karen's bra and nailed it to the garage door with a sign announcing the owner...and the time he hid out on a freezing winter day in a snow bank on the edge of the Bayview Shopping Mall in Toronto, along with his younger brother Robert, hiding from their mother whom they suddenly spotted, shopping, as they played hookey from Saturday morning Religion class...the time he played sick to get out of going to Mass and the family nearly ran him down on his bike as they drove home... the time he brought a box of chocolates to the mother of a friend of his because she was "the only one that would put up with me!"...there was the time he set the sheet on fire from a lamp bulb he was reading by, under the blankets in bed late at night...and the time he got put off the school bus for sassing the bus driver...then the time he got up too much speed on a novice cross country run and whizzed into a tree smashing a brand new cross country ski. .. even at university he tried unsuccessfully to persuade his classmates to play a prank, holding open the doors of the brand new Dalplex so that the pressurized air would escape and the special roof suspended over the gym would collapse!

Patrick was an independent -minded teenager, never a follower but always ready to entertain and never lacking in ideas. He grew up to be hardly an inconspicuous young man with his penchant for rakish hats, his booming voice, blazing blue eyes and exuberant gestures. Some folks even saw him as outlandish, but his proud mother only saw him as enthusiastic.

When Patrick was fifteen I married Pat Kerans and the family moved to Halifax. Patrick was none too happy to be leaving behind his Ottawa friends at Lisgar Collegiate. At first, school in Halifax was ho hum, but a few months into the school year at St Pat's, he came home enthusiastically reporting that Neptune Theatre was starting a theater program for students. Being good with his hands, Patrick joined the stage crew but before long he was trying out for acting parts. Given his loud voice and uninhibited personality he was a natural. That year was the origin of Patrick's passion for theatre.

Theatre totally absorbed his high school life. Two years later saw him in the lead role in "Man and Superman" at St. Mary's University Drama club. After spending the next year in Calgary exploring the work world, he came back to Halifax to take his BA in Theatre Arts at Dalhousie where he studied playwriting as well as acting and directing,

Summertimes were the most exciting. He obtained a student grant to start up a theatre for children, christening his venture "Bubblegum Theatre". Patrick wrote the script, recruited a half dozen of his classmates, got together some crazy props and costumes that emerged out of a big trunk on stage, and proceeded to tour around the Halifax region during the holidays and to put on outdoor kids theatre. It was a great success. With his booming voice you could hear him two blocks away without benefit of any loudspeaker system at all.

The following year he obtained an educational grant from the Nova Scotia province to fund another troupe touring elementary schools around the province in the springtime, and summer camps during the summer. He wrote plays about conserving electricity and starred as "Captain Socket the Power Pirate". That was the start of his lifetime of story telling to children.

When it came to kids, Patrick was a complete ham. He loved to mime. Often he would start to mug or imitate some little kid on the bus and invariably the child would beam and respond. Any children around home always wanted to play with him, or get him to tell them a story. Needless to say, he acted out every bit of the yarns he spun.

After Patrick and Deborah married they would often return for summer holidays to visit us on Caribou Island at our summer home in Nova Scotia, where they joined Patrick's siblings and their families on holidays. Sarah Angus, Patrick's eldest niece, wrote a poem the summer she was sixteen about the fascination her Uncle Patrick held for her and for her young cousins as they surrounded him to hear his stories.

Early Summer Evenings

On early summer evenings

My cousins and I

Would come flocking to him after supper

Looking for a story.

As the adults clattered dishes in the background

My wonderful Uncle Patrick

would have us enchanted

with wild stories

of dinosaurs and giant tomatoes,

far away from our cottage on

the shores of Nova Scotia.

Sitting in his wheelchair,

he'd suddenly come alive,

*his red chapped hands,
darting back and forth.
His loud booming voice
Would grab our attention.
Pulling us closer in wonder.
His piercing blue eyes were wide but never quite focusing.
The spell had been cast
and we hovered there
excited and laughing,
gazes of amazement
radiating off our faces.
Sitting on the rough wooden deck
Littered with red sand and leaves,
It didn't matter that the stories were only make believe;
Uncle Patrick could make them real.*

After his own children Rebecca and Cailum were born, Patrick's greatest delight was to entertain them. Among the many tales were his bedtime stories about "The Great Kazoo" In his last year at home, Deborah persuaded him to tape record some of his Great Kazoo stories. Patrick's forte were his skillful sound effects. Even if his voice was no longer as strong, his sense of the outrageous had not dimmed. In tender contrast to his wild stories he created a hauntingly sweet sound playing his mouth organ between the stories. For a long time after Patrick left us, his recorded stories continued to put Rebecca and Cailum to sleep.

In the family memento for the children, Patrick's uncle, Douglas Roche, wrote of him:

You could see him, with his stories and poems and humour, teaching his nieces and nephews as well as his own children. They seemed to revere him, as if his touch would magically transport them into another world. I could be wrong, but I don't think this next generation saw him as a sick man but a special man who could, without their even thinking about it, brighten their lives.

After university Patrick spent nearly five years in Toronto working at Malabar's costume rentals where he earned a pittance but found life very exciting. He felt he was living in the theatre world. After work hours he took part in amateur and semi-professional productions. Perhaps the high point of his acting career was his lead role in "Our Town," a production with amateurs and professionals. I was somewhat concerned that he seemed in no hurry to get ahead in the world but I knew he was enjoying life; besides, I loved having him take me to plays and to opera whenever I went to Toronto.

He found time to join the Performing Artists for Nuclear Disarmament (PAND). As a peace activist myself, I was a proud mom when he was delegated to sit on the Mayor's Committee for Peace and helped to raise funds through artistic productions. This is what made him proudest of those years.

Eventually Patrick decided he no longer wanted to be a poor artist and that the way to stay in theatre and not be poverty-stricken was to take an MBA in theatre administration. However, he had only just started his studies at York University when he was diagnosed with MS and had to drop out.

It was while riding his bicycle daily back and forth to work in Toronto at twenty-four that Patrick first experienced symptoms of what, two years later, after numerous examinations from various doctors, was diagnosed as MS. The only one of the family to have 20/20 vision, Patrick began to notice how fuzzy street signs were becoming. Then he started having trouble keeping his balance on his bike and began to fall off it. Over the next few years he had to substitute for his bike first a cane, then two canes, then crutches, and then an electric scooter and a manual wheel chair.

When Patrick got the diagnosis in late October of 1984 he was crushed. Pat and I persuaded him to come home to Halifax for a month's holiday. We witnessed his sudden unsteady gait and even inability to walk when his energy abandoned him. With his enthusiasm gone, there was only confusion in its wake. He did not know what he was going to do with himself. I tried to focus on how we could help him. It seemed I always concentrated on that, rather than on his disease. I suppose it was my form of denial. I would learn slowly in the years ahead to acknowledge his condition and to take my leads from him about how he might be helped.

With Christmas coming, he agreed to accompany Pat and me and our youngest daughter Lyn, to visit our two daughters and their families in Ottawa. That was a turning point for Patrick. His sisters Maureen and Joanne introduced him to Deborah Stienstra, a close friend of theirs, who became the new light in his life. Deborah, a bright young woman of incredible energy, both challenged and supported him. He grew more and more interested in how she read the world. Her field of political science attracted him. He took a course at Carleton to qualify for further study. A year later they decided to marry

and return to York University, Deborah to complete her Ph.D. and Patrick to obtain an M.A.

When he was first diagnosed with MS it was a year or more before he would go to the Ontario Vocational Rehabilitation services to see if he might qualify for their services. He did, and they were enormously helpful in financing his return to university as well as in providing him with an array of technologies to help him to read and to get around. Our family too were able to supplement their income. Bill's death had taught us that in misfortune families have to stick together. Patrick's brother and sisters as well as Pat and I offered assistance to the young couple.

Even though Patrick lost his ability to walk within two years of his diagnosis, for a long time he remained basically strong and healthy. He operated his wheel chair with speed and alacrity and could manage to swing and hop from it onto other chairs, awkwardly but nonetheless effectively. At Caribou he claimed his old job of climbing aboard the grass cutter to mow the field. He was a great swimmer and, though his legs no longer worked, he could swim the length of a community swimming pool under water before surfacing. Once at Caribou, when he could no longer transfer himself easily, his sibs hoisted him into a wheelbarrow, ran him down the path to the shore and dumped him unceremoniously into the sea at high tide to frolic with them.

It had not been hard to keep Patrick at the center of our affection. In many ways he was the linchpin that held us together and gave meaning and purpose to our larger family. We remained very aware of his health and the progression of his illness. But just as important to us was what Patrick was doing, what he was thinking and was involved in

and the latest news of his family that he would report with such vibrancy. Patrick could communicate so easily his affection for us all.

Our family remained close through visits back and forth to Toronto, Ottawa, Penticton, Winnipeg, Caribou Island and Halifax. Phone calls were our lifeline. Caregivers were hired to look after Patrick's personal needs when he traveled out of Manitoba to visit us. We dug a little deeper to help Patrick and Deborah to enlarge their little house in Winnipeg and later to add a porch when he could no longer wheel himself outdoors easily. As his mobility was reduced and it was harder for him to travel, we visited him more and more frequently. When Patrick could no longer come to Caribou, during the summer holidays, I exchanged places with Deborah. While I had some precious time with him alone, she would bring the children to Caribou.

Two of Deborah's siblings, Carolyn and Michael Stienstra, settled in Winnipeg in the same neighborhood as Patrick and Deborah. Carolyn lived with them her first year out of university and Patrick became very fond of her and served as a "big brother" freely dispensing advice and urging her to explore life. Later when Carolyn married Art they moved into the same neighborhood. Carolyn recalled how he used to write poems for her and how he told her she was his inspiration for Susie Durkins in his "Great Kazoo" stories. Michael came to study law with his wife Carrie and their little son Andrew. They were always immensely helpful to Deborah and Patrick's struggling household, whether for babysitting, household repairs, lawn mowing or family celebrations and outings.

Like Patrick, Deborah came from a family of six children. Whenever her parents or other siblings came to Winnipeg there would be gatherings of their extended clan. Art

saw Patrick as the “trickster” in their midst, always full of fun and mischief with his stories, whimsical wit and Irish ways. He was the life of their reunions.

Patrick was slow to situate himself in the disability community. It was a gradual process, beginning with his years at York University with Deborah. She remembered a conversation she had with him one day when they went on a long walk across the campus with him riding his electric scooter. At first he talked about himself as just a regular guy who happened to have MS, but by the end of their reflection together he began to consider himself as something else –a permanently disabled person who, because of his limitations, would have to struggle as part of a community of disabled persons to have their dignity and rights respected. Patrick learned early on that to lead an ordinary life he would have to act as an advocate for the supports he needed. Leading an ordinary life became his personal goal but he also learned that to have that kind of life he had to do it as part of the disability community.

Once he recognized his own resistance to acknowledging the effects of MS Patrick also understood that advocating on his own behalf was not the whole story. He knew that public policies and practices needed to be put in place to protect the rights of all disabled persons.

As a student at York University he wrote a letter to the administration complaining about the poor accessibility of his bathroom in his student apartment. The president replied that he would have proper adjustments made. Patrick wrote right back asking whether similar improvements would be made for all students in wheel chairs. He made his point, and handicapped students’ quarters were made properly accessible. When

he went looking for technical visual help for himself at the library, he discovered from talking to the staff that there was a Kurtzweiler voice-activated computer program that was still packed away in a storeroom. He asked to see it and spent many hours working with the instructions until he could use it. After that he made it his business to teach other visually impaired students how to use this program to help them as well. In 1988 he became a founding member of ABLE, an advocacy group for York students with disabilities, and he assisted in policy development and staff awareness and training. One faculty member recalled how effective he was in this role.

In his graduate student days sometimes Patrick had enough vision that he seemed to ride his scooter with insouciance around York's buildings and campus but he could only read slowly with an array of devices to magnify the print. Headaches and sensitivity to light followed. For a while, looking like a pirate, he wore a patch over one eye. A number of student volunteers spent many hours reading to him which made his life much easier.

Deborah and Patrick's families came together in Toronto for a glorious celebration of their simultaneous graduations from York University. There were over two thousand students granted degrees that day but Deborah and Patrick stole the show as Deborah pushed Patrick's wheel chair up the ramp for him to receive his degree amid great applause and cheers. Every university faculty member on the podium rose to greet him.

After graduation they returned to Winnipeg where Deborah had obtained a teaching position the previous year at the University of Winnipeg. Patrick spent their first year there looking for employment. Initially he did not even think of looking in the

disability field. However, he was quite prepared to use the services of an employment agency for disabled persons called Reaching Employment through Equality, and to take their Job Search Workshop. The people in this organization so impressed him that he later devoted several years of volunteer work to it.

He was personally sensitized to how hard it is for disabled persons to find jobs. Patrick had focused on international finance in his master's thesis and he thought he stood a good chance of getting one of a couple of rare jobs in this field. He came home from each of the interviews convinced that employers never got beyond seeing his wheelchair.

Two men in the disability movement had an enormous influence on Patrick. The first was Allan Simpson whom he met on the Board of Reaching Equality. Allan was the man behind the 1967 Pan Am Disability Games who went on to become one of the most effective persons advancing the interests of people with disabilities in Canada.

The second was Henry Enns an immensely creative man who hired Patrick in January 1993 to be his executive assistant at Disabled Persons International (DPI). Each of these men was also a wheel chair user and each was a giant for over thirty years in the disability movement. From being around them, Patrick could see how they led full lives despite their disabilities. Both Allan and Henry predeceased Patrick: Allan died in 1998, and Henry in 2002, each at the age of fifty-nine. Patrick was bereft at their loss.

Though he was inspired by them, he did not see himself in heroic proportions. To Patrick, Allan and Henry were living proof that one could be happy and have a rewarding life, even while having to overcome physical obstacles. Like them, Patrick's political

philosophy was one of inclusion, individual rights and responsibility. His personal goal was to live his life as authentically as possible.

Patrick believed this so strongly that he asked us to read this entry from his journal at his funeral:

I spent the day reorganizing files and reading the 23rd chapter of Moby Dick. The chapter is titled "The Lee Shore" and is a description of why a man called Bulkington would choose to return quickly to the sea again following a long sea voyage. In this short passage, Melville describes Bulkington by describing his reasons for going to sea. He does not describe the physical characteristics of the man but rather an idea that the man embodies. The metaphor of the ship at peril from the wilds of the open ocean is used to describe human longing for something beyond comfort. Melville gives flesh to an idea of struggle and choice and endeavor and opposition. Melville applauds Bulkington and Bulkington's endeavor. It is a brilliant description and a clever means of making the transition, from the ship leaving harbor and the open seas.

Last night while watching television, I saw myself reflected in society's mirror. I watched a fairly sensitive portrayal of a MS mainstay and even there I did not enjoy what I saw. I am now a stereotype. I am the "MS guy." Frustrating but inevitable. Allan and Henry have made careers from this stereotype and the super cripp misconception. I didn't and don't want to do that. I am attempting to be something beyond a stereotype of myself. Like Bulkington, I prefer the open seas of just attempting to be myself.

Henry Enns was a key figure in launching Disabled Persons International at an international meeting in Singapore in 1981. Henry was a visionary who already as a social work student had sketched out the workings of an international organization of disabled persons that would give them a voice of their own. In 1984 Henry became its executive director with its office in Winnipeg. It was set up to connect disabled people's organizations in various regions of the world to information and to funding. When Patrick joined its staff, DPI was at its strongest. The small staff of twelve dealt with 130 member organizations all over the world. Henry traveled frequently throughout Canada and to other countries. A charismatic man, he had ready access to important government figures. Patrick found Henry, though inspiring, to be a bit of a whirlwind. Because of his penchant to take advantage of every emerging opportunity, he shifted priorities without notice.

As a non-government organization, DPI became a voice for the disabled at the United Nations and dealt with issues of human rights, independent living, employment, education, prevention and transportation as well as the broader issues of food imbalance, poverty and racism.

Patrick helped to organize the DPI World Council Meetings of 1994, 1995 and 1996 and took part in the campaign to ban landmines, which won the Nobel Peace Prize. He also attended DPI's world council meeting in Washington and assisted in negotiating the language for the meetings on the Inter-American Declaration on the Rights of People with Disabilities. When Henry left DPI in 1996 to establish the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies, Patrick assisted in managing the transition between executive directors.

Finally, with his own strength and eyesight deserting him, he resigned in 1998. Staff persons had tender remembrances of how, despite a sometimes gruff manner, he was always very attentive to his coworkers and showed concern for their families. Sometimes he would write poems to them for special occasions and at times show them poems he wrote for Deborah. They recall his humor, his dapper appearance, his earrings and his hats.

Patrick was also very involved as a volunteer. Before he found work with DPI he went to work for Choices, a coalition of groups lobbying for social justice. Regularly, once a week at 7 a.m., he would roll downtown in his wheel chair to attend their breakfast meetings, the only visibly disabled person in the organization. There, he was chiefly involved in the fight against the privatization of home care under Manitoba's Conservative Government. Patrick supported government services and not American-style private health services run for profit. He did not want to see home care turned into a business. By 1998 the coalition's lobbying was successful when the Manitoba Government reversed its policy of privatizing home care.

In 2000, when the Federal NDP launched their national home care platform, they did it from Winnipeg. Party leader Alexa McDonough went to Patrick's home to announce to the TV and press crews, crowded into their living room, that private home-care companies would have no role in a national home-care program.

Patrick was never afraid of using himself as a "poster boy" to advocate for proper home care services for the disabled. One Sunday morning, after he had waited for the second weekend in a row for over three hours for a scheduled home care attendant to come, he called the press. He told them that as a paraplegic he required a home care

attendant every four hours and that his wife could not lift him. The resulting picture in the next morning's Winnipeg Free Press of him lying in bed, uncared for, caused a flurry of meetings right up to the Minister of Health. In calling the press Patrick knew exactly what he was doing. The home care services were understaffed and he knew how to put pressure on the government when more funding was needed. He knew he could speak out as a privileged person who was intelligent, good looking, white, male and well educated. Within the community of disabled persons he was indeed privileged and he wanted to use that privilege for the benefit of other disabled persons. Smirking, he would say to Deborah, "I's a pretty crip!"

Patrick also knew first hand how important employment is. His job may not have been without its frustrations but he was delighted to be going off to work every morning. He knew how fortunate he was and how hard it is for most disabled persons to find jobs. This is why, even with his limited energy and an almost full time job at DPI and a young family at home, he still made time to work as a volunteer from 1993 to 1997, going to monthly board meetings and twice-monthly committee meetings of Reaching Employment through Equality Services. He served on committees searching for alternatives to government funding, researching and developing services to sell on the open market to fund their non-profit agency's work. In 1995 he became the chair of the Service Coordination Committee, opposing the Government's attempts to unify services to disabled persons, which would have denied them choices. In 1996, as Vice President, he devoted his talents to writing cogent and persuasive letters to ensure that their organization got sufficient funding from the Province of Manitoba.

Debbie Bean, their executive director, saw Patrick as a valuable member of their

board because he had himself used the service, knew what it was about and had lots of skills to bring to them. She appreciated his wit, how he could poke fun at politicians, his letter writing skills and his keen mind. Patrick provided good balance on a somewhat conservative board. With his sense of humor he lightened moments that got too intense. When people were starting to get ruffled he had a way of saying things to make them laugh and relieve the tension.

By 1997 Patrick's strength was waning and his very limited eyesight was diminishing and so he resigned from the Board. He then continued work on behalf of disabled persons from home by combining his efforts with those of Deborah.

When Patrick and Deborah first moved to Winnipeg they chose to go their separate ways as community activists, wisely recognizing that each was better on their own turf. As Patrick's strength receded, however, their earlier practice of working separately no longer applied. Deborah shifted gradually from women's international relations to research about disability. Together they participated in one project on how the Standard Rules on Disability, adopted in 1993 by the UN, were being applied in Canada. They conducted a two-year study on how the Canadian Government had implemented its commitment in three particular areas – education, employment and income maintenance. They compiled the key promises made by the government and distributed them to disability organizations in each of the provinces and territories, and then followed up to see what each jurisdiction had done. Patrick could make ready contacts with a wide network of disability organizations from his time with DPI. He worked from home for a year, together with a research assistant they hired. Their findings "Taking Action on the

UN Standard Rules on Disability,” were published and presented by them to conferences on disability research, one in Minneapolis and one in Halifax.

Deborah went on to work in the field of disability studies; in 2000 she was seconded from the University of Winnipeg to become the Royal Bank Research Chair and she later become the director of the new graduate program in Disability Studies at the University of Manitoba. Patrick took great pride in her work.

For Patrick the personal was political but the political also led to his personal convictions and choices. Cases like the death of Tracey Latimer made him very protective of the rights of disabled persons. Patrick rethought his own position on assisted suicide because of Allan Simpson, who went to Ottawa to vigorously oppose a public attitude that people with disabilities should be “helped” to end their lives. Based on his personal experience, Allan argued that those working in the health care system often think that people with disabilities experience a poor quality of life, and so are likely to encourage patients to accept an easy death, rather aggressively pursue life. From listening to the discussions within the disability community and from his reflection on the Latimer tragedy, Patrick rejected any former thoughts or plans for assisted suicide which he had for himself. Yet he was never judgmental of the decisions made by disabled persons for themselves.

During his twenty years as a disabled person Patrick shifted from an individual focus to a focus on communities and then to a policy focus. He came to realize that, beyond a person’s physical limitations, there are social obstacles that prevent her from leading a normal life. Society has to change to get rid of those obstacles, and such changes need to be enshrined as human rights. During this process, as he went from the

personal to the political, he had two of this country's best teachers, Henry and Allan. They helped him shape his view of disability - and Deborah shared his understanding. He poured so much passion into his work because, as a disabled person himself, he was aware of how significant are the barriers to living an ordinary life, and how much extra effort it takes to do so.

What mattered to Deborah and Patrick was that their lives should be as "normal as possible". They loved kids and wanted to have them. A colorful jungle gym on their front lawn announced to the neighborhood that children were welcome there. Patrick spent many hours sitting on the porch enjoying them at play and chatting with neighbors. He loved taking himself off to the big Winnipeg downtown mall to get his haircut or to do a bit of shopping. He really enjoyed being in a crowd of people or watching the passing parade.

Deborah was the risk-taker organizing their holiday trips back to Nova Scotia, to Kananaskis, Ottawa, Vancouver and Lake Winnipeg. As his MS progressed Patrick grew more reticent about traveling and the last few years I spent a couple of weeks in Winnipeg in summertime while Deborah and the children went to Halifax and to Caribou. In the cool of the evening we would stroll over to a park overlooking the Red River. Our long conversations and uninterrupted times were precious.

Sometimes when sitting in his wheel chair at home in Winnipeg, Patrick would tell me how frustrated he was not to be able to fix things around the house. Still he was able to participate for a long time in household chores. For fifteen years he was able to do his share of cooking, washing dishes, and doing the laundry. The kitchen was organized so that he could reach what he needed, and an elevator allowed him to get to

the washer and dryer in the basement. Patrick was great at transporting laundry, groceries and children via his wheel chair.

Their family outings provided quite a sight to the neighbors as they strolled to the park with a child in Patrick's lap and Deborah pushing the wheel chair. When they went somewhere by car Patrick could, with Deborah's help, transfer himself from his wheelchair onto the front seat by means of a sliding board, and then she would store his chair in the trunk. Although he did regular exercises to maintain his upper body strength, he gradually found it more and more difficult to hoist himself into a standing position. The muscles in his abdomen were weakening and he had to be careful not to lose his upper body balance and slump out of his wheel chair. Every so often he took a dramatic fall forward. In the earlier years whenever this happened he insisted on hoisting himself back into his chair unassisted. Gradually he came to accept what help was necessary. His legs had a tendency to spasm, and for a time he kept them strapped together when he was in his wheelchair.

For a long time Patrick's arms remained strong. When Rebecca was a baby he had no trouble raising her high above his head to hear her cries of glee. Six years later when Cailum was a baby he had great difficulty trying this. By then he could no longer transfer himself into the car so that family outings became more limited. Patrick would have to be transported by Handi-Transit and he fast became a favorite of their drivers. The dispatchers would banter with him every time he ordered a van.

Wearing diapers became a reality of his life which he never concealed. In later years when the time came that I had occasion to feed him, I used to wonder if he thought

I was remembering him as an infant. I quickly put that out of my mind when I saw with what matter-of-factness and dignity Patrick let me feed him. It felt very normal to me.

Patrick's love and concern for his own included his "community family", his home care workers. They were his surrogate arms and legs. Men like Felix and Jeff, so strong that they could dispense with using the mechanical hoist. Instead they could cradle him in their arms and lift him from bed to wheelchair. Women, like Dianne who prepared his dinners, meticulously following his detailed instructions as though she weren't long since an experienced cook herself. Care givers who joked with and good naturedly tolerated his little children underfoot, all were invaluable treasures to Patrick and Deborah. And he in turn became a friend and confidante to them. Each day they brought him news of the sports world, news about their families and sometimes even brought their own little children to visit him. Often he would tease his caregivers and on occasion he would listen to their personal troubles which made him silently grateful that his seemed less serious. I have seen him rouse himself from near exhaustion to greet his home care workers cheerfully as they arrived and exchange pleasantries with them. Patrick made a point of giving his home care workers clear requests and instructions. He may have been exacting, but he always treated his home care staff with great respect and appreciated the pressures they were under. We were all thankful that Patrick and Deborah lived in Manitoba, the province with the best network of homecare services in Canada. Once when Pat and I accompanied the family on a weekend excursion to the country, a short while after we arrived at a cottage a homecare worker appeared at the door to check on Patrick and arrange the schedule for his care.

The wheel was coming full circle. Patrick had started out in the arts world and now twenty years later, in 1998, Patrick decided he would write with all the time left to him. By then the MS had progressed so far that he lacked the energy to continue working at the office. For several months he had tried working only in the mornings but gradually this proved too much. Not only was the fatigue a serious drawback, but also frequent urinary tract infections meant he had to be hospitalized for their treatment. If he was going to retire from the paid work force Patrick absolutely had to have a role in life. If he could, he would have been a full time parent but this was impossible. In earlier years Patrick had tried his hand at short story writing and he enjoyed writing poetry. Now at age forty, he resolved to become a full-time writer. Going back to writing was like going back to a long lost love.

I've got to write. Otherwise, there will be nothing. No purpose to my existence. There will be little enough purpose even if I were to succeed at writing but without it my life would be meaningless indeed. Well, then, what am I left with? Nothing. Or maybe something smaller but more profound. Maybe it is just the effort, just the work, which makes us what we are. If that is the mark of a human being, it leaves many of us outside the box. Maybe that's something that needs to be written about – that too many of us are left without purpose, because we lack the mark of the beast. (from Patrick's Journal, July 26, 2000)

Being home alone during the daytime while Deborah was teaching at the university and Becca in day care and school meant that he had a quiet setting for work.

But his day was all too brief: home care workers came five times a day to look after him. His personal care routines were very time consuming.

At 8 a.m. his home care attendant would change, wash and dress him, and transfer him from his bed to his wheel chair by means of a mechanical hoist. Then the attendant would prepare and feed him breakfast, returning briefly later during the morning to check his urine bag. A second worker came by to give him lunch and put him down for an hour's afternoon rest. The afternoon worker would come back to get him up and settled, again coming by later in the afternoon to empty his urine bag. A third home care worker would arrive around 5 p.m. to prepare his supper and his final home care worker of the day would come to put him to bed around 9 p.m. repeating all his personal care routines. He had to make necessary phone calls related to his home care. He also undertook some after-school childcare for Becca. In fine weather he would often drive his wheel chair over to her school to accompany her home. Days went by quickly with never enough time or energy for his beloved writing.

Theirs was a busy household, all the more so after the birth of Cailum in December of 1999. For several months he did not even keep his journal.

In rare free moments he loved to watch good TV or a film. Eventually he had to give these up because of the eyestrain they caused. Fatigue was his constant companion, and the biggest block to writing. On the other hand, he never ceased to enjoy listening to the CBC radio.

His journal was where he let off steam over the many frustrations he encountered.

And I am awake, and I am asleep. And I am awake, and I am asleep. I am a light bulb, flickering at the touch of my daughter's fingers. Is this what my

disease demands of me? Two hours asleep for every hour awake? No wonder I get no work done. Fatigue becomes the constant of my existence. In the final analysis, sleep is really very boring. Not much to serve as subject for conversation or creative writing. (Jan 12, 2001)

Even when he had summoned the energy to write, the use of his computer itself posed an array of challenges and frustrations despite his years of experience. As his disease progressed he had minimal use of his hands for typing. So he dictated by means of voice-activated computer programs. By means of Zoomtext he could magnify words so large that the screen would only hold four words at a time. Although it was easier to see what he was writing, it was laboriously slow to reread for editing. His new Dragon Dictate program was an improvement. It could both take commands from his voice when he was writing and it could convert his words directly into text from sound. But the computer had to be adjusted to his voice and Patrick had to enunciate very carefully and consistently. Sometimes the results were hilarious, sometimes disastrous. The program was well named, because he was often locked in mortal combat with his Dragon Dictate. It took many hours for him to review and edit his work. To be fair, between Patrick's ever less mobile hands and a tired voice that grew weaker with fatigue, one had to make allowances for the computer too.

As a solitary writer at home Patrick did not have the benefit of feedback or editing comments from fellow writers or editors. Nor did he have the opportunity of trying out his efforts on a writers' group of peers or even of a literary friend. All his energy just went into plowing ahead.

My disabilities may require me to write less than a paragraph a day. That's fine. I am already so addicted to the process that I miss it if I do not write. (Oct 15, 2000)

Patrick also had to struggle with the same issues every writer goes through as he/she determines what to write and how to say it. He searched for a long time looking for his form. His time in theatre made him very aware of the audience. Was his experience with MS worth recording? He thought not. He figured his readers would not be interested in his health. So at first he tried entertaining with fictional story telling. Gradually however, he drew on his own condition as the subject matter for two of his short stories, in his "Letters to Deb" and in several of his fantasies as well as his poetry and his memoirs. Though MS interrupted his writing and made it slower, struggling with the disease deepened his spiritual life and caused his imagination to soar. Patrick's own condition became his potter's clay. He lived on the edge, striving to become a writer while trying not to deny his disabilities and nearing death. His writing reflects these tensions as he consciously sought to be authentic.

He left behind a record of his notes, conversations with himself and journal entries about his flights of imagination. Mirroring his foreshortened life Patrick's writing files contain several incomplete stories, as well as sketches of plots and characters about his "flights of fancy". These sketches contain the beginnings of stories, plot and character outlines. We will never know how these stories end and sometimes even where they were going but he left a testimony of his rich fantasy life.

At times Patrick's battle to write was overshadowed by the reality of his coming death. He fought depression. There were moments when he feared he would never be

able to write again. Fatigue clearly limited his output: his declining health; the exacerbations of Multiple Sclerosis; isolation from the work force; the death of two important figures in his life; and his limitations as a functioning parent were all sorrows which drew him into depression.

All the while, very real windows were closing for him and more and more painful adjustments had to be made. The MS was moving upwards. He lost strength in the muscles in his torso and was less able to hold his body upright. As he progressively lost control over the use of his arms and hands he could no longer run his hand operated wheel chair. Consequently he had to acquire a powerful electric chair that could be kept in a reclining position. While this provided him with a more comfortable position for resting, it seemed to dominate and encase his body. Moreover because it weighed six hundred pounds he could no longer use the elevator which meant he lost access to two thirds of their home.

His downstairs study just off the living room was converted into his bedroom. Now this spacious sunny room became equipped with a hospital bed, a mechanical hoist, and a wardrobe, besides his desk and computer. While his new room was central in the house, he could no longer share a bedroom with Deborah.

The use of his fast-moving electric wheel chair posed another problem too. Baby Cailum was crawling around the house by this time, and when Patrick was in the living room he had to be extremely vigilant when he was in Cailum's vicinity, for fear of rolling over the baby's fingers. With Patrick's minimal sight, the enormous watchfulness this required was an added strain. He even had a back support on his wheel chair removed so that he could more easily look over his shoulder and sense the baby's presence. Cailum

used to want to scramble up onto his “Poppa’s” lap and Patrick wanted to be accessible to him and to be able lift up his little son but that grew more and more difficult for him.

Physical discomforts, cold, heat, the weight of other people’s troubles, child management, family discord all gave him tough times, sometimes unbearably so. Nothing caused him more anguish than his occasional failures as a parent. Patrick adored Rebecca and Cailum but increasingly he found the natural exuberance of the children exhausting, the noise level overwhelming and his efforts at limiting them fruitless. His patience grew thinner and he became more and more anxious either for their safety or over their “naughties”. Tensions between himself and the children and between himself and Deborah increased. Some days Deborah, returning from her work, teaching at the University, to care for two young children, felt strung to the limit of her endurance. However Patrick refused to excuse himself just because he had MS. He would not isolate himself from the children by going into his own room and shutting the door. Nevertheless, it seemed the worse his condition, the more effort he mobilized to continue writing. His writing did have therapeutic effects. It helped him to express his grief, even when he masked it in black humor.

Then as he encountered the death of persons he knew, he reacted with the same sadness and resistance that most of us experience as we face the reality of our own demise. But these losses were also acute reminders of the importance of the time left to him. He tried to cope with his own mortality by thinking of all life and death on the planet and the interconnections between life and death. When he was sick in hospitals with close calls, the struggle was very real and he had to fight his way back. When he was better, he was even able to face in a matter of fact way such practical details as

planning his own funeral. Once when Deborah and the children were away on a trip and I was with him, he had to be hospitalized for a urinary tract infection. He was delirious with a high temperature and I witnessed first hand how hard it was for him not to give up.

There certainly were times when Patrick was tempted to run away from life. Then he would consciously use his writing to push himself past his black cloud. His journal indicates over and over that he could suddenly switch from worrying about his condition and his inability to care for his own family to imagining characters, a new plot for a story or a new development in a story he was currently working on. Or he would plan some concrete action to break depression's deadlock.

The last fifteen months of Patrick's life were his greatest challenge – and his most remarkable achievement. In late summer of 2003 he was hospitalized with a lengthy bout of pneumonia. It became evident that he needed full time care. He used to choke easily and was in such a weakened condition that he could not always call for help. While twenty-four hour home care was available, for the sake of the kids it was not feasible. The only option was a nursing home. Patrick immediately took hold of this reality and raised no fuss whatsoever. He simply said it was time. None of us wanted to have him separated from his family but we knew it was inevitable. We could never have foretold the disastrous loneliness of separation for him or for the family. One evening I was returning with them in the car from visiting Patrick at the hospital, I heard Cailum's small voice from the back seat protesting, "But Mommy, I want Papaa to come home with us."

Their nursing home of choice was Taché Centre because it had a special wing for young adults with Multiple Sclerosis. There, each floor had its own bright sunny dining

room and attractive lounges. On the ground floor there was a cafeteria, a chapel and several services. Outside was a garden with walkways and little nooks with patio furniture where families could gather in the shade on a summer's day. However there was no vacancy when Patrick required placement. He would have to wait for an opening.

In the meantime he was placed in Misericordia, an old center city hospital which had been converted into an interim facility. The appropriate wards for him there were also filled, so that Patrick was placed on a floor of elderly patients, most of whom had dementia. He shared a room with another patient with whom he could have no conversation. Nor could he engage in conversation with anyone in the dining area. Worst of all, Patrick had no access to his computer and his beloved writing which up until now had been his life-line. His painful maladjustment was clear.

We quickly figured out that if he could not use the computer, what he needed were people to take dictation from him. Family members were his scribes when each of us was there, but there were many long hours and days in between visits. Patrick later admitted that he kept his sanity in those months only by writing poems and stories "on the inside of my eyelids". A few weeks later he told me that he he was not losing his mind but he felt he was losing his imagination. To me, this spelled disaster. We did two things to avert this catastrophe. I went to see the social worker at Taché to explain the seriousness of Patrick's situation. He agreed to do everything he could to get Patrick admitted to Taché as quickly as possible.

Meanwhile Deborah and I met with Tom Stroud, a faculty member at the University of Winnipeg to discuss the possibility of getting student volunteer scribes. Tom agreed to help and Patrick drew up an ad for himself describing his requirements.

With Tom's encouragement, Luc Lu, a young first generation Vietnamese Canadian theatre student responded and came to visit Patrick. With no previous experience, Luc became his faithful weekly scribe, keeping immaculate longhand dictation in a special book. During his remaining months, Patrick dictated memoirs, essays, fantasy stories and poems to Luc and occasionally to Jody, another dear young friend and to me. As Patrick and Luc came to know each other they talked about Luc's studies at the university and Patrick told him stories about his days as a theatre student at Dal and later at York.

In February an opening came at Taché, but not in the wing for young adults with MS so that he had to be placed on a floor of mostly elderly people. When, after a short time, he got his own room, Deborah outfitted it with electronic aids. Suspended over his bed was a microphone-like device into which he could blow. One puff rang for the nursing staff, two puffs answered his phone or enabled him to place a call through the operator, three puffs turned on his radio and four turned it off. This gave him some independence but it was no substitute for human company or human-on-the spot response to his needs. Most days he was still able to be transferred to his wheel chair by means of an electric hoist and sling, although the transfer grew more and more uncomfortable for him.

On pleasant days in the summer we could take him downstairs and outdoors to the garden. Deborah spent many hours there with Patrick, reviewing his writings and having him decide which he would like to have published.

Friday nights were special. Deborah, the children and Jody Proctor, a dear young friend, came for supper and brought any visiting family member along. We accompanied Patrick to the cafeteria and occasionally brought along a picnic. Jody would take Becca

and Cailum outside to play or around the residence and to visit and entertain some of the older folk, while Deborah and Patrick had a little time to themselves. Then everyone tramped back to his room to say goodnight.

Some days Deborah could get away from the university for brief visits. She was always available to Patrick on the phone. They had an understanding that whenever he had enough energy and wanted to talk with her, he could call at any time. She would pause in her work and they would visit. Patrick reached out to her almost daily.

Besides Deborah and the children, his wider family set up a schedule of regular visits, and friends continued to visit. During those final fifteen months, each month a member of our family in turn spent a week in Winnipeg. Patrick's in-laws too came to visit, as well as his cousins and uncles when they were in town. Deborah graciously turned Patrick's old bedroom into a guest room for visiting family and gave us a warm welcome. Each of us found these times precious. We learned to wait around the residence for those brief intervals when Patrick had sufficient energy to engage in conversation. He was like a glowing log in the fireplace whose flames occasionally leap up. As the months progressed we saw these moments recede and become ever briefer, yet we were happy just to be near him. I was content to see him enjoy meals I had made and fed to him, but I felt equally distressed whenever he had choking spasms.

Everyone's recollections of those visits is not of how we raised Patrick's spirits, but of how he raised ours. His keen interest in others was a quality that sustained him especially in his final years. This was certainly true of young people who aspired to write. Two stand out – his niece Mariel and his friend Jody.

Mariel recalled for us her last visit to see him.

Nothing had changed the last time I visited him, in August of 2003.

"Stay away from volcanoes!" "You're so innocent, you're going to end up raped on a beach somewhere!" and, of course, "Bring a suitcase full of condoms down with you!" were a few of his usual cautions about my upcoming visit to Central America.

The first thing he did when I sat down beside him was to recite a poem from memory that he had written "on the insides of his eyelids." It didn't seem to deter him, how his memory had weakened, he just plowed on through, pausing in concentration as the words came to him. His determination was extraordinary - and so inspiring that any excuse I could think of for not writing seemed ridiculous.

He sent me home the first evening with an assignment: to write something and bring it back for him. At that time, it was a struggle (emotionally) for me to write anything - I didn't trust myself enough. So after a lot of agonizing I finally let my pen spit something out, and I read it out loud to him so fast the first time I had to repeat the whole thing again. When I was done, he closed his eyes, leaned his head back, and heaved a sigh. "I hate my niece. She writes better than I can, and she doesn't because she's LAZY!" I highly doubted the former, but I couldn't argue with the latter. Compared to him, who continued to write despite all possible obstacles, I couldn't bring myself to put pen to paper because my ego was in the way?

Jody recalls her first visit to a "small abrasively sterile room" in the Misericordia Hospital.

... holding a collection of poems by Sylvia Plath. I read the poem 'Tulips' to Pat. ... Pat was delighted by how passionate I was about Plath, and I loved that he seemed to appreciate her as I did. We had fun. I remember him tilting his head back and laughing up at the ceiling, his huge mouth wide in an open grin, his tongue moving with his laughter. I left the hospital in a fantastic mood, in a spirit of romance even; the world seemed much more interesting than it had when I first arrived.

As the visits continued regularly, Jody tells us,

I loved being able to tell him about everything really. Pat was a great audience, and I began collecting moments from my life to share with him. When I was out and about I would constantly find myself noting things of interest for him, and on the long bus rides to the hospital to visit him, I would mentally compile lists of exciting things I had done, seen, or thought so that he would be able to enjoy them. ... I had the sensation of living the life he was no longer able to for the both of us; I traveled at every opportunity, and sought out dance and entertainment I thought he would be interested in. I enjoyed my life more thoroughly, knowing how Pat would appreciate the detail of it.

As the months slipped by, Jody saw his life ebbing:

As Pat's MS began affecting his energy level more and more, visits became harder; Pat had less energy to talk, and though his eyes were as alive as they always had been, there were more moments when they would dull with fatigue, his shoulders would slump, and it was clearly a struggle for him to stay awake. I was amazed during this time that Pat managed to maintain his efforts to be

optimistic and engaged with the world around him. It showed a vibrancy of spirit that was undeniable. I was enormously inspired by this energy; he made life seem like an absurd and precious gift that no matter what, one was lucky to receive.

We had a conversation once about how he did not seem to be afraid of death. He told me that of course he felt fear, but that he understood it would get him nowhere to give in to it. He looked at me with his eyes sparkling and said something like *besides, one thing I do know for sure is that the first thing I'm doing is going dancing.*

Throughout these last months, most of his waking hours were spent reclining in his wheel chair or lying in his bed, writing compositions in his mind, editing and memorizing his poems to be ready for when Loc Lu came. Loc recalled that Patrick seldom changed a word he dictated. With great concentration he simply moved forward. As the months of his final year unravelled, Luc also witnessed Patrick's ever decreasing strength. He spent less time in conversation with Luc in order to conserve his energy, his voice became weaker and their dictation sessions shorter. Just before Christmas, Luc came by with a little gift for Patrick. As Luc was leaving Patrick said that he would call Luc in the New Year when he felt a little better. This was their last visit.

One morning, six weeks before he died he sent me on an errand downstairs to see the occupational therapist. I happened to mention to her that he was writing. Her eyes widened and she asked me about this. She said she wished she had known this earlier when he was not so weak, because she would have asked him to write a piece for her describing their services from the point of view of a patient. When I returned to his room and told him this, he barely responded. A couple of days later when he had a momentary

burst of energy he told me to get his writing book and dictated from memory a piece he had composed for her in his head as straightforwardly as though he were reading it.

Patrick never lost his sense of mischief or his sense of the ridiculous. His brother in law, Murray Angus, told about his visit to Patrick:

He was, of course, not above being outrageous just for the sake of it. A tiny, but telling, example of this came during one of my last visits with him in Winnipeg, in late 2003. I had a digital camera with me and asked him to allow me to take his picture as he lay in bed. I framed the shot well enough, but a digital camera at that time had a split-second lag between the time the button was pressed and when the shutter actually closed. Patrick's pose looked fine as I pressed the button down, but when I looked at it much later, I discovered Patrick sticking his tongue boldly out—a reminder to us all, I felt at the time, that he still had what it took!

He could still tease me. Once, after a searching conversation about my politics and my faith beliefs he asked, “ Mom, have you any idea how much you’ve changed?” I laughed but held my tongue not to retort “ Are you sure it’s not you or your perceptions of me that have changed?”

For years he had postponed death, fantasizing that he would live to see Rebecca and Cailum grown up. Now he knew he would not. I did my best to reassure him that his influence would linger with them.

Patrick’s faith was not a conventional nor a dogmatic one, although he was respectful of his and Deborah’s families’ religious beliefs and practices. His spirituality was grounded in loving human relationships, in awe for the universe and in taking responsibility for making life good for all around him. An old friend of his tells us that

in a conversation about religion Patrick remarked, “*Yes, God... I think of God as a bag lady.*” To him, religious belief should not be to comfort the comfortable, but to draw our attention to poverty and exclusion, and to the need for social justice.

The week after New Year’s 2004, Patrick was hospitalized for an obstruction. Within hours he developed pneumonia and Deborah called us. The infection did not respond to drugs. With full awareness, he called Deborah and me to his hospital bedside at 4 a.m on January 10th and told us, “*it’s time*”.

The doctor came by at 9 a.m. and unselfconsciously knelt by Patrick’s bed and took his hand in his own. They talked for a while about the music gig the physician had been on the night before and then all he said was “Patrick are you sure?” And Patrick said “Yes”. The doctor then ordered the medication to cease.

Patrick, who had lain prone for so long, asked to have his bed raised so that he could sit upright. We did not lower it until 6 p.m., when he fell quietly asleep. During that day, Carolyn, Deborah and I read to him from a favorite book, *The Hitchhiker’s Guide through the Galaxy*. Deborah and Carrie and Michael brought the children to see him, friends came by, as did the chaplain. Patrick’s sister Joanne and his stepfather, Pat, were with him as well on the final day.

Not long before he lost consciousness Patrick said he wanted to write. Michael, his brother-in-law, was sitting on one side of his bed and I was on the other. Michael took a legal pad from his briefcase and I leaned over Patrick, gently moving his oxygen mask aside to capture his words. I repeated them to Michael and Patrick dictated a last message for the family.

Getting organized to die was such a fascinating project. There were so many details to attend to. There was a host of medical matters to address, of course, as well as the inevitable contemplation of emotional rigors. It was in no way easy, but not for the reason I expected. The family was uniform in the strength of its support. My failing energy and doubtful heart were the impediments to the successful completion of the project. It is so weird even now to talk about my dying, but it is not something I am frightened of. I can only hope that the example I have set for my family members gives them courage when they go forward to face their own.

On his final day he was surrounded by his loving, praying family. That night, January 11, 2004 he passed away quietly with Deborah at his side.

Afterwards his brother and four sisters and many of their children gathered in Winnipeg. With Deborah we planned and made arrangements for his funeral, met at the house for supper each night that week, listened to Deborah read Patrick's "Letters to Deb," looked at family pictures, told one another tales about him, played with Rebecca and Cailum, laughed, wept, embraced and consoled one another. It was the saddest and the best of family times.

We knew Patrick would have approved of his funeral, beautifully conducted at Patrick's own request by the Reverend Tim Sale, who warmly welcomed everyone to St. Paul's church: the little children gathered on a picnic rug at the front of the church with toys and books, surrounded by their caring older cousins; persons in wheelchairs; sightless persons, one with her guide dog; provincial and federal politicians; home care, hospital and university staff; all of his and Deborah's families, and many friends and

neighbors.

Patrick's spirit lingered with us when Pat read from *Moby Dick*, as requested by Patrick, and introduced it with the entry from Patrick's journal. The readings, reflections, Deborah's reading of a poem by Patrick, Jody's poem and Robert's eulogy all reflected the spirit of Patrick, but nothing was more himself than the rollicking recessional "My Uncle Walter Goes Waltzing with Bears" expressly requested by him – who had assured us that he would be dancing.

STORIES

The Gift

This tender story was sent to me as a Christmas gift when Patrick, aged twenty-two, first went to Toronto. He not only wrote the tale but bound it on hand-made paper in a little gold cloth-covered book. I read it aloud at a Mass in memory of him.

The Gift

A long time ago, in ancient Japan, lived a man in a house overlooking the sea. And while he was not famous, he had earned no small reputation for his quiet skill in the fashioning and flying of paper kites. He built them very slowly, with a dogged persistence, and the greatest attention to the smallest detail. He made them in all shapes and all sizes and all colors, and the ones he liked the best were those brightest and most bold.

He could never explain why he worked in this art form for he was often unhappy with what his hands had produced. People called his kites beautiful, which only made him feel hollow, for all he could see when he looked were their flaws. Some kites he sold for money, and felt like a robber, for his heart told him they were better given away. He could never bring to words the feelings that ran through him, but he loved his kites for the laughter they pulled out of children's cries.

One day a memory jarred him, and left him with a problem, unfortunately one that he could not easily solve. A woman he had known for a very long time, and too short a time, and never long enough, would soon be celebrating the day that she was

born. And he tried to decide for a very long time on a gift that he could give her that would be both special and rare. He knew those things she wanted, and he knew those things she liked, but sadly, he was a poor man and could ill afford those things.

As he thought on that awhile, he felt a growing dissatisfaction, because he thought such gifts could never bring meaning to what a birthday is. And when he thought he had an answer to that single simple question, he knelt down at his workbench and began to move his hands.

He took his best rice paper, and his finest bamboo and balsa and slowly and steadily he began to build a bird. He built it large and beautiful, in the shape of a Great Heron, and the wings he stretched wide open as if it reached to climb the skies. Seven days it took to build the kite: a week of long hours and tired morning eyes. When it was finished he sat back and stared at it, then took out his paints and his gift came alive.

On each paper feather, he painted a picture, and each picture was a frozen moment in time. These were all his memories of her, and were things that would not leave him, and each moment spent with her was a memory added more.

Not content to paint mere pictures, he infused each with feeling, and that gave each moment something that was different from the rest. In some pictures reigned confusion, where lacked any understanding, but these scenes were often balanced when minds met close; eye to eye.

The paintings were completed on the morning of her birthday, and he rested his wet brushes after a full night in his hands. Then he ate that morning's breakfast and he rested for a moment before walking into the village to find the lady on her day.

But he could find her person nowhere, though he asked all of the people. And some claimed they'd seen her walking, though none were sure which way.

He traveled home then sadly, not sorry for wasted labors, but unhappy that he couldn't pay tribute in the triumph of her day. As he reached his weathered threshold, he saw the front door standing open, and he entered in deep quiet, thinking someone was inside. But nothing much was different, and nothing had been touched, until he entered his workroom and he saw the kite was gone.

Then he heard a happy laughter, and he looked onto his balcony, and there was the lady, playing the kite out on the breeze.

She looked up then and saw him, and she looked at him and smiled, then she looked toward the kite as it struggled toward the sky. And there seemed in her a sadness that a thing of such great beauty should be held by any person, or chained by earth-bound string. So she looked at him in silence and he looked at her and smiled and gently she released it and it waltzed into the sky.

Then he joined her on the balcony and they watched the Heron in silence and it danced above the ocean and disappeared inside the clouds.

Calico Jones

Patrick wrote this spoof as a distraction from writing his Master's thesis for York University. He was fed up with academic writing and wanted to have a bit of fun. Later he sent the story as a Christmas gift to his brother Robert. Family members teased him about characters possibly inspired from his own family of origin.

The Author's Disclaimer

Anything that is written suffers the peril of being taken as a veiled comment upon the relationship between the author and the reader. When the writing concerned is in the form of a story, this danger looms even larger. The questions which abound in the reader's mind quickly come to overshadow any pleasure derived from the story. Is the author trying to tell the reader something? Do the situations in the story represent those of real life? Even worse, are the characters in the story someone the reader knows? Could one of them even be a parody of the, reader herself?

Kurt Vonnegut once said that the purpose of any story was to delight and amuse. The intention of this story is to meet both those criteria. It is up to the reader to decide whether it does so.

As to the relationship between this story and reality, this story is a work of complete fiction. In legalese, all of the above can be summed up in the phrase:

The following is a work of fiction. Any similarity to persons living or dead is coincidental.

Calico Jones

The story of Calico Jones, like any other story, took place within a context. In Calico's case, that context was comprised of any number of discrete elements, but only some of them are important to the telling of her tale. That the physical location of the story was a small prairie town about forty five minutes drive outside a larger urban area is interesting, but not of immediate importance. That the temporal position of the story was the recent past is likewise interesting, but not particularly important. Nor are these facts relevant because, as will be seen, the story of Calico Jones deals with the panoply of

human relations and the human condition is a force almost entirely divorced from time and space.

In order to understand the story of Calico Jones properly, we must begin with an examination of that most relevant of contexts, the family. Calico Jones's family may have been no more strange and idiosyncratic than the average Canadian family, but given the peculiarities of the average Canadian family, her family may have been very strange and idiosyncratic indeed.

Certainly they were an unusual group by virtue of their diverse ethnic and linguistic origins. Calico's mother was French Canadian, and before marriage had borne the weighty name of Elouise LaPierre. She had moved to Western Canada from Quebec in her early twenties, in search of an existence devoted to hard work, frugality, and unhappiness. She was resolute in the belief that this was life as God had meant it. She had been somewhat disconcerted by the fact that she had met, fallen in love with, and married, a quietly happy transplanted New Yorker who took great pleasure in her company and the three children that she had borne.

Henry Jones, Calico's father, was one of a large clan of boys who had been raised in Brooklyn. Their family had been distinguished by the fact that there had been no girls, and that they were the only family on their side of the block who were not Jewish. (They were the most waspish of wasps). While still in his youth, Henry Jones had resolved to see the world and had traveled west from New York to the Grand Canyon then north to the Canadian prairie and decided he'd seen enough. As he would say in later years he'd seen the ugliest of the American desert, and the biggest of the American holes in the

ground, and when he got to the flattest and most golden of places he'd ever seen, there didn't seem much point in going on.

The early years of Elouise and Henry Jones' marriage were marked by an unspoken but spirited competition around inducing members of their respective immediate families to relocate and take up residence near them in western Canada. Whether this competition was motivated by a desire to garner emotional support during periods of marital discord, or whether out of communal feeling unencumbered by ulterior motives was never completely resolved, but a competition of relentless pressure definitely took place. Elouise and Henry were both the eldest children of their families and, as such, were able to exert a form of moral suasion known only to the eldest children of close-knit families. The velvet glove covering this mailed fist was promises of beautiful landscape, career opportunities aplenty and a lifestyle known previously only to Egyptian kings and queens.

Of the two, Henry Jones was much the more successful in convincing family members to relocate. It was not so much that Henry was a better liar, but that his father had steeped the boys in the lore of the ever-present business opportunity. When their elder brother began singing the siren song of the mermaids, the Jones boys all started swimming like crazy. The two middle brothers, Louie and Bennie, reluctantly accepted grubstakes from their parents with wide-open palms. With these funds as starting capital Louie opened a small retail store in town which sold suitcases, briefcases, and men's leather goods. Bennie wisely took advantage of the existence of a nearby detachment of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and ensured his economic security by opening a donut shop. Sadly, when it came time for the youngest brother, Jacob, to receive his

parental grubstake, the family hardware business was on the brink of bankruptcy. The death of the brothers' parents soon after in a freakish recreational mishap left Jacob with little interest in remaining in Brooklyn and, after the burial of their parents, Jacob joined his brothers on the Canadian prairies.

In the contest of the families, Elouise was handicapped by neither having as many siblings as Henry, nor as compelling arguments to attract them westward. She did her best, adding linguistic affinity to the Métis to her promises of landscape, jobs, and lifestyle. There were only her widowed mother, and younger sister and brother to convince, but they initially remained steadfast in their refusals. It took the admission of homosexual preference on the part of her younger brother Michael to send Elouise's sister Marie, and their mother Mere LaPierre, scurrying westward under the misapprehension that homosexuality was contagious.

While the LaPierre women were numerically outnumbered by the Jones men, they made up for this deficit through unwavering determination and an unshakable sense of purpose.

Mere LaPierre particularly endeared herself to the Jones men both for her concern over their welfare and a resemblance to their own dear departed mother. As they married, and began raising children, Mere Lapierre's position within the family ranks grew. There was never a child's ailment for which she did not know a cure, or a parental problem which could not be assuaged through the poultice of her kind words. By the time the children were in their teens, she was properly ensconced as the family matriarch, and by the time the children were beginning their excursions into the real world of full time employment, she was considered indispensable and immortal.

It was something of a rude shock, therefore, when the family discovered that she was not the latter and thus could no longer be the former. One morning Elouise checked on the old woman, because she had not responded to the regular summons to breakfast, and found her lying in her bed very still and very cold and very dead. The funeral of Ellen LaPierre was a simple and somber event and well attended by family members. The proceedings were only slightly marred by the local priest's looking at the small granite headstone and quipping that seldom had a person been so aptly named. The family later agreed, however, that this oversight had been more than adequately rebutted by the drunken cousin who offered to punch the curate in the nose.

The major consequence of the death of Mere LaPierre was a distinct power vacuum within the family ranks. Not only was there no one to placate parental fears about the misadventures of the younger generation, but there was also no one to direct and coordinate family action when such a response was needed. Mere LaPierre's firm guidance had resulted in a lack of such skills developing in other family members and a successor to her throne had neither been selected nor trained. The story of Calico Jones was played out within this context and is as much a chronicle of the intricacies of family power relations as it is a narrative of the complexities of youth.

One of the main methods of enforcing family discipline during the reign of Mere LaPierre were communal Sunday night suppers held at the homes of the LaPierre - Jones clan households on a rotating basis. The younger family members were brought along but were excused during the after supper conversations which informally but dictatorially addressed family business.

The elder children of the family were granted a place at the table during these sessions once it had been generally agreed that they had reached some indefinable point of maturity. So it was that Suzanne and Martin Jones, eldest children of Elouise and Henry Jones, were at the table when their mother made her bid for power. Elouise had waited two weeks after the death of her mother, and prepared her opening gambit carefully. It was couched in the question of what was to be done about Calico?

“What’d’ya mean?.” grunted Bennie. “She’s a good kid.” “Of course she’s a good girl,” exclaimed Elouise. “How do you think I raise my daughters, eh? That’s not the point.”

Elouise looked at Martin and Suzanne and said, “You two, I don’t want your sister to hear nothing of this. I don’t want her feelings hurt.”

“Hey, it’s alright, Elouise, nobody will say nothing,” reassured Louie. “Where is she tonight, anyways?”

“I said that she don’t have to come, so she went off to be with some friends,” replied Elouise. “But I don’t know what I am going to do. I am so worried about her.”

Martin and Suzanne glanced at each other.

“Maman,” said Suzanne. “She is just depressed because she didn’t have a date for the prom. It’s not that important.”

“Oh, it’s not important to you, eh? Well, it was important to her,” Elouise retorted. “You don’t care about your little sister, you.”

“I don’t know what’s wrong with those boys,” contributed Elouise’s sister, Marie. “Calico is so pretty.”

“Look, she’s too old for the guys she graduated with. All of those guys are two years younger than her,” explained Martin. “It would also help if she wasn’t such a space cadet.”

“You don’t say rude things about your sister.” ordered his mother. “She can’t help it that she was held back in school.” “Elouise, you’re right. Martin listen to your mother.” Came from Henry, who was acting the role of the calm voice of reason. “We all know that Calico is a bit different. But she’s just a bit more special because of that, alright?”

“Alright, I didn’t mean anything,” said Martin and lapsed back sullenly. Past experience had shown to all present that Calico was her father’s favorite and that Henry Jones would suffer no criticism of her.

“So what’s bugging you about Calico?” Bennie asked. “It can’t just be that prom thing. It’s over and done with - life goes on.”

“Non, non, I don’t care about that much,” Elouise said. “It’s not that for her. It is what we do with her now? She’s finished school, she won’t go to anything else, so what does she do now?”

“She’ll just have to be like the rest of the world. She’ll just have to go out there and get a job,” replied Bennie’s wife Tina. It’ll be hard for her, but it was for all of us. She’ll find something she can do. We all did.”

The family ranks greeted this suggestion with a long suffering silence. Mere LaPierre had welcomed Tina into the family fold with something akin to the kiss of death, and Tina had only partially ingratiated herself in the old woman’s eyes by dedicating her life to the creation and raising of eight grandchildren. The matriarch’s

dislikes were so embedded in family relations, however, that Tina's comments were usually accorded a special place of prominence on the far side of the moon.

"You know it can't be like that, Tina," explained her husband. "You remember what happened the summer she worked for US. It takes a while for her to figure out what's what, and even then you can't expect her to handle something new. She's better when she knows what's going on."

The maternal instinct rose in Elouise.

"She is not stupid, my Calico," Elouise asserted. "She's the only one of my children who learned to speak French. She remembers from when she was two, and I did not ever have to worry because she never got lost. She takes good care of everybody's kids when she baby-sits, she sings to them like a bird, eh? So now I want some help with her. She helped out all of you a lot."

Nods and murmurs of agreement filled the room as Elouise glanced from face to face, defying dissension. They had all benefited from Calico's willingness to help out and baby-sit whenever called on (particularly because Calico refused payment).

"Elouise," chided Jacob's wife, Wendy. She made a stab at mollifying the older woman. "We all know Calico's good qualities, and she has lots of them. But Henry is right, too. Calico is special, she is sort of ... well, one of life's innocents."

"Innocent?" sputtered Elouise. "That's not good enough. She is an angel, is Calico."

"It would help if she'd just come down to earth," was Suzanne's aside to Martin. "So Maman, what is it that you want for her? What are we supposed to do?"

“She can’t mope around the house all summer,” interrupted Henry. “She has to have something to keep her occupied.” “Bennie, she can work in the donut shop for the summer. She worked for you before,” added Elouise.

“Oh, that’s not such a good idea,” was Tina’s quick response. “We are going to put our two eldest in there starting summer vacation and you know how business is slow in the summer months.”

“I gotta agree with Tina,” said Bennie apologetically. “I don’t think Calico is cut out for the donut business. Look what happened that last time.”

“That wasn’t her fault,” broke in Louie. “If the cops hadn’t joined in and that reporter hadn’t been there, nobody would have ever known a thing.”

Jacob smiled. “I thought Calico looked great in the newspaper, though. Standing on the counter and trying to stop that food fight between those cops and her friends. She was sure getting plastered. It wouldn’t have been so bad if the national paper hadn’t picked up that picture for its cover. Then those cops wouldn’t have got in so much trouble, either.”

“Yeah, but it happened,” Bennie said. “Now I don’t think Calico even likes my place. She didn’t come in for a whole year after that.”

“Okay, so we’re not going to try and make Calico do anything that she doesn’t want to. But if she isn’t going to go to work for Bennie, we gotta find something else for her,” Henry summed up.

“You got any clients that she can go to work for?” Louie asked Henry hopefully.

“Nope,” he replied. “Farmers don’t want somebody like Calico driving a combine. They all want guys to work for them. And I’ve got nothing for her to do around

the office. The one time I tried to show her an account's books, she asked me why they didn't just let the bank keep track of everything. I told her that if they did that her Pear would be out of a job. It was kinda funny, but I don't think she got the point."

"Oh, come on now," Louie said exasperatedly. "Why's everybody looking at me? There's got to be lots better places for Calico to work than with me. I like her lots but I already got Angelina up front. We don't need two women in the store."

Words were not exchanged, but family disapproval was nevertheless voiced at Louie's mention of the woman who had been at the center of his marital breakup. Elouise's face was a textbook example illustrating the muscular contortions needed for a scowl, Tina and Marie had averted their eyes and Henry and Bennie looked embarrassed. Disregarding those of the younger generation, only Jacob and Wendy seemed to understand that divorce was a part of the modern world and something from which no couple was immune.

Elouise had watched Mere LaPierre's familial manipulations long enough to know when the opportune moment had come. She had played at being frustrated, and shown a trace of real anger, but now it was time for her trump card, which was shame.

"So that's it, eh? After what the family did always for you, and what Calico did for you, too? Never a bad word from that one about you. Always she says how we must help her Uncle Louie out. How Uncle Louie can't be talked about. How we should understand that it is very hard for him," she drawled, and buried him slowly and inexorably in remorse. The coup de grace was deliberate, caustic and merciless. "You should be ashamed."

“But, but, what about the library and Marie, or maybe there’s something over at the school that Jake could get her,” but Louie was spluttering and his defenses were down.

“Calico’s not one for reading books,” Marie pointed out. “Yeah,” said Jacob. “And I can just see her over at the high school, helping out cleaning up the guys showers. I don’t think that’s anyplace we want her working, Louie.”

“Geez, I can’t believe that this all comes down to me,” Louie capitulated. “I don’t know how I’m gonna explain this.” The mopping up operation took the next half hour, but all of Louie’s protestations had been already effectively rebuffed. The only matters to be worked out were where Calico was to report for work and when.

Perhaps the most interesting exchange of the evening took place later in the kitchen between Suzanne and Martin and their younger cousin Tommy. Tommy was Wendy and Jacob’s only child, and had missed the festivities (as the others were describing them) because of a prior commitment of the romantic persuasion.

“I am so glad I didn’t get involved in that,” Martin was saying. “If they want Calico to go to work for Uncle Louie, that’s fine, but I Just don’t want to be part of it.”

“I know what you mean,” agreed Suzanne. This is not against Calico, but every time the family starts meddling everything gets screwed up. I’ve seen it too often before and I don’t want to get stuck in the middle of it.”

“You might be surprised,” said Tommy. “Calico is the one person who always seems to do alright, even when she doesn’t know what’s going on.”

“Probably because she doesn’t know what’s going on,” said Martin dryly. “Sometimes it really ticks me off.”

“Oh, give her a break. I like Calico,” replied Tommy. “Hey did you really buy that bike?”

“Keep your voice down,” whispered Martin. “If Maman finds out, she’ll start in like it was the plains of Abraham again.” “Yeah, but did you get it?” asked Suzanne.

“Papa and I went down and picked it up yesterday. It’s in the garage. I got Papa to countersign the loan. You should’ve seen him drool when he looked at it,” Martin told them.

“Aren’t you scared she’ll find it?” Tommy asked.

“Fat chance,” Suzanne said. “She thinks garages are part of some strange male mystery like wet dreams. She hasn’t been in ours in years.”

“I put it between the car and the back wall. It’s got a tarp over it so it’s alright,” Martin assured them. “Insurance and payments are going to kill me, but I’ll just leave it in there ’til my raise comes through next month and I just won’t drive it or insure it ’til then.”

At this point the evening began breaking up, so the conversation about the new motorcycle was discontinued. For our purposes here, nothing of importance happened next until the following Wednesday, which was Calico’s third and final day of employment under her Uncle Louie’s tutelage. The events immediately preceding and following her quitting were reconstructed and later embellished in a series of phone conversations between various family members. The first took place about one o’clock Wednesday afternoon between Elouise and Henry.

“Henry, hello, it’s me,” said Elouise. “Go over to Louie’s store and help Calico. Those people have gone completement fou. Calico phoned me and said that Louie

jumped off the balcony and that woman pushed a bunch of suitcases on him through the window. Non, I don't think she was mixed up, I think she saw that happen. Well, she said the window is broken and the police are there and Louie has to go to the hospital and she doesn't know what to tell them. Non, non, she said she was all right. But she needs some help I think. Okay I am going to call the store so you go over there."

Several phone conversations then followed. Elouise talked to Henry at the store, which was dissatisfying and interfered with the clean up process. Elouise phoned again to talk to Calico which was dissatisfying and interfered with Calico's understanding of what had transpired. Henry phoned the local hospital, which was dissatisfying because Louie was there but was having X - rays done and couldn't come to the phone. Henry phoned Angelina, which was dissatisfying because he had to Listen to her answering machine before recording, "What did you do to my brother?" and "I'll have the law on you!" and "What the hell is going on, anyway?"

Elouise phoned Wendy at work because she had always liked the yokinger woman and thought Wendy knew how to deal with crazy people because Wendy was a social worker. Wendy was relieved to hear that Calico was not hurt and phoned Jacob to tell him to go over to the hospital and see Louie. Jacob went to the hospital and found Louie being released with nothing but minor scrapes and bruises. Jacob phoned Elouise, Henry, and Wendy, while Louie convinced two inquisitive R.C.M.P. officers that the whole thing had been a complete misunderstanding and a ridiculous accident to boot.

The afternoon's strange circumstances must now be seen as they were viewed from two very different perspectives. The first was Louie's, and was explained to Jacob over beer in Louie's kitchen.

“I dunno what happened,” said Louie. “The day was completely shot, no customers at all and the whole week has been like that. So I went up to sit on the balcony, it pulls people over to talk for sure when the weather is good. They look in the store window, they see something, and maybe they buy. So, I’m sitting up there with my feet over the edge, and Angelina comes up behind me and starts swearing in Italian. You can really tell when somebody is swearing in Italian. And she was really loud.

“I thought that maybe she was teasing me for loafing or something so I reached back to grab her and give her a kiss. She can get angry sometimes but she cool’s down pretty quick. Next thing I know she’s hit me in the head with some briefcase she has in her hand and I’m falling straight over the edge. I would have been dead for sure if the awning hadn’t been open and broken my fall.”

Jacob looked at his brother skeptically. “What did you expect, sitting on that little ledge? That’s no balcony, no matter what you like calling it. It’s just a little ledge.”

“Alright, so I shouldn’t have been out there. Old argument,” continued Louie. “But that’s not the strange bit. What’s so strange is that there I am, lying on the sidewalk, I’m hurting like mad and I see Angelina standing in the shop. She must have come down those stairs pretty quick! So I look up and see Angelina looking at me through the window. And when she sees me moving around, she shoves a pile of suitcases right through the window at me. If I’d been any closer, I’d have been cut by glass. As it was the ’cases landed all over me. By the time I know what’s going on, Calico is on top of me trying to help out, and the cops and the ambulance are coming and Angelina’s taken off. What I can’t figure out is what’s with Angelina. If she wanted to kill me or something, she was sure trying to do it in the right way.”

The afternoon's events must also be seen from Angelina's perspective. This is necessary not so much for the sake of fairness as for the sake of clarity.

Angelina had watched the installation of Calico into the shop carefully. She had been told by Louie that the young girl with the slim figure and long hair would be working in the store for a while and had been asked "to be nice please, okay?" Having been kept at arm's length from the family, Angelina didn't know who the girl was or why she was working there suddenly. When she asked Louie about it he put her off, and when she asked him about it a second time, he put her off again, and this time he looked embarrassed.

Angelina considered herself nobody's fool, and thought she knew the wiles of men very well indeed. Hadn't she taken Louie from his foolish wife, and didn't she know how to keep him, no matter what his family said to him about her? But this young woman was something different again. She and Louie looked cozy and friendly and once she'd seen Louie pat the girl on the bum and the girl had not complained. So by the time Louie refused to 'drop by' for their usual Tuesday night, Angelina thought that she had things figured out. Her suspicions were confirmed when she saw Louie kiss the girl a quick peck on Wednesday afternoon, before he went upstairs.

Angelina was furiously jealous, but tempered the emotion with curiosity. Who could blame the girl? Any one could see that she was just a child and everybody knew that Louie was an old leech. She needed to know where Louie had met Calico, how long they had known each other, how close they were...

"You and Louie like each other a lot?" she probed. Oh yes, came the answer. He's the best.

“You been in his new apartment?” Angelina asked. The girl didn’t like the decor, but enthused that the bedroom was wonderful!

“Have you been to the apartment much?” was Angelina’s last, infuriated question.

“Yes,” answered the girl “but usually he comes over to the house.”

Then Calico offered the secret Louie had requested of her. “Louie’s really my uncle,” she said.

Now this is an innocuous enough sentence, if spoken to someone not already in the throes of jealous fury.

Unfortunately, Angelina was in the throes of jealous fury. Of the two possible conclusions which could have been drawn from Calico’s statements, Angelina drew the wrong one.

Angelina’s response was both immediate and startling. She stepped back, paled, and crossed herself. Then she swore in Italian, grabbed a briefcase and rushed upstairs. The rest of her actions were recounted by Louie to Jacob with a reasonable degree of accuracy.

Angelina’s destination after leaving Louie’s shop can be deduced from the fact that, like Elouise, Angelina had been raised a staunch Catholic. In her hours of need, she invariably turned to the church. Her intent was to speak immediately to the priest on hand, but she was stymied by the fact that he wasn’t there. She was delayed because he was at the hospital ministering to a sick parishioner. By the time he returned to the parsonage, she had spent her time productively, alternatively praying and working herself into ever greater heights of emotional frenzy. From the torrent of half Italian, half English that she poured out upon the ‘good father’ he assumed the worst, and headed back toward

the store. When he found it boarded up, he changed direction and drove toward the Jones family household. Remembering the volatile nature of some of his past relations with the Jones-Lapierre families, he detoured by way of the hospital where he knew the on - duty members of the local force would be trying to get dates with nurses and requested the officers' assistance.

So it was that about the time Louie was describing the afternoon's events to Jacob, the priest was knocking on Henry and Elouise's door with two policemen in tow. By some mischance, a stray Airedale that had been hanging around the front door entered behind the police. They assumed that it belonged in the house, and Elouise assumed that it belonged to the police. In the few moments it took the priest to explain his errand and for the dog to pee on the living room rug, Elouise knew that her attempt at matriarchy was done. Whether it was this realization or being told that Calico and Louie were chronically engaged in carnal congress was the reason for her faint is unclear, but faint she did. It was performed with such speed and grace that the four men in the room did not catch her, and the dog did not get out of the way. It was at this moment that Calico chose to come down from upstairs and ask what was going on, which complicated matters immensely.

The emergency family meeting convened that evening was held in the home of Wendy and Jacob, and attendance was compulsory. Only two absences were noted, the first being Tommy because he had to work, and the second being Calico. She had refused to participate, choosing instead to stay at home and shampoo the living room rug with a rented rug cleaner. She was unwilling to face the entire family after repeatedly denying the priest's accusations. Elouise and Henry entered Jacob and Wendy's kitchen fully

prepared to commit grievous bodily harm on Louie. They were taken aback to see him sitting in a chair with numerous cuts and bruises and explaining how he'd been answering questions put to him by two very suspicious R.C.M.P. officers for the last half hour.

Elouise replied resolutely, "We will live in disgrace. We must, then we will move."

"It wasn't my fault," Louie was saying. "Angelina won't answer her phone. How did I know that she was going to turn into a crazy person? I didn't know that she would run around saying lies about me."

"Lies about you? Elouise screeched at him. "What about Calico? What about us? I cannot go to church. Who cares what we say - the father is a man of God and he will be looking at me. He will believe what he wants to believe and maybe he tells other people. All the neighbors saw the police come to the house, they will want to know things. What am I suppose to say?"

"Elouise, we will have to tell them the truth, or we will have to lie," Henry decided decisively. "Louie, if you hadn't gotten involved with that woman, this would never have happened."

"But, but..." Louie weakly responded.

"You poor dear," said Tina. She went up to Elouise and put her arms around the other woman. "Bennie and I will stand by you, no matter what happens."

"Non, non, I will be alright," shrinking back from Tina's embrace. We will not hold up our heads...Maybe we will send Calico away."

"Send her away?" Henry was as astonished as everyone else in the room.

“What sort of reputation do you think she will have now?” Elouise asked. “This is not big, this town. She cannot have people talking about her. If she goes away then things will settle down and we will stay. It will be best for everyone.”

“Maman, you are over reacting,” said Suzanne, as she entered the room. “This is not the nineteen fifties - people don’t get sent away anymore.”

“Those things haven’t changed so much,” Elouise said with a firm conviction. “everything must be normal.”

“Calico isn’t normal,” Martin commented. “She doesn’t even have a boyfriend.”

“So get her one.” Bennie laughed. “Back in the old days, we used to get fixed up with girls by each other all the time.”

“I wouldn’t want to be part of that,” was Martins answer. “It makes sense,” Bennie charged on excitedly. “You and Suzanne can introduce her to some nice guy. Then she’s happy, he’s happy, Louie’s off the hook, and everything looks like normal.”

“No way,” Martin said. “It’s just not done like that anymore.”

“So maybe it should be,” Tina squealed. “I think it’s a great idea.”

No one in the room wanted to agree with Tina, but no one in the room had any better ideas, either. Faces grew thoughtful, then heads started to slowly bob up and down. “Maybe we give it a chance,” Marie tentatively suggested. “It might work out,” Wendy said.

“I think it’d be good for Calico,” Louie added.

“People wouldn’t talk then, Elouise,” Jacob contributed. “Fine, but who’s goona do the dirty work?” Martin asked. “Who finds some poor guy, and convinces him and Calico to go out with each other? They probably won’t even go out a second time.”

“We won’t know until we try,” said Henry with a hint of motorcycle in his voice. “Martin, I think you could start to like this idea, if you really tried.”

“You betcha,” Bennie put in. He had been included in the motorcycle conspiracy by Henry on the previous night. “Martin, you and Suzanne can find some friend of yours who’s a nice kid to go out with Calico. That’s no hardship, she’s a pretty girl. Show him a picture.”

“But do it quickly,” Elouise ordered, as she watched her youngest daughter being sacrificed on the alter of conventionality. “She should go out this weekend. It will make her forget everything and everyone could see nothing was wrong.”

As Suzanne drove Martin to his apartment later, they commiserated over their mutual problem. The mood inside the-car was black, and in one of nature’s little ironies, perfectly matched the howling wind and pelting rain outside.

“You really blew it,” Suzanne lamented. “Why’d you go on like that?”

“Me?” I didn’t say anything.” Martin replied. “What are you talking about?”

“You should have just given them an instruction manual called “How to get Calico a date? Haven’t you figured out that if you come up with the idea, then they’ll tell you to go and do it.

“What was I supposed to do? You came in late -- Maman was going on like it was the end of the world. She was about three seconds from sending Calico to a convent.”

“Maman couldn’t have done anything like that,” Suzanne informed him. She’d get halfway to doing it and then change her mind.”

“Well, it wasn’t my idea anyway.” Martin continued in his defense. “Uncle Bennie really ticked me off with his jolly little Mrs. Matchmaker act.”

“Ms.” Suzanne absently corrected. “So what do we do now?” “Get her a date with one of the guys in your office,” Martin threw out off-handedly.

“Not a snowball’s chance in hell,” Suzanne said vehemently and punctuated her words by spinning the car around a corner Viciously. “All those guys would drool in their drawers just looking at her. They’re all old enough to be her uncle themselves and either married or on the make or both.”

“There’s got to be somebody,” Martin begged.

“This one’s yours, buster’ Suzanne ordered. “You gave them the idea on a silver platter, and you got the strong arm because of your motorcycle, and she’s your only little sister, so this one is your’s, your’s, your’s.”

“Thanks for your fabulous help,” Martin said. “All the guys I work with are engineers. You want to feed her to the lion’s loins?”

“Don’t flatter yourself,” Suzanne answered dryly. “From the guys I’ve seen around your shop, she’d be as safe as with a nun.” As Suzanne dropped Martin off, he reflected on the fact that she was probably right. The guys he worked with were structural analysts which, in the engineering school hierarchy, put them only one level higher than computer hacking geeks. They were not known for their amorous abilities, general social skills, or table manners. Most of them combated these deficiencies through a combination of shyness and brashness, which usually consisted of alternatively blushing and then successfully making the most inappropriate comment possible.

The means Martin struck on of entrapping his victim sprang in part from his Uncle Bennie’s suggestion and in part from his knowledge of office dynamics. At work the following day, Martin made a great show of putting a photograph of Calico into a

small picture frame (bought for that purpose) on his desk. His actions were surreptitiously noted, and it was not long before one of the guys ‘happened by’ to lean on his desk and inquire after who the cute dish was?

Martin explained that it wasn’t a new girlfriend, just his kid sister, the picture didn’t do her justice, she’d just been dumped by her boyfriend, she was out of school for the summer and footloose and fancy free, and if any of them thought he’d ever let them get a date with her, they were out of their minds, Martin’s tone was older brother protective but subject to negotiation, and by the time late afternoon arrived, everyone in the office had been around for a glance and a few cautious questions.

At quitting time, Martin went over to the local tavern for a beer and was trailed by a few of the likelier candidates. After letting them buy him more than one round, Martin fell into quiet conversation with his selected victim. When the time was ripe (and more than a few beers had been consumed), Martin produced the even better photograph of Calico he’d put in his wallet that morning. By closing time, he’d reluctantly agreed to ask Calico if she’d consider a date with a ‘special friend’ from work.

The next morning, Martin phoned Calico and asked her if she’d do him a favor. One of the guys in his office was really nice, but he’d been dumped by his girlfriend and would Calico consider going out on a date with this guy? Calico didn’t want to, but finally succumbed to Martin’s pressure, as he had known she would. Martin hung up the telephone, then yelled across the office to his victim in earshot of everyone. “Okay, Kevin, it’s on if you want it, but she says it had better be tonight because she’s thinking about visiting the relatives for a while.”

The ruse was transparent, but possible because of the lack of sophistication in the room. Within minutes, everyone was waiting to hear Kevin's phone call to Calico and how he would handle himself. It was that pressure Martin had been counting upon and it did not fail him. Kevin found a secluded telephone an hour later, and returned to his desk whistling to himself. Martin telephoned Suzanne and had her check things out with Calico. When the message came back that the date was on for that night, Martin leaned back in his chair feeling pleased with himself. He had the family off his back, owed Calico a favor which she'd never ask for, and had gotten a free night of drinking out of the business as well. All things considered, he thought that he'd done pretty well by himself.

He felt even better when he received a telephone call from his mother, who sounded very pleased and told him that Calico was going out on a date with some friend of his. He wrangled an invitation to dinner, both to have a chance to look at his motorcycle, and to ensure that the family did not interfere with the plans he had set in motion. His self satisfaction abated somewhat when he heard that Wendy and Jacob were also coming to dinner and that Bennie and Tina were dropping by later in the evening for cards. All he needed, Martin thought ruefully, was to have the whole family start meddling.

Upon arriving at the household after work, Martin discovered his concern had been warranted. Wendy and Jacob had already arrived, and Henry Jones had taken Jacob out to the garage to initiate him into the conspiracy of silence around the motorcycle. Martin found them in the garage, where they had moved the motorcycle around the family car and propped it up against the inside of the garage door. They were deep in

discussion of its more complex parts, such as the gas tank. It took Martin a good fifteen minutes to convince them to go back into the house, and even then he had to promise that he would show them the owner's manual after supper.

Supper went as well as could be expected, given that Calico was certain she had been set up to date some eight eyed loger from the outer moons of Jupiter and Jacob kept making jokes about how Henry had once set him up with the worst date of his life. Wendy and Elouise spent their time trying to be unobtrusively soothing, while Henry spent his time trying to shut Jacob up. Between bites, Martin discovered that he had a hitherto unknown ability to sweat copiously. By the time the meal had ended, the nerves of everyone around the table were frazzled.

After supper, Calico went upstairs to change and the interminable wait for Kevin began. Martin had hoped that Kevin and Calico would be spared the scrutiny of Bennie and Tina but their cheery hellos beat Kevin's arrival by a full five minutes. When Kevin did arrive, however, the means of his conveyance so astonished Martin that his worries about family obstacles were almost completely forgotten.

Kevin swung into the driveway and parked in the only space available, which was directly in front of the garage doors. He looked casually, but appropriately dressed for a quiet date on a warm summer night. His air of self confidence was supported by the fact that he himself was supported by a burgundy and black vintage two seat convertible of vaguely British ancestry.

Martin was dumbfounded by the incongruous combination of this beautifully - reconditioned sports car and what he thought of as his thoroughly inept office mate. At work, Kevin had never demonstrated any interest or knowledge of the finer aspects of

motor vehicular transportation. Yet, upon exiting the house (with his father and uncles closely in tow), Martin had to admit that it was indeed Kevin who got out of the car to greet him.

In a way, the car lubricated the formalities and embarrassments of the formal introductions. By the time Calico and the other women had left the house, the men were so deeply engrossed in their admiration of the little automobile that the women's presence almost went unnoticed. By unspoken agreement, the males had decided that anyone who drove such a fabulous car (even if it was his father's) had to be a good guy. The women were more reserved in their favors, asking pointed questions about how fast it could go, and noting with approval the recent addition of shoulder belts. As for Calico, she seemed somewhat relieved that Kevin could not be cast in the leading role of "The Furball from Outer Space," and appeared pleased at the prospect of a spin in such a jaunty little car.

With much ado, Kevin opened the passenger door for Calico and then closed it after she was seated. He strode around the car, got in himself and started the engine. Their good - byes made, Kevin pushed in the clutch, shifted into first, hit the gas, and popped the clutch.

Kevin really should have shifted into reverse.

The little car sprang forward, neatly knocking Martin over its front grille and bonnet, and attained the speed of six miles an hour before ending its forward motion by crashing into the garage doors.

Six miles an hour is not a great speed. When the object traveling at six miles an hour weighs in excess of one thousand pounds, however, a great deal of forward momentum is involved. At Elousie's insistence, Kevin and Calico had put on their

shoulder belts and so escaped injury. The same cannot be said of the garage door, which both crumpled and sent shards of metal flying into the garage. The same also cannot be said of Martin's uninsured motorcycle, which was the recipient of much of the forward momentum and many of the metal shards. As well, the X-rays at the hospital later showed that Martin had a fractured right tibia.

It was not until the next morning that Henry Jones had enough time to assess the damages. Kevin, the sports car, and Kevin's sorrowful father had been removed from the premises the previous evening by a cooperative tow truck. To Henry's eyes, each of the three looked equally shattered. The garage door was beyond repair, as was the track it rode on. The damage to the motorcycle had not yet been calculated, but given the curious shape of the front forks, the bill would be extensive. An additional surprise was the damage to the family car, the windshield of which had been shattered by a falling chainsaw which Henry had been storing in the rafters above the car.

All of this excluded the personal cost, which was comprised mostly of Martin and his broken leg. After having his leg set at the local hospital, Martin had been placed in his old room in the family household. He had spent a restless night making his sentiments known to all. He was accepting no responsibility for the situation, alternatively blaming Kevin, Suzanne, Bennie, Louie, Calico, and the whole family in general. Calico was so upset by all this that she had forgotten that Martin had arranged the disastrous date and forgiven him his part in the affair. Henry had given her some money and sent her out that morning to buy Martin some flowers for his room. From the flurry of phone calls that Elouise had been making and receiving since breakfast, Henry predicted that the family meeting that Sunday night would be a classic.

He was not disappointed. Barring Calico, who had once again refused to attend, the entire family was present. Out of consideration for Martin, the meal and meeting took place in Elouise and Henry's house. Martin occupied a place of prominence at the table, with his leg in its large cast. The meal was marked by its careful politeness, which foreshadowed the storm of recriminations which broke over the table once the children had been dismissed.

"Were you out of your mind?!" was the question which rang round the table from mouth to mouth. Martin was blamed for introducing a variable like Kevin into the situation. Suzanne was blamed for not helping Martin. Bennie was blamed for suggesting the idea of a date. Louie was blamed for being involved with Angelina. Bennie was blamed for not taking Calico back into the donut shop. Elouise was blamed for raising the problem at all, and Henry was blamed for Calico's existence in the first place. Even Wendy and Jacob did not escape recrimination for their minor role in events.

Meanwhile Tina kept saying, "No one is really at fault, you know." She did not seem to notice that she was at odds with the general sentiments of the conversation. Fortunately, the closeness of the room contributed to the noise level which spared Tommy from having anyone notice that he was constantly snickering.

Eventually, frustrations abated as everyone realized the intractability of the situation. No one was willing to admit that their position might possibly be wrong. As this realization sunk in, a general mood of despair settled around the table.

"So what do we do now?" Henry asked. "We haven't got Calico a job or a boyfriend or anything else to do. Anybody got anymore bright ideas?"

I

No one was willing to address that particular question.

As they were mulling it over, the doorbell rang and Elouise went out to the front hall to answer it. The silence in the dining room was such that it allowed everyone to hear the following conversation, which produced in them ever greater degrees of incredulity.

“Hello, does Calico Jones live here?” asked a strange male voice

“Yes, but she isn’t here right now,” answered Elouise carefully. “I’m her mother. Is something not right?”

“No, no, everything’s fine. My name’s Hielstra. I just wanted to bring her her wallet. She left it in my store yesterday,” he said. “Her identification told me where she lived, but I didn’t have a chance to phone because we’ve been so busy at the greenhouse, so I just thought I’d drop it off on my way home.” “Thank you very much, she could have come to get it,” Elouise said. “That was nice of you.”

“Well, I was also hoping to get a chance to talk with her. I wanted to know if she’d made any decision about my offer.” “What offer?” Elouise asked, immediately suspicious.

“When she was in the greenhouse yesterday, we got to talking. She knows as much about flowers as I do and I’ve been in the business thirty two years,” he told her. “I sort of asked her if she’d be interested in coming to work for me. My wife is not so well, and I really need somebody to take her place in the front, in the shop.”

“You want Calico to work for you in a flower shop’?” Elouise asked in a wavering voice.

“Well, only if that’s okay,” he replied. “There’d be some work in back in the greenhouse for her too, getting shipments ready.”

“Would you like to come in?” Elouise asked in a dazed way. “No, my wife’s waiting in the car. But if Calico wants to work for me, have her come round in the morning. If she can’t come by, maybe she could give me a call. Here’s my card - the number’s on it.”

With that the man was gone, down the walk to a waiting car. Elouise returned to the dining room to a chorus of exclamations. “She never said a thing,” Henry burst out.

“I should have known something when I heard her singing,” Suzanne observed.

“Working in a flower shop,” Bennie mused. “And a greenhouse.” Wendy added.

“She stopped to smell the roses, and now we’ll never get her face out of the flowers,” Martin concluded. “Now if she just had a boyfriend.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t worry about that,” Tommy stated. “So far as I know, Calico and a friend of mine are getting pretty close.”

“What?!” Henry shouted.

“Oh, it’s alright, Uncle Henry,” placated Tommy. “He’s a really nice guy.”

“Son, why didn’t you tell us about this before?” asked Jacob “Nobody asked me,” was the inevitable reply. “His name is Rudolph Malcolm Bilgewater.”

“Bilgewater?” exploded Louie. “What kinda name is that?” “It’s okay, Uncle Louie,” insisted Tommy. “His friends call him Rusty.”

Finis

Artificial Intelligence as a Disease of the Heart

Patrick was always enamored of bicycles. This was the first story he attempted when he retired from the work force. It is preceded by a writing note about his personal experience as a cyclist and a journal extract written on completing the story.

Undated note

There is a unique quality about being a cyclist on a fine spring night. You move in almost complete silence – the little noises you make left behind in your wake. There is a feeling of invisibility as though your passage is a secret process marked by you and you alone and of interest to no other. What little exercise is required brings your body and senses alive and the pleasure of this existence is mingled with the feeling of curious vulnerability. I know no other moment when I have felt so transparent and so in touch with my surroundings, with the beauty and with the night.

Journal Excerpt

August 31, 2001

Today, I finished my first story. I feel a great many things. Disappointment, that it is completed, recognition of the need to move on, elation, that I actually did it, and sadness, because it will probably never be read by a very large audience and I will not become rich and famous as a consequence. Nevertheless, it was fun to do and gave me purpose and a reason to get up in the morning. As a mental health project, it succeeded in its goal, and I am thankful for that. It is entitled, "Artificial Intelligence as a Disease of the Heart."

Artificial Intelligence as a Disease of the Heart

As he walked into Olympia Cycle'n Ski, Andrew Blindly was a young man with a problem. Recently, he had made a visit to his doctor's office and that learned gentleman had given Andrew his first truly adult experience. The doctor had listened to the recitation of Andrew's most recent complaints. He had placed his stethoscope against Andrew's chest and thoroughly taken Andrew's pulse. He had examined the results of tests he had insisted Andrew have performed at a local hospital. He had paused and hummed and taken off his spectacles. Then, he had taken a deep breath and had looked Andrew squarely in the face and told Andrew that if he did not immediately begin an exercise and diet regime, Andrew would be dead of heart disease within five years.

... It was with the stride of a man bent on a mission from God (or more accurately on mission to keep from meeting God), therefore, that Andrew walked into Olympia Cycle'n Ski. Andrew approached a wall of hanging bicycles, replete in their high gloss paint and alternating gold and chrome parts, and Andrew felt much as Daniel must have felt upon entering the lions' den. His trepidation vanished however upon spying a distinctive racing model festooned in red paint and emblazoned with the exotic logo "Paris." It hung separate and alone as if a thing apart and it spoke to Andrew of breeze and sunshine and excitement....

... Paris hung suspended and gleaming in oiled abandon without need of adornment or clutter or fenders. Paris was compact and sleek and built for speed and Andrew knew that, regardless of the cost, he must have her (him?). The bicycle shop staff attempted to dissuade him. It was not the cycle for a novice, they said. It was not built for city riding, they said. It was not the right bicycle for a man with a larger frame, they said. Andrew would have none of it. With careless indifference, he proffered his

father's credit card with the caveat that they change that uncomfortable looking narrow seat for something more appropriate to his style of riding. Say, that wide one, for instance...

... "What?!" was the senior Blindly's hoarse cry. Had Andrew gone insane? His father's face turned a color which made Andrew wonder if heart disease was not a genetic problem throughout the family. Andrew's mother, as usual, came to his defense. "That's what bikes cost nowadays," she said. "I'm sure that he'll make good use of it..." and her voice held that note of finality which spoke more eloquently than any words could, it's better than the alternative. With that, the matter was sealed and all that was left for Andrew to do was eat his cottage cheese, celery and watermelon supper and promise to rise early and shine and put his new purchase to good use.

It was not exactly early, and Andrew did not exactly shine but he did rise, and did so with no more than a few pathetic grumblings. He munched stoically on a meager breakfast and made his weary way to the garage. He opened the door and looked at the alluring bike cautiously. He resolved that, today, they would do things differently. He went over to his father's workbench and took down a screwdriver and a pair of pliers. These he applied to the toe clips, rattrap and saddlebags of a CCM Super Cycle that his father had handed down to him ten years earlier. It had been ancient then and he had seldom if ever ridden it. The toe clips, he attached to Paris's pedals and the rattrap and saddlebags, he mounted above the rear wheel. Obviously, the parts were not compatible and the rattrap ended up tilted from left to right at an angle which made its utility questionable, but Andrew was imaginative and applied himself contentedly and vigorously. As he worked, he occupied himself with a fantasy that he was repairing his

bike during the Tour de France, which he later went on to win. When he was finished, he put the heavy lock on the rattrap and secured it into place with a bungee cord. Then he decided to take Paris out for a little spin. Now that she was properly dressed, the only thing appropriate to do, he decided, was to show off his new love interest to his friends. With that in mind, he climbed aboard her and, the garage door yawning widely behind him, Andrew sailed forth blissfully in utter and complete ignorance....

... Tom and Jerry did not seem to (have the same sentiments) suffer from the same feelings. They stood before Paris like camels inspecting a Picasso. Well, if you have to, Jerry said. Tom just looked at it and scratched. Bicycles were obviously something with which they were only vaguely of familiar. They had exciting news of their own. Smartguys had gone six steps. Andrew was ecstatic. When had they run the test? That morning. Jerry had written fourteen lines while putting in an all-nighter, Castle and Norbert had done a successful pre-amp, so just for fun, Jerry had run it. By the time Tom got up, Norbert had spit out the printouts and they're sitting on Jerry's desk. Just dump the bike in back, Tom suggested. Andrew had Paris locked to the back fence in a heartbeat. They went inside bubbling excitedly about ballyhoos and cache.

Paris was disgusted. Not only did this unmitigated, ridiculous, pompous blowhard not know how to ride a bicycle or treat a bicycle, he couldn't even tell a male bike from a female one. Paris thought of himself as a considerate bike. Indeed, he thought of himself as a quite considerate bike. It behooved his Gallic ancestry to think so. But how could he tolerate anything more of this? The performance in the bicycle shop had been embarrassing, to be sure, but almost amusing like, for instance, shows on television. The ride to the idiot's home had been frightening for both of them, but Paris

thought he had handled it well. It would have been impossible, Paris was certain, for even the densest human to mistake the signals Paris had given on that horrible night. The only proper course of action would have been to return Paris immediately to the bicycle shop, apologize profusely, and leave promptly - without a refund. But, instead, what had the idiot done? He had left Paris locked in a dark and dismal warehouse and risen the next morning to drape heavy tin trinkets over Paris as if Paris were some junk yard Christmas tree in need of scrap metal ornamentation. Then, the idiot had taken him out to show him off to the world! Paris had been paraded before the idiot's friends and described in a juvenile - and, frankly, completely inappropriate - fashion. But, to be abandoned so that the idiot could go inside and play with something called a computer? That was unforgivable! Well, no more. Paris would tolerate the situation no more. The trinkets were gone, even if Paris had to work at them forever! The trinkets would be gone and Paris would ride the highways and bi-ways, without help of Andrew or any man. The first thing to be done, he decided, was to remove that absurd seat. It was uncomfortable and ridiculous and, worst of all, it itched. He was considering how to proceed when he spied, through a crack in the fence, a much more magnificent adventure.

She lay on her back, reclining in the morning sun. It was obvious, there was nowhere that she needed to go. She just lay there, resplendent in her beauty and spinning her wheels. Paris took one look and swooned. She was neat and trim and pleasantly built with all the right accessories in all the right places. Everything was clearly top quality and it was love at first sight, or at least it was for him. He could only imagine what it would be like to have her slowly and, oh, so gently, slide herself atop him. He felt his spokes go weak and his seat post go hard. She was beyond him but it was spring and he

was young and she was fine and it was beautiful. Oh sure, she was human, but what the hell, he'd always been a liberal sort of bike...

In the days that followed, Paris occupied himself outside while Andrew occupied himself within. From conversations Andrew had with Tom and Jerry, Paris learned that the three were collaborating on a computer program which, in their words, would revolutionize relations between humans and machines forever. According to them, when their program, Smartguys, was finished and released, the line between the two groups would blur forever. It was about at this time in their conversations when Paris would blur a bit, himself. They would continue without noticing and wave sheets of computer paper at each other which were covered with tiny strange symbols. Paris had no choice but to learn that their technique was to have their computers write the program for them. They had nicknamed their computers Castle and Norbert and, apparently, the two were engaged in some kind of conversation. All that Andrew and the others needed to do was refine the program until the two machines were capable of distinguishing between each other, like an actual human being. Dependent upon the success of the day, the three were annoying in either their elation or depression. Whatever the tenor of the discussion, the words "artificial intelligence," were in use a lot.

...It was inevitable that two such focused personalities as Andrew and Paris, with their own separate projects and agendas, would come to clash. For with the first successful testing of Smartguys, thoughts of perspiration and imperiled future respiration vanished from Andrew's head. Every morning he would dutifully rise early and, fortified by only a light breakfast, climb aboard Paris. In his backpack would be his mother's healthy, if somewhat skimpy, lunch. He would quell his misgivings over the value of two

wheeled vehicular transportation, slip two or three heavy computer manuals into the saddlebags on the rattrap, and pedal over to Tom and Jerry's. Once there, he would sit all day before computer screens and eat the leftovers from Tom and Jerry's previous night's fast food binge. At the end of each day, he would return home perspiring profusely and be rewarded with a healthy and hearty meal.

Paris, by contrast, busied himself with more physical, but equally questionable, pursuits. While he was willing to acquiesce to their joint travels to The Home of the Girl Next Door, (for that was how he had come to think of Her), Paris did so only to spy on Her. Paris was thankful a wooden fence separated them, however, because his shame would have been unbearable if he had been forced to appear before Her in shackles and such absurd attire. The certainty of this conviction necessitated the removal of Andrew's unwanted accessorizing. So it was that during his forays into the realm of voyeurism, Paris acquired some success at unfastening Andrew's lock. The first time Andrew noticed that the duct tape holding the rattrap struts to the rear forks was frayed, he put it down to simple wear and tear. This sort of thing was to be expected in the life of an active cyclist. He was surprised somewhat, though, to find his repairs frayed again after two days, but he added more tape, as was required. This time, he made certain to do a thorough and complete job of it. He was astonished, therefore, when one week later as he dropped the lock and computer manuals into the saddlebags, the entire rattrap assembly fell off. No simple addition of more tape would repair this! Andrew was forced to ride home with saddlebags, lock, computer manuals and rattrap draped over him like some overburdened snail with the contents of his passage upon his back. Not only did this ensure that he was in peril of life and limb, it also made him late for supper.

With that first collapse of the rattrap, the battle between Andrew and Paris was formally joined. Each day, Andrew would rise and stride manfully into the garage. Once there, he would gird his loins with weaponry carefully selected for that day's combat. Duct tape, string, pliers, screwdrivers and bicycle parts of every shape and description were taken into the assault. On one horrific occasion, even Crazy Glue was put into effect, but Andrew determined it to have dangerous personal implications, following careful reflection during a visit to the Urgent Care Ward of the local hospital. The morning sortie completed, Andrew would drive his victory home by climbing atop Paris and bullying him over to Tom and Jerry's. Yet each afternoon, notwithstanding anything Andrew had used or anything Andrew had done, by the time Andrew rounded the house prepared to ride Paris home for the evening, the ground around Paris would be littered with bicycle parts and all Andrew's machinations would be for naught. Andrew would be forced to ride home once again draped about like a snail, in disgust, and in defeat.

As Andrew became ever more adept at his repairs to Paris's accessories, Paris became even more skilled at their removal. For, as anyone who has ever had to cope with the mechanical depredations of the maturing adolescent will tell you, it is much easier to take things apart than it is to put them back together. And Paris was definitely a maturing adolescent. As summer had progressed and temperatures had risen, The Girl Next Door had continued in her sunbathing. She was Paris's alone to spy upon and she had given him more motive to continue in his efforts than Smartguys had given Andrew to continue with his....

... Meanwhile, Andrew was having a miserable day. Tom and Jerry had met him at the door and their faces spoke eloquently of things he did not wish to hear. The test of

the last night had not gone well. Castle and Norbert had talked for a seventh of a second and, if printed out, their conversation would have gone well over six hundred pages. Unfortunately, most of it consisted of inane riddles and even more inane answers. They sound like a couple of monkeys trying to swap recipes for making a banana, thought Andrew dejectedly. He studied the computer screen for the next three hours and then, suddenly, he knew it was over. For him, the project was over.,,

... Andrew wheeled the bicycle off the grass behind the house and onto the back lane. He felt an overwhelming need to get away and was at a loss for anything more to say. He placed one foot on the pedal nearest to him, and like the expert cyclist he had become, he threw his leg over the bike as he pushed the bike forward simultaneously. It was a perfect running start. He transferred his body weight onto his other leg to begin peddling and dropped onto his seat. It was the act of an instant and it looked magnificent. Unfortunately, his seat was no longer there.

The morning had been a miserable one for Paris as well. Despite his every effort, the lock remained immovable and he remained propped beside the fence. Since he had failed in that, he had consoled himself by applying his efforts to the bicycle seat. Why not? It was destined to come off eventually. He had succeeded in completely removing the two tiny bolts holding it in place but he had failed to remove the seat itself. Some type of friction between the seat and a pressure plate was keeping it attached but he was certain it would fall off with some sort of simple jarring. Unfortunately, he had never anticipated anything approaching the effectiveness of the full weight of Andrew's body.

Let us pause for a moment and silently commiserate on the sudden meeting of male sensitivity and seat post and crossbar and handlebars and sidewalk. Nothing need

be reported here but that Andrew rediscovered his voice, albeit in a higher register. Nor let us fault him for the nature of his utterances or for his intent upon rising. For while he had escaped severe injury, he was not without insult or suffering or indignity.

.... The emotions of Tom and Jerry at this moment must be wondered at, as they moved so quickly from despair to desolation to shock to utter amazement. To see their friend, whom they had known always as the meekest and gentlest of souls, (well, c'mon let's be honest, probably the laziest of souls), to pick up his beloved bicycle and hurl it across the back lane? Then, to watch him lean it against the neighbor's garage and begin methodically kicking in the spokes? Such folly was madness and, probably, the result of too much exercise. Whatever the cause, their safest course of action was obviously one of studious non-interference. This was an activity, they felt, which fell well within their capabilities. The four made a curious tableau. It could have been frozen for all time, indicative as it was of striving and frustration and the perils of thwarted desire.

"Are you all right? I saw you fall from the house. Do you need help? What are you doing?" She stood there, The Girl Next Door, and her voice was warm and brave and curious and full of concern. Paris looked up from the ruins of his impending destruction and, had he been given a choice, he would have gladly chosen destruction over the picture which stood before him. For there it was for anyone, even someone without eyes, to see. Andrew stood before Her, in confusion and injury, and she stood before him, solicitous and radiant. It was as if Paris could see their future before him, working together to repair his shattered parts, buying him a new seat and rattrap and saddlebags, walking together with him on a moonlit night and when Andrew leaned over to brave that first kiss, Paris would be resting between them. It was too much and more

than too much for the heart of any poor bike to bear. For the first time in his existence, Paris lost consciousness and he collapsed and crashed into the pavement at their feet. So it came to pass, but not all as Paris had envisioned it. For The Girl Next Door knew bicycles and knew how to ride and taught Andrew much of those things he needed to learn. She would not tolerate such indignities as rattaps and saddlebags and insisted on fenders and helmets and bicycle shoes. She spoke to him of riding and exercise and bike care and although he never did learn how to tell a male bike from a female one, he was the better man for their conversations. He never did enjoy the sport however and, five years later, refused her suggestion that bicycles be the theme of their wedding ceremony. Which may have been for the best, given that Andrew Blindly never did remember to follow his doctor's advice, and the bicycle got the girl in the end.

A Christmas Story

Patrick pondered over what could he add to the literature of Christmas stories. His own unfinished version offers the beginnings of a tender adventure written for children.

A Christmas Story

(an incomplete short story)

I sat in my wheelchair and stared in disbelief out the door of the building where I worked. The most magical and wonderful things are supposed to happen on Christmas Day, I thought. But not this Christmas, and not to me - and especially not tonight. Outside, a snowstorm was blowing so fiercely I couldn't even see the street. I couldn't tell whether my Handitransit bus had driven up. What kind of bus driver, I wondered, would be brave enough, or foolish enough, to come and pick me up on a night like tonight?

I wondered what I should do. My bus would arrive any time now. But it would wait for only a minute and then drive off to pick up another passenger. If I couldn't see outside, I might miss it. But if I went outside then the front door of the building would lock behind me. I would have to unlock the front door if I wanted to get back in the building. I had the door key in my coat pocket but I was in my wheelchair. There would be no one around to help me. Opening the door by myself would be very hard but I decided to try going out. I pulled my scarf tighter around my neck and pushed the door open with my feet.

The air was cold as I pushed through the front door and rolled through the snow to the curb. I looked up and down the street for my bus but I couldn't see it anywhere. I

could barely see anything! I turned my wheelchair and went back to the door to go back inside. I reached the door and fumbled the key out of my coat pocket. My fingers were so cold they were numb and, as I tried to fit the key into the lock, the key was so slippery it dropped from my fingers; with a pretty tinkle and a jangle it disappeared into the snow below my feet.

This was a bit of a problem. It was getting colder outside by the minute. I dug my fingers into the snow frantically, but I couldn't find my keys anywhere. It was time to call for help. I reached around to the knapsack on the back of my wheelchair and pulled out my cell phone. I pushed the button to turn it on and got the shock of my life. The batteries of my cell phone were dead! I stared at the door in amazement. I was really in big trouble. It was getting colder by the second and there was no way for me to get back inside and nobody knew where I was and all the buildings were locked and my wheelchair wouldn't roll through the snow and I didn't know what to do!

"Excuse me, please, sir," said a voice over my shoulder. "Are you by any chance waiting for a bus?"

I turned my head and nearly jumped out of my skin! Almost nose to nose with me was a wrinkled brown face with laughing, dancing eyes. It had a wispy beard of black and white, with wrinkles everywhere, and the strangest yellow hat on his head I had ever seen. But, oh joy of joys, there was also a Handitransit uniform underneath the face and I knew that if he was a bus driver, then somewhere nearby, he had to have a bus.

"I dropped my keys," I said. "I was waiting for the bus."

"Oh, good, good," he replied. "That is very good. Such a night, eh? So cold. Wait, I will find your keys." With that, he was on his knees in front of me, brushing at the

snow and looking for them. As I put my cell phone back into my knapsack, he said, "Oh yes, here they are," and handed the keys back to me. Then he chuckled like he was having the best day in the world and, stepping around, grabbed the handles of my wheelchair and rolled me over to his bus.

"Where did you come from?" I asked. "I didn't see the bus before."

"You were looking for your keys when I drove up," he grinned, as he opened the loading door and lowered the lift for my wheelchair. "Such a night, eh, such a night? And look at you," he grinned. "No hat on your head, and no gloves. You're not wearing gloves. It's too cold, - you could freeze."

I backed my wheelchair onto the lift and he pushed the button to raise the lift up to the right height. I rolled backwards into the bus and he closed the big door behind me. Then he nimbly hopped up the stairs and closed his door behind him.

"Here," he said, laughing. "Someone left this on the bus a few days ago. You need it tonight, I think, eh? A Christmas present. From me to you."

He held up a knitted toque for my inspection. Printed on it in big red letters were the words, "Start Your Day With A Smile". Without any warning, he opened it wide and pulled it down over my head.

"Hey," I protested weakly.

"That is better, much better," he smiled. "Now you will be warmer, eh?"

As he leaned over to put on the straps that hooked my wheelchair to the floor, I took a closer look at him and his hat. He was a lot older than me, and had gray hair and a short beard that was turning white. His uniform was baggy on him and he looked pretty short. He also seemed awfully cheerful.

"You're going home, eh? Oh, yes, thanks for that," he said, as I handed him the ticket. "You were working? That's too bad, to be working on Christmas Day. What were you doing?" he asked, as he sat down behind the steering wheel.

We started to drive off. I looked out the window at the snow-covered street and I thought, why shouldn't I tell him?

"I've been thinking about it all day," I replied. "I had to work Christmas Day. People don't know it but they are depending on me. Let's see them eat their Christmas dinners without me. My job might not sound important, but you just try eating supper without heat."

"Eh?" he said. "You fix the broken ovens? Is that what you do?"

I laughed. "No, no," I said. "I sit in an office with a phone. When somebody can't get their furnace to heat their house, they phone me. I work for the gas company. I phone the person who comes and fixes the broken furnace. I sat there all day and the phone rang four times. But that's four families who'll get Christmas dinner because I told the repair person to go to their house. That's my job. It doesn't sound very exciting and it's not. I read a book for most of the day. But somebody has to do it and four families will be able to eat their Christmas dinner tonight because of me." Then I laughed again, but not very happily.

"You don't sound happy. You don't look happy either, eh?" the little driver said. "Why not? That's an important job. People have to eat dinner."

"I know, I know," I shrugged. "But it's not exciting. It's not like I'm a firefighter or a brain surgeon or anything."

"That's a good job," he said again. "It's a good job. People don't want to be cold

on Christmas. It's like when I first came to this country. My first day of work and it was a day just like this one. It was a Christmas Day, twenty-four years ago." I could hear him laugh.

The bus suddenly skidded and swerved from side to side in the street. "Whoa," I shouted....

The Great Kazoo

This is transcribed from a recording of several children's stories about the Great Kazoo that Patrick used to tell to his little daughter Rebecca. Later Rebecca and Cailum used to listen to them as bedtime stories.

(Taped October 1999 at the suggestion of Deborah Stienstra)

This is how I met the Great Kazoo. I admit I don't like moving and we moved right into a new town, the town of Smallville and I was six years old. And we moved into a new house and we moved into a new town and we moved into a new neighborhood and all my friends were in my old neighborhood, and this wasn't very much fun at all. And my mom told me "don't worry you'll like it" and my dad told me "don't worry you'll meet lots of new people". Well you know what? I knew I would but I still didn't like it very much and I was worried about the new house, I was worried about everything.

Well we got to our new house. We started moving in our furniture and I started bouncing off the walls, running from room to room. Which room would be my room, which room would be my mumma and poppa's room? Which room would be the baby room when the baby came? Which room would be the kitchen – I didn't even know that?

I was going crazy, running around here, there and everywhere. My momma said "Get out of my hair you're driving me c-r-a-z-y! Get into the front yard and stay out of the mover's way. Well the movers were moving the furniture in and out and in and out and I didn't know what to do and suddenly I noticed that next door to us there was a kid. He had on red hair and he had on blue eyes, he had on blue jeans and a white T-shirt and he looked really clever. And I said (ominously) I don't know about the looks of this character, and he looked at me and I looked at him. Well he stuck his thumbs in his pants

pocket. I stuck my thumbs in my pants pocket. He swaggered out to the front of his sidewalk. I swaggered out to the front of my sidewalk. He sneered at me. I sneered back at him. He made a big horking sound. “H-o-o-o-o-r-k-i-n-g.” I made a big horking sound “h-o-o-o-o-r—k--i-n-g” He spit! I was shocked! At I looked around. My momma wasn’t there so I spit too! He looked at me . He was shocked too! He said “Ooooooooo.k” I said “Ooooooooo.k”.too. He put one finger right beside his nose and he blew his nose!!! That’s right, it was gross. I was shocked! I decided that if he could do that I could do anything he could do. I reached up to my nose and I put my finger against to the side of my nose and I snotted too (Becca’s laughter) He couldn’t believe it! He couldn’t believe his eyes. His jaw almost dropped right out. I decided I could show him. He reached around and he was about to stick his hand right underneath his belt and I thought I’d beat him to it. I pulled down my pants and I reached into my underwear and just then when I had pulled down my – my momma grabbed me and yelled “What do you think you are doing? And she grabbed me and dragged me right back into the house my ear, dragging me with my feet around my ankles, my knees around my ankles and my pants around my ankles too and I was going ow!ow!ow!ow! all the way home. And my mamma talked with my poppa and I know she talked with my poppa ‘cause I heard her say, “Your son is a hooligan” later on and I asked him, ”Poppa what is a hooligan?” and poppa said, “Don’t worry about it, try to be good and don’t make any trouble and don’t make any fusses.” And then I was going to bed later on that night and I was thinking about all the things that happened that day – everybody moving in and this strange new kid next door and all of a sudden I said to my mom. “Mom my room doesn’t have much air in it. Can I open the window?” And my mom said: “O.K”. So she opened up the

window just a little for me see? And there was this window right across the lane from me right in the house beside me and that window was already opened but the room was dark. And then from the other side of the room from the house next door I heard an 00000000h sound. And I went “ahhhh this is my bedroom and I want to sleep in it but there is something in the room next to me, across the lane and it’s going Ah0000000000h, it was, and it got louder and louder and louder. I was more and more scared. But I knew how to defend myself. I went to the bathroom and I got a glass of water and I threw it across the laneway and right through the other window and I heard from the other side of the window in the house next door “Wah wah wah Wah....Well! I thought I got whoever was over there pretty good so I peeked my head ooooooover the side and I heard giggle, giggle, giggll, AND THEN a big splash of water came over and soaked my head and I went bluuuuugh, bluuuuugh, bluuuuugh. I said ‘I’m not putting up with this and I went into the basement of my house. My parents were sitting in the living room talking quietly. I went to the basement and I got a big bucket and then I went upstairs and they didn’t see me cause I was really quiet. I went to the bathtub and I filled up this whole bucket with water and I heard this noise from the room next door and it said “Good night Kazoo” And the voice at the other end said “Can you please just close my window?” And I heard this noise coming over to the window and I said “I’ll get him now” and I threw the big huge bucket of water right across between the two houses, right through the window, right on to whoever it was that was on the other side of the window and that was when the Great Kazoo’s poppa went YEIIIIIII !EEEEEEKS! and got soaking wet. And the next thing I know I heard my poppa from downstairs calling”What’s going on? And my momma ..”OH NO!” And all the lights in our house went on and all the lights in the

house next door went on and and I thought OH OH!and from the other side of the window, on the other side of the alleyway, from the house across the way I heard a voice go ..HEHEHEhehehehehe and I knew that I got the Great Kazoo's poppa all wet! And I knew I had met for certain the sneekeyest, the trickiest, the slickeyest guy I had met in my life and that was the first time I met him. And you know what he was called? He was called the Great Kazoo.

Now that story was about how I met the Great Kazoo and this story is about how I met the person who lives on the other side of the house. And that story and that person is called Deborah and the story is called "Deborah and the First Day at School"

Now, the next day after I met the Great Kazoo, believe it or not, was the very first day we had to go to school and our school was about two blocks away and my mamma and my poppa had already shown me where it was and I knew I could walk there, no problem, all the kids were going there. In the morning my mother packed a lunch for me. And she said "Here you go" and she gave me a smoochy kiss good bye on the front porch. And the Great Kazoo's mother was giving him a smoochy kiss goodbye on their front porch. And then I heard somebody else on the other side of our house going "mmmseech" too and giving them a smoochy kiss goodbye too and we walked out to the sidewalk and there was me on my lawn and the Great Kazoo on his lawn and there was somebody else on the lawn of the house to the left of us and that was a GIRL, pretty much like he Great Kazoo except she had red hair and green eyes and I looked at her. I didn't know who she was. I didn't want to talk to her. That's right. And her name was Deborah. I didn't want to talk to her cause I was a little bit shy so I went over to the Great Kazoo instead. And I said "UMMM Hello!" and he said "UMMM Hello!" I said "Who's

that?" And he said "that's the kid next door" I said "Who is she?" he said "The kid next door's name is Deborah" I said "Oh!" He said "Yeah" He said: "I try to play tricks on her. Want to play a trick on her?" I said "Um O.K." He said "Sure, you just do what I do. So we walked over to where Deborah was just about to walk to school and she said "Hi Kazoo! Who's your friend?" And the way she said it I knew that she knew what a sneaky- weeky- trickey wickey guy he was and the Great Kazoo said "This is your new neighbor. This guy's name is Pat. He's o.k." and she said 'Uh-hun" and she said as we walked to school "When did you move in?" We all talked about that for a little while and she said "Are you nervous about going to school?" and I said "No, I'm not very nervous" and the Great Kazoo "Yeah, yeah, and he's got lunch and everything and I said "Right!" and I said "What did you get for lunch today?" and she looked in her sandwich and she said "UM – let's see, I've got some cream cheese sandwiches and a little bit of tofu and Mum gave me an apple. What do you have?" And the Great Kazoo looked in his bag and said "UM the same old usual stuff" he sez "worm sandwiches" And she said "worm sandwiches! Oh yuk!" And he said "Yep worm sandwiches" and he said "What did you get Pat?" I looked in my bag and I thought of the grossest thing I could think of and I said: "The same old usual stuff- lizard eyeballs" when I said "Lizard eyeballs" even the Great Kazoo turned a little green. And Deborah said "Boy oh boy, I'm not going to have anything to do with either of you guys and she walked ahead of us. And the Great Kazoo said "Well, we got her pretty good!" and I said "yeah pretty good" And He said I have an idea and I said "What's your idea?" He said "you're going to be the new kid in class and the teacher's going to ask what's your name? And you are going to tell her and then ask her if we are going to do Show and Tell.

Cause she'll always say this to you , Shell say "Oh do you have anything you want to show and tell? And you say yes" And then we whispered a little bit and we had a plan. It was a good plan.

Well we went to school and the Great Kazoo did not even come in the classroom and I noticed right beside the school there was a little sheep farm and the Great Kazoo, he went over towards the sheep farm because we had planned it all. And when we went into class everybody said their name and then the teacher noticed me and she said "What's your name and I said It's Pat Kellerman. And I said "Are we going to have show and tell to-day?: And she said "Yes we will!" Is there something you would like to show and tell?" And I said "Yes" and just like the Great Kazoo had told me to do I held my hand up to the ceiling and I said "Sheep" because the Great Kazoo had told me he was going to let some of the sheep out of the farm because they always got out, he said, and he was going to let them run around in the school yard. But trick of tricks, the G. K. played a trick on me! When I held my hand up to the ceiling and I yelled out "Sheep" the back door of the classroom opened up and in ran three sheep and they were all going baaah! Baaaaah! Baaaaah! And they were all making terrible noises and all the kids started yelling and jumped up on their desks except for Deborah who immediately grabbed one of them and started pushing them out of the door and the teacher whose name, by the way, was Miss Crankshaft, she said "Oh my! Sheep! Come on let's get these sheep out of here? How did those sheep get in here? And I heard the G.K. going heheheheHEHEHEHE! And the teacher asked "How did those sheep get in here?" And the principal had to be called and eventually we got the sheep rounded up and got them out in the yard just in time for us to go out to recess where we went out for recess and the farmer came and got his sheep and

brought them back. I said to the G.K. “Did you let those sheep out of the farm?” and he said “No the gate was open. They just followed me when I walked in and I said “Wow! That was a good trick” and he said “I liked it too”. And then – then Deborah did something. She came over to us and she said: “ Well it’s going to be time to each lunch soon and I noticed that she had been hanging around where our boots and coats and lunches were. And she said: “Why don’t we check to see what we’ve got for lunch?” And the Great Kazoo said “O.K., maybe I’ve got a bit of candy in there. “ So he went and he opened up his lunch bag and he went “Yuck!” I said “Kazoo, what’s the matter?” and I went running over and Kazoo said “Uuug!” and he really did turn green. And I went and looked in my lunch and went “Oh yuuuk, it’s full of spinach and I did turn green. And right away from behind us I heard Deborah and she was going”Heheheheheh” which meant that she had played the trick on us. And that was the first time I met Deborah and I knew I found somebody as sneaky and as tricky and as wicky as the Great Kazoo.

LETTERS TO DEB

Patrick left behind a legacy of his passion for Deborah in this collection of letters. They are an imaginary tour de force about life after death and how he would continue to relate to her. As his imagination soared he played with cosmology and with historical and literary figures and then created a story within a story.

Dear Deb,

Beginnings are such fragile things. Before them, a nothing so profound it beggars conception or description. After them, anything of whatever form or substance. Between the two, the beginning, that most tenuous of transitions. How to describe such an instant? It is so sudden and fleeting there is scarce space enough for thought. But after that moment, oh, such an expanse for words! The *tabula rasa* rolls out to the infinite and just lies there, ready for our reality to be inscribed upon it. The promise of creation is all there in creation's absence and possibility. But as soon as the first mark is made and the first character completed, parameters are constructed and boundaries set. The vagaries of past chance and circumstance are molded into experience and sifted through practicality's skein. Grammar and reference and meaning intertwine and what was the stuff of the infinite becomes more akin to a complex minuet. How could writing be anything but reality's pale shadow? How else could the opportunity afforded by nothing be seen as anything but a most profound beauty?

No wonder my writing always sucks. There's no way I'm up to the task. Fortunately, it's not my fault. It's obviously the process that's flawed.

I've no way of knowing if this message will ever reach you. If not, smile and throw it on the pile of vain and squandered efforts, humanity's attempts to figure out the purpose of the universe. Fear not, the pile is big - it'll support the weight.

Like everything else, this message is the product of a process and, in this case, the process began with genesis itself. For me, the great leap beyond acquiescent acceptance into consciousness was the spark called imagination. It must be so for every conscious being - otherwise why else the impetus to move beyond what *is* to what *could be*? Imagination was the first building block and gave me the next great leap forward. I had thought and, therefore, I was. Having discovered I could creep, the gambit made, I strove to crawl. Consciousness told me that there was a present, imagination informed me of the possibility of a future. So, I wrapped my consciousness in my imagination and asked myself if I was a past. With that, I reconstructed memory and reclaimed my person and was myself.

Perhaps it is in the nature of the human beast. Perhaps it is a consequence bred of past practice and long familiarity. While we can live in isolation, perhaps it is that we have little experience with and would never choose a universe of ever only alone. I needed desperately something, or anything, beyond my thoughts and beyond myself. I needed something of the familiar, something of my past, something of sensation, for there was nothing. There was neither sight nor touch nor taste nor sound. I existed in a place of memory and thought and self and it was not enough and could not be enough, and it left me uncreated because I was so alone. Would that be the limits of existence forever? Had some inadequacy condemned me to this? Unable to move, unable to see, unable to feel, unable to hear. I was only abject terror and I reached out with my desperation and I did the only thing I could think to do.

I turned on the lights.

It really is a very, very Big Bang.

Why would anyone dare undertake anything? There are so many pitfalls and barriers to our actions. Worse still, why would anyone compound such feeble efforts with vain attempts to represent them in words? When Pandora's box loosed all troubles on the world, do you remember the last thing to flutter tremulously into the air?

It was hope.

Good night. I love you.

Pat

Dear Deb,

I think I can be excused a little arrogance. When I try to remember the details, I realize my first memory was a glimpse of wave and submicroscopic particle, the laws of quantum mechanics holding court. Gravity and wave physics conspired to create the first partnership ever, constructing particles that boiled about each other, collapsing under their own mass or, in their glee over existence, tearing each other apart. Some particles were so bizarre they fled from my perception at speeds greater than that of their later cousin, light. Perhaps they are out there still, racing like terrified sentinels warning darkness of the ravenous illumination to come. Others couldn't compete with the temporal nature of this reality and left for timeless greener pastures, elsewhere. Things also came into being for which humans have coined no terms, things as yet undiscovered.

Until then, I had known what I had known without vision, for there had been no light. But now, cause began to follow effect and the Big Bang begat time, and time and gravity begat light. Then, like the sorcerer's wayward apprentice, light stole the master's tools and set the limits of time and space, taking to itself their magic, and the universe was made anew.

I can hear you ask, where was I? While the stars burst into the heavens and the galaxies began to whirl? Where was I as gas clouds took strange shapes and planets began their parabolic strolls? With light to see by, and time enough to look, where was I?

I opened my eyes and found myself rotating slowly in space, naked, above a small blue-green marble speckled with swirling white clouds. We circled together around an insignificant star in an unimpressive part of an unimpressive galaxy. With such a fabulous display around me, and such tremendous beauty at my feet, I did what any marginally sane entity would do.

I curled into the fetal position and bawled like a baby.

I love you.

Pat

Dear Deb,

Well, this is annoying. Spinoza just read my first two letters and now he's laughing so hard, he's almost pissed himself. Nope, I'm wrong. He has.

He said I could never get these letters to you and, even if I did, that there's no way you'd get the point. Didn't I realize it was a futile endeavor?

I told him he's underestimating us both and, anyway, maybe they're not really for you. Maybe they're to help me cope with people like him.

He hates losing arguments.

As to delivery, for the first letter, the system that seemed most appropriate was a paper airplane. Since I wasn't content with the ordinary, I didn't go with the dark paper airplane configuration. Instead I used a model designed by a NASA flight engineer, with both forward and tail wings and a terrific leading edge. I released it gently and watched it

descend downward, performing graceful loop-de-loops as it went. I thought: if it doesn't reach her, it's not because it wasn't beautiful enough.

I love you.

Pat

Dear Deb,

Spinoza may prove right about one thing. I am beginning to understand the size of the project I've undertaken.

When I was about thirteen, my mother purchased a set of the World Book Encyclopedia. I can still see the white cover with its black stripe and the gold edging on the pages. I think she thought that with six growing children and a deceased husband, she would ensure a comfortable retirement by investing in our education. I don't know if it helped, but I can trace my understanding of things like the internal anatomy of human beings to the World Book's transparent diagrams of leopard frog guts. I was even more captivated by drawings that detailed the operation of mechanical objects and certain industrial processes.

When I thought of writing these letters, I decided to start from the basics and work my way up. Constituent parts. Hence the start of the universe.

I love you.

Pat

PS.: Some might call me just plain lazy, but my grasp of the accurate has always been weaker than my grasp of the inane. Which gives you some idea of how to treat these letters.

Dear Deb,

How did you like the spider's web? Wasn't it beautiful? I didn't even arrange for the glistening dewdrops and the shaft of light. It was just happenstance. But it took forever teaching that stupid bug how to write. Don't worry if that sounds a little strange. Einstein was right. Temporality is an incredibly relative concept.

Sorry if the writing is a little wobbly. I'm writing on this rough wooden plank. Where did I get the wood? Remember the tree? I sent some of it over to the sawmill.

An uncle of mine cut the planks for me. He really knew what he was doing. He spent forty years of his life doing very dangerous work in lumber camps and sawmills, so I guess our little chore suffered by comparison. He kept watching what I was doing to help and laughing. He kept saying, "Sweat, you bugger. Your mother always told you to stay in school." You should have seen him call up that sawmill, though. He did it just like it was nothing at all. But then he told me he hated planing wood and he thought that I'd be able to do that job myself. Unfortunately, he was wrong. I got frustrated and decided instead to concentrate on training the spider. Now, for my efforts, I have a bunch of rough wooden planks and the painful lesson that spiders are really, really, dumb.

I'm willing to bet that the sawmill and the spider was some sort of experiential lesson. Unfortunately for them, I think I'm too dumb to get it. Maybe some things are ground into our eternal cores. Or else I'm their spider.

I had this strange conversation with one of my guys once. It explains a lot. He was arguing that no one had bodies in the here'n'now because they weren't needed

anymore. He told me, "You don't understand nothin.' Its gonna be different. There's gonna be beautiful music playin' all the time. Its gonna be special." So I asked how he was going to hear the music if he didn't have ears? He got a disgusted look on his face and told me I was hopeless. (I had a lot of fun, but I was such a shit.)

So I have to admit to being a little stuck. I really don't want to blow this. But I feel like the physicist who disturbs the conditions of his experiment as a result of his observations. How do I write something that I won't distort and lose in the shuffle? Maybe that's why Spinoza and everyone else is being so patronizing. I'm beginning to wonder if I'm not the idiot child.

Spinoza wanted to make me feel better so he has just told me the following story.

There was this guy named T'narcinimpay who lived in the City-state of Atilia about sixteen hundred years ago. Most of Atilia was located in what is now the southwestern area of Sudan. The Atilians had perfected an astonishingly beautiful form of art. Small brown eggs were collected from the pens of birds kept for this purpose. The most perfectly shaped of these eggs were selected and hollowed out. Cracks and imperfections in the eggs were repaired with a mixture consisting of starch from a cassava root and saliva from a spittlebug. The eggs were then given to the Carvers who scratched tiny, detailed drawings onto the eggshells. Portions of the shell not drawn upon were then treated with a rudimentary form of solvent. This solvent had two effects. First, by etching into the eggshell, the solvent produced a subtle layering. Secondly, the color of the treated area changed from brown to copper. With repeated applications of the solvent, the copper color became brighter and brighter still.

Although fragile, these eggshells were strikingly beautiful and were prized

throughout northern Africa. As a commercial activity the eggs were, for Atilia, the source of tremendous wealth. The production of a single eggshell could take several months and the highest social stratum of Atilian society was reserved for the finest Eggshell Carvers. Within that elite, T'narcinimpay was the greatest carver of all.

The Atilians followed the practice of adding on an additional syllable to people's names to signify their rank and the social class achieved. T'nar had begun life as a member of the lowest class of artisan but by the time he had been accorded the name T'narcinimpay, he was both friend and confidante of the Godking. As center of the City-state and as the very purpose of life itself, only the Godking was beyond a complex name. It was a tribute to the centrality of the Godking's existence within Atilian society that his name consisted of a single syllable. That syllable was O.

One day, commercial travelers presented the Godking with a treasure never before seen in the kingdom. It was an unfertilized ostrich egg. The Godking ordered T'narcinimpay to cover its surface with depictions of a historic triumph won by O's ancestors, - the Battle of Rolling Heads. It was this battle, supposedly, that had made possible the founding of Atilia. In T'narcinimpay's drawings, this battle was to serve as the central focus from which all of the City-state's well-being flowed, past and present.

T'narcinimpay looked upon the honor bestowed by his young Godking with both elation and dismay. The ostrich egg was the canvas of which he had always dreamed. However, he knew that he was a man of advancing years. He doubted that he had time enough to complete such an extraordinary undertaking. As well, he was frustrated with the limitations of the difficult skill he had mastered. He felt intuitively that there must be some means of expression beyond the forms that he knew but he lacked any grasp of

what those were. Nevertheless, he also knew that an instruction from the Godking was worth as much as, or more than, life itself and so he set to work - but with a quiet air.

The Godking O and the court of Atilia were astounded, therefore, when T'narcinipay emerged from his studios and requested a public viewing of the eggshell on the very first anniversary of his seclusion. The silence of the unveiling was only broken by the Godking's whispers, "It cannot yet be done; it cannot yet be done." How much more amazed were they, then, by the first sight of abstract art in all of Atilian history!

The eggshell was covered with swirls and shapes reminiscent of the Atilian landscape, of sunsets and trees. Dyes created by T'narcinipay had stained the entire eggshell's surface with colors and hues of every description. The carved portions were rough and mottled, reminiscent of Atilian architecture and of its desert and rock. Flecks of gold were embedded in the egg, as were varied items of green and orange and red. It was a masterwork of heart-rending beauty that would set the standard for Atilian art from that day forward.

The Godking was dumbfounded. The eggshell was completely outside his comprehension and beyond the comprehension – it was obvious to him - of anyone in the court. But he could not deny its powerful effect nor, as Godking, could he be seen to falter.

"Exactly as directed," he said. "It shall be called the Battle of Rolling Heads."

"What was that all supposed to mean?" I said. Spinoza's story didn't much help and I guess I sounded vexed.

"I dunno," he said. "Maybe it's hard to put the whole world onto an eggshell, even

if you're a genius. I didn't make the story up. It really happened. Look it up in the Memoirs."

Maybe I will. But let's leave that for a letter for tomorrow.

Good night, I love you,

Pat

Dear Deb,

I'm getting more than a sneaking suspicion that things up here may be a little more complicated than they first appear. Before I go into that, I've got other news. Spinoza took pity on me and arranged a few lessons on the environmental controls. I would have figured them out myself eventually.

I get the impression he thinks my activities a little arcane but was prepared to tolerate them if they helped me become acclimatized. According to him, though, my interest in letter writing is slowing my progress in other areas. Funny, I'd have thought it would've been just the opposite. Few individuals here-and-now undertake concrete projects providing exercises in varied manipulative activity.

Sorry about that, I lapsed into turgidspeak. It's a logical outgrowth of turgidthought, which gets used sometimes here-and-now. It's inevitable. Prior linguistic associations unduly complicate communication with unintended imputations necessitating terminological precision. If you see what I mean.

One of the tutors Spinoza managed to wrangle into helping me turned out to be our old pal T'narcinimpy. I should have known. There had to be more to Spinoza's

telling me that story than met the eye. Layers within layers, I guess. I'm going to begin not trusting anybody soon.

T'narcinipay turned out to be a very gracious and patient individual. He was a short muscular balding man with iron gray hair and wore a thigh length toga. I got the impression that he thought my activities a little arcane but was prepared to tolerate them if they helped me become acclimatized. We spend a fair bit of time discussing technical tricks like "thought to action" and "choice and control" and he told me that his experience as an Eggshell Carver had taught him volumes about patience and restraint. I think he may have been practicing those qualities, when I commented wryly, "I'll bet."

Eventually, I worked up the nerve to ask him about the accuracy of Spinoza's story. He looked at me cautiously and then asked me to repeat what I'd been told. He waited quietly until I was completely finished. "It was somewhat more complex than that," he said. "Some things happened after I presented my masta to the King which have some bearing on events." I asked him if he would correct the things I had been told and continue the story.

"You must understand," he said, "that I have been asked about this story many, many times. Atilians argued about it for more than two hundred years. When I first arrived, Atilians lined up to hear it from me personally or would stand before me in a crowd and request that I tell it. I didn't mind. But, by now, I have seen so many other things and I think there are much better stories to tell. When I look back at my masta, I know that there are better works of art to create. There are so many other painters and sculptors. The Europeans had the Renaissance and the Impressionists and Picasso. I had nothing. I carved eggshells. It is impossible to compare.

"Spinoza did not tell you enough. The Godking added to my name. He took from his own name and gave a little bit to me. For that afternoon, they called me T'narcinimpayo. No Godking had ever done that before. There was a ceremony and my masta was placed in the Royal Treasury – we guarded that Treasury even closer than we guarded the King himself. After the ceremony I was dismissed and went outside, into the courtyard, to breathe some air. One of my students called to me. I looked over at him and, in that moment, the guard behind me bonked me on the head."

I must have looked shocked. He just grinned. "You are surprised. But no one can blame C'in," said T'narcinimpayo. "He was just a guard doing as he was told. It was an Atilian thing. And, anyway, what could I have done after my masta? It sounds stupid now, but it was a kindness then. It all evens out."

I told him I thought he was taking a very generous view of things. He laughed again.

"Not so much. The story of my masta spread all over the City-state. People came to see it and they argued about it as if it were a thing of good or evil. Many people never even saw it - and they argued about it the most. Two hundred years later and they were still arguing about the masta - so much so that word of this carving spread far beyond Atilia itself. No good could come of that. A big tribe from the south of us became envious and they raided Atilia, robbed the Treasury and stole the egg.

"And so that is the end of the story?" I asked.

"Oh, no," he said. "An even a bigger joke was yet to come. Halfway home they took my masta out of its wrappings to look at it. It slipped from the hands of the man who held it and the dromedary that had carried it forty miles stepped on it. Goodbye,

masta."

"But weren't you saddened," I continued foolishly, "by this pointless destruction of your contribution to history?"

"Oh, no," he said. "It was a fitting end. The supposed hero of the Battle of Rolling Heads was the great, great, great grandfather of the Godking O. I found out later that his name – which no one had ever recorded - was B'is. It means 'sandy loincloth'. He was a little smarter than the other people of our tribe, but not by much. He spent the battle hiding under a dead camel. When it was over, he climbed out and found everyone wounded or dying. So he told everyone that he was the hero and they were all too tired to argue. That was the founding act of the Atilian dynasty. That was the beginning of my egg. Has anyone ever told you, that you're overly attached to traditional forms of artistic representation?"

It was my turn to laugh. "You think I have problems?" I said. "You should read about Francis Cornish in this book by Robertson Davis, What's Bred in the Bone."

His face went from surprised to quizzical and then showed a sudden comprehension. "Oh," he said, grinning, "That is very funny. Goodbye."

Oh, and I think he's just being condescending, but Spinoza told me I should say hello.

I love you.

Pat

Dear Deb,

I would appreciate it if you would read these letters aloud. I always enjoyed the sound of your voice and especially your cadence when reading. Who knows, I may even

be listening.

I've been thinking about the phrase 'Hi, there'... I often said that to open our evening conversations. Usually, I knew what your response would be before I said it. It was a way of asking you how you felt about your day and how you were feeling generally. But I knew the answer before saying the words. You never hid your emotions from me.

It took me a while to realize that intimacy is just a shorter way of saying 'sharing emotions'. I was lucky to be married to someone who shared so easily.

I love you.

Pat

Dear Deb,

St.Valentine's Day... Up here, the calendar date is a matter of personal preference. I let Spinoza pick today's date and I suspect I'll rue the day. He wants me to go on a double date, tonight, with him and Ezra Pound. My date is to be Lizzie Borden. It's a blind date and I really don't think I'm up to it. Former ax murders and all that... Maybe come Halloween... There are lots of people to choose from - but it's not them, it's me.

It has me thinking about the social construction of love. A group of university students once created a formula for finding 'true love.' They worked out that universities offered the greatest possibilities... I remember reading the formula in a newspaper, after my first stint at university and still unattached. I was so depressed. I figured I'd definitely blown my best chance. I figured I was doomed to become a monk.

Thanks for helping me avoid the monk thing.

Good night. It's you I love.

Pat.

Dear Deb,

I suggest that you repeat these phrases aloud as often as necessary in order to keep your memory of me in perspective:

My partner was vain.

My partner thought he was God's gift to women.

My partner was sexist.

My partner was really, really lazy.

My partner left me with all the goddamn responsibility and work.

I am so mad at him!

Please repeat these words whenever you feel the need.

Good night, I love you.

Pat

Dear Deb,

So last night we went to the Ides of March dinner theater. At first, it was pretty much what you'd expect - Caesar in bloody rent robes, Brutus being honorable and acting really guilty, Mark Anthony striding around, imperious - and horny for Cleopatra. A regular told me it was being acted by the individuals themselves. Then they all started doing campy send-ups of various literary-historical versions of the events in question. I didn't get all the references but the ones about Shakespeare were pretty brutal. Caesar was parading about, imitating Mussolini. Brutus was Genghis Khan - and, for some reason, Mark Anthony was Napoleon Bonaparte. Suddenly, the real Alexander the Great

and the real Napoleon Bonaparte showed up and I thought things might get ugly.

There's long been a feud up here about who was the greatest military conqueror of all time. It's a Brownie points sort of thing. Not in bad taste - it's their way of saying, "I was worse than you but, now it's all over, I'm sorry." Though it's not all forgive and forget. Some people up here are paying some pretty heavy dues. I think the dinner theater might have been some kind of penance thing – I'm guessing that a lot more was going on than I understood. Anyway, in the end all the actors started throwing plates and the whole thing degenerated into a food fight.

I had a good time but Lizzie Borden didn't like it. It turns out she's not a 'happy ending' kind of gal. I should've guessed. It's funny about social occasions like dinner theater and life. I was so nervous before going out but everything turned out all right in the end. Strange, eh?

Good night, I love you.

Pat

Dear Deb,

Let's discuss where I am and am not and what I can and cannot do. Sort of a job description... I am not looking over your shoulder second-guessing your decisions, mostly because I know you don't want or need me there. I am not hovering over Becca and Cailum shooing away pesky germs like some cross between a guardian angel and a demented can of Lysol. I am not available, sadly and unfortunately, to bail you and the children out of hot spots, financial ruin or life's assorted miseries. Happily, however, I am always available for discussion and consultation. My advice and suggestions will be bad, as usual. Be assured that they can be ignored without reproach. Please note:

Conversations may be monitored or recorded for training purposes.

As to exactly where I am and what I can do, that's more complicated. Think of me as in the space between the words or the lulls in conversations. Remember that I will be thinking really, really big. Should the Hubble Space Telescope discover that some stars have been rearranged to spell certain names, don't be too surprised if yours is among them. Alternatively, I am interested in figuring out exactly what is beyond light. So much to learn, and so much time to do it in. All of which is a complicated way of saying don't worry about me - I've got lots to do. Take care of yourselves. I'll see what I can do about the big stuff.

As to my job description, the most important part will be the provision of moral support. When you need some, just think of me. That's always good for a laugh.

Good night. I love you.

Pat

EXCERPTS FROM THE JOURNAL

After the introductory entry, excerpts from Patrick's journal over the years 1999 to 2003 are organized chronologically under specific themes: physical, emotional and mental effort; difficulties with his use of the computer; the search for his story; battling with depression; and domestic life.

September 18, 2001

...This is not a journal for any given subject or topic, instead it is a journal for any and every topic. The journal of a life? Perhaps not the most interesting of ones, but then whose is, given that we are our own worst critics? I would that I led the most interesting of lives, but that lot is not mine and, however much I might desire that (and once aspired to it), it is just a life. What a scathing condemnation that last sentence is. So be it. My life is my life. If you do not wish to read about it, you had better stop. So be warned and possibly tempted. Continued reading may be boring. Alternatively, it may not be for the faint at heart.

On his physical, emotional and mental struggles

April 22, 1998

...Since I have decided to end my employment, it is best that I end it quickly. I am becoming familiar with the use of my computer and my Dragon Dictate program. I believe that I have alternatives which will make better use of my strengths and which will provide me with more satisfaction. I have finally come to the realization that I am not being lazy. In truth, I will make better use of my energies and time by writing. I have concerns that I will be documenting without audience, given the profusion of information in the world, but I believe this is something that I should do.

Monday, Aug. 18, 1998

Today, in two different letters that arrived at the same time, I received my Canada Pension Plan notification and the approval of my Long Term Disability Insurance. Combined together, they will amount to approximately as much as I was earning after taxes. Because I don't pay many taxes now, it means that I will only take a slight decrease in my take home pay. It is very strange to think that I do not ever have to work again. When Deborah told me of the approvals I almost cried. Not from relief but from the recognition that this was an acknowledgement of my weakness. I do not want to be this weak.

So now I have to determine the purpose of my life. Not much to that, as goals go. I don't even know if it's the right goal. It may be a substantial waste of time to even ask that question. I don't know. Not having a job to do or to be forced to do by the demands of money leaves me feeling very odd.

Friday March 12, 1999

Even when there is nothing else to write, someone aspiring to write can still write the resolution, "every single day I must write."

The mindless repetition of doing something again and again and again and again and again either results in getting better or results in being fortunate enough to chance on a lucky moment in which all the stars line up propitiously and the piece of literary magic occurs. I don't expect magic. Not without effort and I am willing to put that in. I do not simply want to reflect upon my goal or my project.

Let's talk instead about some random thoughts I have been having. My recent thoughts have been returning again and again to the idea that, like the aptly named television program, ours is a "Lonely Planet".

Thursday, March 18, 1999

I do not have sufficient short-term memory to remember where my time goes. My last entry was Monday and now it is Thursday and only one day off for my birthday and another day just disappeared. That is not fair - it was spent working on the Standard Rules project, but it's still feels like it disappeared.

Deborah gave me a Harley Davidson motorcycle peaked leather cap for my birthday. It matches my Judy jacket and now I look like a biker 'wannabe'. At least I am not fat. Robert suggested leather chaps, and a Harley Davidson sticker for my wheelchair. I don't know whether to laugh or cry...

March 24, 1999

Yesterday, I did not feel good. Just the bowels, but I can't say I enjoyed it. So I spent my time writing a confused poem. I wonder if Shakespeare had bad days. Undoubtedly, and doubtlessly his worst surpassed my best. Such are the little triumphs of the little life. Strife, knife, life, strife...

April 12, 1999

Today started in a blanket of small-scale discomfort but somehow worked itself into a productive effort. Supper was made and laundry done thanks to an efficient homecare worker, phone calls were made and homecare supplies were requested and received, and now a moment or two with which to write. If nothing else, I have a varied and sometimes hectic life.

I have had a headache as a result of too much computer screen viewing and too much television watching. Of the two activities, I'd much prefer computer screen viewing because of the satisfaction provided by my writing, so if a choice has to be made,

television will just have to go. I have given up Scotch, sex, and my sight. I do not think giving up watching television will be much by comparison. It is strange that pleasurable vices have been slowly taken from me. Not that I think there is a moral there, by half. Or one that I would want to promulgate.

April 14, 1999

It would appear as if my disability will restrict my writing in the morning. It is really only until after my nap that I feel well enough to write. Today I listened to Milton Acorn reciting a poem on the radio. There was some delightful discussion about „voice.“ In Milton Acorn’s case, the words leapt out of the radio with such depth and had obviously been chosen with such care. I don’t know if I will ever have the strength to put such effort into my words. I imagine I will have to find my own voice, even if it turns out to be a sparse and lazy one. Who knows? Maybe there are people who want to read lazy voices and lazy books.

If you wanted to lie on the beach, you should have been a grain of sand. For me, this says a lot about doing nothing versus doing something. I prefer to be doing something, however badly.

Wednesday, May 26, 1999

There is so little time to write. Today I have made a rice salad, but the dressing is no good. The wheelchair hasn’t worked out either. I am very stiff and sore and pretty uncomfortable. („Pretty uncomfortable“ - a strange combination of words.) I have also been thinking about definitions of what is genuine, the commodification of culture, the purpose of pain, and related matters. I am spending more time accommodating my various disabilities. Not pleasant, but necessary.

Thursday, May 27, 1999

Just living my life is taking all my time. In some ways, I wish I could just sit here and write. No, in every way I just wish I could sit here and write. That is not to be, however, and I could never expect the things destiny or karma has, had, or will have in-store for me. The goal of writing something for publication may be impossible, but it is a nice goal. Having heard Mordecai Richler describing the woes of a „book peddler“ while on tour perhaps the real joy is in the imagining. The practical execution of the job might not be so pleasant. Tonight, Deb and Becca are going to a soccer game located at a school far away. I will have a chance to work then.

I have had so many ideas for stories. The Joshua Pictures, and others. I don't know the venue, or if anything will ever happen from any of this, but I sure hope so. As well, I hope that I will do more than hope.

Friday, May 28, 1999

Brutally hot outside. Even with air conditioning on, the inside of the house is hot. I am at the whim of the weather.

May 31, 1999

Things have shifted so quickly. I am now considering keeping the [hand-operated] wheelchair, the weather is brutally cold outside, and I can no longer deny that using the computer hurts my head. No pain, no gain. It has never stopped me before. Not out of determination, but stupidity. No one ever said stupidity suffered from apathy. A nice thought, that.

April 20, 2000

Yesterday was brutal. I began the day wrong, with a small breakfast, and compounded

the error by not eating enough throughout the day. Happily, yesterday was only one day long and today shows prospects of being better...

I had a very strange thought yesterday. It felt weird to have, as a project, planning for your own funeral. You are given the opportunity to structure what people will have as a memory of you. What do you want them to remember? What are you trying to say and how do you want to say it? So weird, so weird. There are endless choices of readings, music, songs for them to sing.

July 22, 2000

A hailstorm which peppered the house last night has me thinking about the extremes of Winnipeg weather. There is excessive cold, excessive rain, on occasion hail, rapid temperature fluctuations, and – occasionally - excessive snow. Throw in a painful package of mosquitoes and the occasional city-threatening flood and it is not surprising that most Canadians think that Winnipeg is somewhere best left behind as a youthful endeavor but not a place where one would wish to live. More fools they. It is only by facing extremes that one knows their own capacities. Unfortunately, it is a lesson which must be learned repeatedly because we so rapidly cast ourselves upon stony beaches of doubt and forget our past abilities. It is a function of aging and probably necessary in the grand evolutionary scheme. Or something like that....

January 12, 2001

And I am awake, and I am asleep. And I am awake, and I am asleep. I am a light bulb, flickering at the touch of my daughter's fingers. Is this what my disease demands of me? Two hours asleep for every hour awake? No wonder I get no work done. Fatigue becomes the constant of my existence. In the final analysis, sleep is really very boring.

Not much to serve as subject for conversation or creative writing. A distinct hamper on projects - and on maintaining other people's interest. The project becomes one of staying awake and that is a pretty boring project for everyone else.

I am so rusty at writing. I have not been writing for several weeks and even forming a coherent sentence is difficult. Certainly flow is always going to be a problem for me.

But now I can barely string two thoughts together. It will come; it will come. The psychology of our society has taken so many missteps. The psychology of a sick global society - that might make a good title for a book. would argue that the ills of our current existence are the result of having embarked on an erroneous path. Pollution, overpopulation, refugee movements are all a result of human greed. Too simple, too simple. What a stupid idea. My mind is better than that, but I am just too tired. I don't have anything really to write about.

Don't think it all away. The wise advice of the artist Mary Pratt. She led a life and whether as good or as bad as it could have been, it was hers. In the end, our lives are our own and that is all that we have ownership over when we leave this earth. Yeeuch, profundity. It makes me want to barf.

January 26, 2001

'There's a lot of use in empty symbolism.'

I have spent two days thinking about the process of writing and it has been vicious. This morning I have a nasty cold, probably as a result of my wonderful bag of germs. In consequence, I am giving up!

March 18, 2001

... My life is further complicated by my decreasing energy and strength. This morning, I

recorded the opening story of „‘Tis the season to Kazoo.“ Unfortunately, my voice sounded strained. After only one hour I was beat. Working that hard is tiring.

June 12, 2001

I had a bad sleep last night. There was a long period of wakefulness somewhere between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m. I did not think that I would feel rested today but then I fell asleep after Deborah and kids left and now I feel wonderful. Today has become cool and beautiful so I am torn between writing and getting outside. I have chosen the former because - well, just because. It is pleasant to feel this alive.

Yesterday, I went for my annual visit to the neurologist. It turned out to be very frustrating. I was treated to a visit first with her nurse, then with the doctor and then with some clinic nurse as well. They fussed with my medicines and my home situation but they really had nothing to say or do for me. While they were attempting to find some way to provide me comfort and themselves purpose, I became increasingly annoyed. I did not feel as if I was being listened to - they were patronizing and condescending in their well-meaning-ness. It is something for me to remember as well in my relations with Deborah. I may mean the best, but trying to solve other people's problems does not provide them the opportunity of solving the problems themselves.

Perhaps that is the biggest leap of faith. To entrust people with the opportunity to make their own choice even though the choices are wrong - especially if you know it is the wrong choice. I have to remember that for my treatment of Becca. Also, it would be wonderful for a second act for my writing.

October 20, 2001

Hopefully, I will be able to write for a longer period than I was capable of yesterday.

Who knows? Of course, I am still tired and I am very tired of answering the question, „How are you feeling?“ I feel tired. What else is to be expected? I do not think most people understand that hospitals release patients when it is convenient for them to do so and not necessarily when the patients „feel“ better. No, the characterization is unfair. Most people have had enough experience with health-care in the year 2000 to know that this is the case.

I came up with another wonderful phrase. Aggravated angels. Not perfect, but not bad. I would like to start writing again but I don't want to blow it. A common problem is that I imbue the writing process with such importance, I am scared to begin for fear I will go astray. Then I think that if I go astray, the wrongs cannot be unraveled and made right. So many fears - stupid, really. As if write cannot be made right by write.

October 25, 2001

...I feel very beleaguered right now. There is a substantial difference between being disabled and being ill. I think I may be moving into the section of my life where I am both and I am not enjoying it. The more time I devote to being miserable is the less time I devote to being me.

August 4, 2002

Precious moments are few and far between. When you can say, in honesty and to yourself, that was me, that was my best, that was the best of anything that I do. You can look back on what you did and feel a quiet pride, like you would like to show it to someone because it was good and deserved to be seen, but it wouldn't matter if you didn't because it would still be just as good and you would know it and nobody else really needed to know. That sort of thing happens in the morning when energies are

bright and the light different than any other time of day.

August 7, 2002

I am in the middle of an MS exacerbation. It's very strange. In the past, I have had only one other occasion when I really noticed the start of a new symptom, but - as of yesterday and today - boy, I am sure feeling it now. (I hope that this is being recorded by my computer for history's sake.)

On struggling with the computer

May 5, 1998

I have been very busy. As a consequence, I have had little time to write in this journal.

Also I have been frustrated with this computer program. However, with continued use, I am either becoming more tolerant or the machine is becoming smarter. I suspect the former, which speaks volumes about human malleability.

My writing is not quick when using this computer. However that too is an advantage.

More time spent in reflection provides me the opportunity to be more concise and to make use of the appropriate words.

I am now well and truly retired. I have delivered the appropriate forms to my doctor for completion, I have advised my employer, and begun a planning process for the future.

There are a number of tasks to be executed including organizing my computer to facilitate my activities and setting up calendar and address books.

Wednesday, May 6, 1998

The truth of writing with this computer program is that I will be fortunate to complete a page a day. I shall have to concentrate on quality and not on quantity. For the sake of

my voice, I will also have to speak in longer phrases.

Thursday, March 18, 1999

...I am becoming more adept with this program. I have begun to use it for moving within a document and not just for editing purposes. It has some interesting features. Certainly the speed of my work has progressed. Also, the recognition accuracy of my computer program has increased tremendously. Unfortunately, what I once considered clever usage of the English language and clarity of thought has turned out, on revision and editing, to be not much more than a misconception built on sand. I will just have to learn to write better.

The use of this program will mean that my work is not measured in pages, but rather in sentences - or even in words. While this is frustrating, I am thankful that I am able to write at all.

The necessity of editing my material while it is being written to ensure accuracy makes for additional complications. How do I impart emotional substance while being constrained in this fashion? How do I write "I love you" without the phrase sounding contrived and mechanical?

April 8, 1999

Today, I learned how to change the base font. It is an achievement that will drastically change and facilitate my writing because I will no longer be dependent upon Zoomtext for reading my text. This is amazing. I think I am in heaven. Admittedly, there are complications to writing in this format, but being able to see my work is so pleasant that I will accept the additional complications of reformatting. Correcting spelling errors is a pain, but not insurmountable. I am one happy camper. The proof will be in the pudding.

Will I be able to retain a coherent train of thought while writing in this font size? Will I be able to construct paragraphs that flow logically and seamlessly and bring delight to the reader? I definitely think I can.

April 27 1999

Today was difficult. I did not feel well and my homecare worker worked badly as a result of allergies. I only have a few minutes to write before Deborah comes home with Rebecca. Yesterday was a frustrating comedy of errors. I erased my morning's work accidentally and then caused my computer to malfunction in an interesting way. It began writing spontaneously by itself. I rather enjoyed that, even though the writing was incoherent. It was understandable but did not make any sense. It did, however, almost rhyme.

April 14, 2000

I have had to begin (again) this journal because my last journal was on a file that became corrupt. Computer glitches were causing my program to begin producing errors and eventually to lock up. Should my children ever wonder why their father wrote so little about them, let them read these words and know it was because these words took so long to write...

April 26, 2000

Writing with this computer program becomes more and more delightful. I have just discovered the „Delete“ feature. There is something to be said for reading the „Tip of the Day“ when the program boots up.

The computer date is wrong and I don't know the real date. Not that I much care. This program works magnificently on some occasions and badly on others. This leads me to

the conclusion that I may be stuck in the same impasse as Jeff [a homecare worker]. Jeff has such a profusion of ideas that he can barely concentrate on one before another idea comes forward to take its place. As well, his dyslexia and resultant lack of formal training in writing has barred him from occupational advancement and an outlet for his many ideas. By comparison, I have to contend with a computer program that malfunctions and requires that I check my work, thus interrupting the flow of my thoughts. As I said, we may both be at the same impasse. But so what if my words are laid out as a cardboard construction? Great poetry has never suffered from the effort put into the placement of the words. So again, why would I care?

Sept.12, 2000

As regards the hope of publishing any work, the chief difficulty appears to be my disability. The tape recorder mom purchased for me has the frustrating flaw of making a terrible noise whenever the automatic microphone is engaged. This is really frustrating. Trying to use the automatic microphone doesn't work, my hands don't work and, for me, the computer is very difficult to use in the DragonDictate Naturally Speaking program. My critical function gets engaged with the writing and I start erasing words and then entire paragraphs. As well, while writing, the flow is seriously hindered by the necessity of correcting the program errors. I am getting less down than I would like. Much less.

March 16, 2001

Fascinating.... Last night, Susie [*Patrick's sister-in-law*] came by and ran Norton Utilities through my computer. It is very noticeable how much quicker the computer is operating. This is a great aid. It's been my own fault to have not taken advantage of what this computer could do for me. Susie ran Norton Utilities at my request because I had been

having a number of crashes. Unfortunately they have persisted and this is frustrating. So I'm saving a lot. I may have to replace my hard drive. Deborah doesn't want me to do this because she has lots of other places she wants to spend the money.

Fascinating, as well. Someday the book will be written, but not by me, but not by me.

May 18, 2001

What a workout! Absolutely brutal and then some. I thought it would be easier - just set up a calendar on my computer and decide whether to back-date it like this journal or forward-date it for the sake of conceptual thinking. I chose the latter and will probably rue the day. Oh, well. No stone like one unturned. And promptly trod upon.

May 22, 2001

... Creating a calendar on my computer is, in fact, turning out to be a more laborious process than first expected. It is necessary to check and re-check the calendar several times, then record the proper notations on my computer calendar, then continue by reporting the notations in the proper format on the computer again, then check the time, date, and note again and again and again, ad nauseam. Not to mention the joys and limitations of this stupid program. Which is so stupid that I should edit and correct this paragraph. But I am too annoyed at how time-consuming the process would be so I am just going to move on.

July 5, 2001

I am deaf, deaf, deaf. The wonderful combination of fingers which root around in ears and a genetic pre-disposition to excessive production of ear canal wax means that I am learning even more about differing types of disability – interesting, that. Speech becomes garbled and distorted, the volume levels of the voice become confused; I experience ear

popping, strange spatial distortions, and changes in scalp sensation. Weird, weird, weird. Things are so confused for me, in fact, that I am having difficulty using this program. You teach me one thing. My war will always be slow. That's just a function of my disease and my different disabilities. That's okay. I will always have more projects I would like to do than those I can do, or will ever have enough time to do. That's not really a bad way to be. People are always trying to finish the unfinished symphony. I don't think they get the point. I really don't think they get the point.

September 20, 2001

I am working today without the ability to have the computer read my work back to me. Unfortunately I think my speakers are turned off. This may have happened last night, if Deborah was using my computer and did not want to wake me. Or else the computer is malfunctioning as a result of her work or its old age. I would turn the speakers back on but unfortunately they are at the back of my desk and I am unable to reach them. I will ask Felix [a homecare worker] to try to do it when he arrives in another hour. I would write that it is interesting to work without reviewing my writing, but it isn't. I am forced to move my cursor back and forth a fair bit. Well, such are the trials and tribulations of men and machines, especially half blind, crippled and aged ones. I mean, half blind and crippled for me, and old for the computer.

I realized that I wish to write well in this journal in order to maintain my interest if and when I might choose to re-read it. If I am to be my only audience, I should at least enjoy the work.

Boy, my lesson of the day is to strike while the iron is hot. Yesterday I began writing a piece about an author lamenting the lack of imagination in most works of fiction. It was

such an excellent idea at the outset but one day later, while the idea is still excellent, my enthusiasm for the idea has paled. Why? Is it that the act of writing is too hard?

Certainly, my method is harder than that of other people, but probably easier than it was for Shakespeare. Quill pens and parchment are no kindness to the continuity of human thought. Yet he persevered. Oh well - so shall I.

June 6, 2002

What a frustrating experience! I just tried to do some „Stream of Consciousness“ writing on the computer and failed miserably. It wasn't my thoughts that weren't flowing, this time it was the stupid computer that blew it. Something glitched - I don't know what - but the computer stopped talking, froze up, and I was fucked. I tried re-starting the computer, tried the program again (not once, but twice) and now it is working but only slowly. When days start like this they have gotta go up. I mean, they have gotta go up. They can't go down.

July 5, 2002

The best metaphor I can think of to describe my relationship with this computer is that of the grizzled Western prospector and his relationship with his balky mule. The machine is ornery, stubborn, stupid, and as like as not to ignore.

July 14, 2002

If this thing still works, still understands anything of what I am trying to say, I will be amazed. Probably most of my computer's problems are a result of my own neuroses. I am treating it much as if I were a bad parent who is worried he is passing his character flaws onto his children. Honk! No such luck! This thing doesn't have brains - this thing doesn't have comprehension! This thing is no further on the evolutionary scale than a

rock. Admittedly, a cleverly organized rock, but no more than that.

On his search for the story

Saturday 16 October 1998 (I think)

Lately, I have spent some time thinking about what work I feel is important and why. It has occurred to me increasingly that I have been given the opportunity to do anything I want with my life. The issue of „what do you want to do?“ This is more complex than I first assumed. It comes down to what is the human work which I think is most important. What is the work that I think is of most value and why...

Friday, March 26, 1999

I have so many things to write about. Last night, at supper, I declaimed, „I wanna be a mountain, a pimple on the face of the earth!“ And my daughter replied: „Popa, you can't be a mountain, you're a person.“ Nothing like a 20th-century realist to dash cold water on metaphor's illusory heights. Oh, well. It isn't the first time.

Nevertheless, a lot of ideas. Voyeurism isn't as interesting as action. Nor is reflection and explanation as interesting as action. Action is required to tell a story. Someone did something. A story is not someone thought about doing something.

Monday April 5, 1999

There is something about reaching into the essence of experience in order for it to be genuine. Looking down at the Grand Canyon is not the same as whitewater rafting down the Colorado River at its bottom, nor would it be the same as living on the bottom. When does the person move beyond being voyeur and become a resident or traveler? What are

the criteria and who is the judge?

I thought last night that the idea of being a hero for someone was an interesting idea to explore. Never considered myself worthy of being a hero for someone. The choices made in the pause before a breath, Before the rush of air that brings the motion and thought, The decision is made, need and criteria completed, In a single mind, a hero is born.

What a strange choice, to select for adoration another human being. Is that what we do to lovers? Even in the first bloom of passion? Or in the moments of lust? Perhaps embarrassment comes when our lover's humanity is revealed. Perhaps love is kindled when whatever greatness our lover has is revealed.

Monday May 3 1999

...It occurs to me that a story like "The Purpose of My Life" could ask a very wide and fascinating question. If we have reached the point in history where there is nowhere else to go then human beings will have to address what is their purpose in being.

May 6, 1999

I spent the day reorganizing files and reading the 23rd chapter of Moby Dick. The chapter is titled „The Lee Shore“ and is a description of why a man called Bulkington would choose to return quickly to the sea again following a long sea voyage. In this short passage, Melville describes Bulkington by describing his reasons for going to sea. He does not describe the physical characteristics of the man but rather an idea that the man embodies. The metaphor of the ship at peril from the wilds of the open ocean is used to describe human longing for something beyond comfort. Melville gives flesh to an idea of struggle and choice and endeavor and opposition. Melville applauds Bulkington and Bulkington's endeavor. It is a brilliant description and a clever means of making the

transition, from the ship leaving harbor and the open seas.

Last night while watching television, I saw myself reflected in society's mirror. I watched a fairly sensitive portrayal of a MS mainstay and even there I did not enjoy what I saw. I am now a stereotype. I am the „MS guy.“ Frustrating but inevitable. Some people make careers from this stereotype and the super crip[ple] misconception. I didn't and don't want to do that. I am attempting to be something beyond a stereotype of myself. Like Bulkington, I prefer the open seas of just attempting to be myself.

Tuesday Aug. 24, 1999

...Other reflections: I have been rereading journal entries and have been pleased with my writing and my ideas. I am a good communicator of my thoughts. These things mean only that I can communicate, not that I can write. Writing is communicating in a manner organized both to communicate ideas and simultaneously evoke feelings. I don't know whether I can do that.

July 21, 2000

Well, I feel like death (not that I know what that feels like). Still, this morning I woke up fine, but now I feel like shit (not that I know what that feels like, either). There is probably a letter [*referring to the piece he was writing, "Letters to Deb"*] in just feeling like shit. There may be a problem with Heaven. Not enough opportunities to feel like shit. There is definitely a letter in that.

There may also be a letter in natural catastrophes. I also want to use the phrase unnatural catastrophes.“ Interesting juxtaposition of the two ideas. Remember the tornadoes in Alberta. Remember the episode of 'X Files' about the man who was carried away by a tornado after he had kidnapped children. There are so many letters if you just look for

them. Write a letter about doing the obvious or not seeing the obvious, using the example of „The Old Man and the Sea“ by Ernest Hemingway and the fisherman’s response about how to save a large fish from sharks (just put the best parts of it in the boat). Possibly the subject of the letter could be a place in Heaven called “The Glaringly Obvious”.

It is strange. I began this entry by feeling bad and complaining about it. Now, it seems redundant to note that I wanted to make a point about how important it was to write every day.

Supposedly July 26, 2000

Is writing more important than re-reading? I find I’m bored with past journal entries. Probably just because they’re so short. I am learning so many strange lessons by growing up. Unfortunate that I have chosen to do this at such an old age. Sometimes I think that I am learning life’s lessons in the wrong order. Whatever small amount of empathy I possess seems to be hitting me rather late in life. Ditto for sensitivity. Most alarming, that. I wonder if we die when we have learned our share of life’s lessons. Probably a little too neat and tidy to expect that. Much too just and compassionate. Chance and evil must be given their due, too.

It is more difficult to write than it is to write or talk about writing. I’ve been working on a story for the better part of a month - and it is harder. The idea came easily. The exposition and setup for the plot came easily. Unfortunately, all I had to do was run into one badly written paragraph and I was screwed. So I’m not too pleased with myself right now. It is so easy to give up and let yourself be racked with indecision. Like all other persons, I am too familiar with my failings.

I’ve got to write. Otherwise, there will be nothing. No purpose to my existence. There

will be little enough purpose even if I were to succeed at writing but without it my life would be meaningless indeed. Well, then, what am I left with? Nothing. Or maybe something smaller but more profound. Maybe it is just the effort, just the work, which makes us what we are. If that is the mark of a human being, it leaves many of us outside the box. Maybe that's something that needs to be written about - that too many of us are left without purpose, because we lack the mark of the beast.

What a frightening concept. That we all find our purpose in our work. Left without it, our credibility is gone. We become less than others and less than ourselves

Oct. 15, 2000

„The second letter [“Letters to Deb”] was finished on Friday Oct. 13.

Well, today I learned several things. First, I had better write down stories and information when I get it or I will forget them.

Writing notes:

...Countries can be considered like companies. Government is the cost of administering the resources used to produce the Gross Domestic Product, social services are also expenses incurred to maintain deterioration and replenish the inputs (human beings), and the product produced is time. So if the cost of administration (all levels of government expense) is calculated in comparison to revenues, then government and administration considered comparatively with businesses is cheap, cheap, cheap. So a right-wing fink who believes in eliminating taxes can just fuck right off. A great letter on the left right political divide called The Cost of Doing Business...

Remember the minnows at Camp Shawanaga for the letter on the best times of my life.

At the end of the first letter:

Well-written, but it took a tremendously long time. My disabilities may require me to write less than a paragraph a day. That's fine. I am already so addicted to the process that I miss it if I do not write. The first page contains less information than I thought that it would; however, I think I found a natural ending point.

The beginning: okay - I wake up dead. I don't even know I'm dead because I have no reference point because I have no sensory input whatsoever. What do I do? I choose to do something and the Big Bang erupts. Probably because it's the only thing I can think of. I just wanted light. Then I'm left watching the formation of the universe. Did I create this or am I a passive spectator?

I have to begin with an examination of my body. This brings into play the question of how important our bodies are to us for the purposes of self-identification and reference to the external. What would I have done if it was not my own body? What would I have done if I had kept my eyes shut or spun my mind in another direction? What an overpowering sense of relief to discover my own body, naked, floating, as light strikes it. At first I had been beyond light, but now, as I begin to speed time up, the universe is flooded with light from all directions and from stars all around me and I am overcome by the universe's magnificence.

But what does it smell like? What does it taste like? Am I cold? Am I hot? Am I limited to seeing in one direction? Am I given any answers? Am I given any questions? Is there any communication at all from anybody?

So much has to be addressed. Certainly, there are any number of possible reactions - joy, relief, shock, or abject terror.

January 24, 2001

I have run into my first temporal problem [in writing "Letters to Deb"]. This is good. It demands of me that I solve it. It will also make the story stronger.

When do I write the letters? When do I begin the story and why? I have to write about things after they have happened because I couldn't have the ability while they were happening. So I have a bunch of experiences and write about them after I develop the skill. I take on letter writing because? Possible answers: It is a means of becoming acclimatized. It is because I miss Deb. It is because no communication between 'here'n'now' and Earth does neither any good. Because I do not understand that the means of communication between 'here'n'now' and Earth does exist but gets changed into something which humans fail to recognize. Possibly because of limited capacity, possibly because of intervention by God, possibly because of...?

... Perhaps life and death are taken on faith. Why you believe what you believe is simply a matter of upbringing and perhaps the failing of my family was that we were taught to believe in kindness and in ourselves but not taught a great deal else. Perhaps I have always longed after not seeing both sides. The single dimension is so much easier. Is there a skill or a strength in not being uni-dimensional?

April 3rd, 2001

Astonishing. I started working on „'Tis the season to Kazoo,“ and it has taken me a great deal of time just to get interested in the project again. I think I have now. The first story went 21 minutes - which surprised me because I did not expect it to be so long. I will fill up the rest of the first half of the tape with the second story, which I will embellish. It will be the one about the giant tomato. The third story will be the one about the never-

ending conga line and the fourth story will be about climbing the rainbow and sliding down to the Christmas tree in the town square...

September 10, 2001

Last Saturday night, Deborah and I went to a “dance” party. I was introduced to a woman named M. Seven weeks ago, M. was diagnosed as having MS. She lost vision in her left eye, and was short-listed for an MRI. Her story in short is relocating from Toronto in order to take a position at a university, the breakup of a long-term relationship, and, hardly coincidentally, her being diagnosed. She is currently in the shell-shocked but still “phoney war” stage. I wish I could offer more than an ear and information, but that is all anyone actually can. I do not think she realizes how difficult it may become for her. A network of family and/or friends is crucial. She may be able to make a go of it, but it will be incredibly more difficult.

September 11, 2001

...What to say of this tragedy? That war, in any of its myriad of forms, is pathetic and stupid and disgusting? That Americans, and Canadians, and every member of the human species, has shown difficulty in being able to distinguish between systemic and personal forms of violence? Between coercion by means other than violence? Or is there some kind of sacrosanct step that differentiates between violence in its passive and active forms? I don't know. I don't have the answers to half the simple questions I pose... I am saddened by the choices being made by those around me. By those who share this existence with me. But I am certain: their answers to these questions are clearly inadequate and will bring no satisfaction or benefit to them in the end.

September 25, 2001

... I had an interesting thought. If I were not to tell people that I had MS and changed the title of the book about myself, then I would keep getting multiple sclerosis as a surprise. If I could do it, it would be a gigantic hook. If I could do it...

November 19, 2001

...In my notes on writing projects, I just asked myself the question, why add to the literature? It is more profound than I originally thought. And then I thought: why add to the literature? Why add to anything? Especially when there are reasons, good reasons not to. The only possible answer is hope. That we do not know - absolutely know - everything.

November 21, 2001

This is frustrating. Doing a journal entry for nothing more than trying to solve writing block. Well, I'm sure Ernest Hemingway probably did it, too. Or else he had other tricks. My blockages are just a result of trying to work within the confines of this writing program. I'm a lot better off than a cockroach that has to dive headlong onto typewriter keys. Shades of Archie and Mehitabel the cat...

...So, I've got the story, I've got the ending and I'm frustrated with the beginning. I'm probably just tired and bogged down because I am tired. Or else because I am frustrated. The combination of being blind as well as mobility-impaired is frustrating. And boring. And stupid. And pointless. I don't know whether any society has ever had positive and affirming roles for persons with disabilities to play. I don't think societies are constructed to accommodate the emotional needs of its (their) members. I think that this is probably a major flaw of our society. The pursuit of the economy, with the political

apparatus providing the power behind it, has totally divorced itself from the emotional needs of the society. Period.

Suffering? Not our problem. Humans have suffered forever and will continue to do so. The catchphrase, „The poor will always be with us“ is just a code for “we don’t care if they suffer”. Certainly groups within societies, and between societies, come into violent conflict, but this is usually in order to protect their members. Strange, strange, strange.

Jan. 8, 2002

...On “This Morning,” Bob Carty interviewed Gregor Wolbring. He is a scientist at University of Calgary. He discussed genetic manipulation in order to try to avoid disabled adults. He addressed problems with technique, societal attitudes towards disabled people, potential for societal changes to class configuration and introduced societal vs. medical model of disability. Nothing that I had not thought of, read or discussed before. Nevertheless, interesting.

Jan. 28, 2002

On the CBC radio program “This Morning”, I listened to an interview with Nora Whitney. Her son, Lucas, has autism and is receiving a treatment known as Applied Behavioral Analysis. She asserted that this treatment has a success rate of 47 percent but is only being funded by the Ontario government for treatment of children until the age of 5. She argued that people are capable of learning throughout their lives and that the government of Ontario should support this treatment to a much later age. The treatment breaks behavior down into very simple discrete elements and teaches the child the appropriate form of behavior for each. The treatment regime is expensive because it is a

one-on-one exercise. Current costs are approximately 62,000 dollars per year, however full recovery from autism is possible. Given that a lifetime of institutionalization is the usual outcome for these children at a cost to the taxpayer of approximately 2.3 million dollars over a lifetime, the treatment is inexpensive by comparison. During her radio interview, Nora Whitney provided a knowledgeable and impassioned plea. That she was on the radio provided me with the certainty that there are rays of sunshine, that there are rays of hope. Certainly Nora Whitney had her own agenda. She did not dwell on possible failure, on the expense of failures, on the success rate over time and duration of recovery, probably because the treatment is so new that many of these answers do not exist. Nevertheless, it was a ray of hope.

April 24, 2002

Michael Ondaatje took ten years to write „In the Skin of the Lion.“ I think he had far fewer hurdles to overcome than I in the simple process of writing down a single sentence. Perhaps I should not despair.

I just re-read this journal file. Not as good as I would have hoped, but far better than I expected. It is not a journal of activities but of ideas. At least my mind is active, if my body is not. This morning I wrote a poem about Peter Gzowski. Not good, but let it be a start. I have, in the past, been ashamed of my shames. Even the reading of science fiction was a shame. Malabar was a shameful indulgence. Someday I am going to have to write something about the shameful indulgences.

April 29, 2002

...I think that, perhaps, in times past we used the effects caused by theatrical tragedy to provide us with experiences that were part of the growing process. Radio pieces can

provide something like this, as can novels. The imagination of the inner eye is so much more powerful than that literal medium. I wonder if we are using other media to replace face-to-face storytelling.

I am working on a story entitled, „The Emperor of the Air.“ In light of this, I wonder if the story shouldn‘t be called, „The Emperor of the Inner Eye.”

June 9, 2002

Dear Diary,

Outside, it is raining torrents. While Deborah has been provided with the opportunity to take Cailum and Becca to a play at Manitoba Theater for Young People - by the gift of a few tickets from some neighbors - I am left with a moment or two to write. Given that I had nothing pressing to record, I was given the opportunity to reflect and it occurred to me that writing in this journal is a lot like performing a speech in theater. It is important to set place, person, purpose, before addressing opinion and resolution. You have to answer the ‘who, what, where, when, how,’ before you address the ‘why’ question. As soon as the ‘why’ question is answered, there isn‘t much more reason to listen.

How does this relate to my journal? If I address the journal as a person, it becomes the object I am writing to. It is much easier for the audience to relate to an object, even an empty chair, than an empty stage. It helps everyone’s focus. So, the words „Dear Diary“ become a focal point and set the context both for me and for the reader. The reader becomes more than a mere observer of a conversation between me and an empty chair. So, too, comments about the weather provide additional ‘place’, as do comments about Deborah or our children. Even comments about my state of health could do so, provided they are done carefully. As I have noticed before, health is not something people are

comfortable having discussed in front of them, especially if they think it causes embarrassment for the individual making the statements.

...Yesterday was our garage sale and block party. It does seem to me increasingly that life, my life, comes in stages and that the stage we are moving into is middle age. We seem to be doing it more comfortably in the last two days than previously, though. The garage sale, in which a house cleaning of a particular sort takes place, is a ritual of the middle-aged. Deborah and I sold many of our paperback books and she kept describing what she was doing to people as 'letting go of parts of her life'. I liked that. It spoke somehow to letting go and putting into place and of having learned those lessons we needed to learn in order to survive. Perhaps that is where the fascination with narrative comes from - the need to survive. I have thought this thought before, and written it elsewhere, but it is pleasant to witness this concrete physical example of it taking place. We are offering the lessons we have learned and providing others with the opportunity to learn them. Pleasant thought, that.

June 10, 2002

...My brain is really cooking today. In the course of writing the above two paragraphs I have already thought of three potential themes which warrant addressing. Firstly, that the battle between the forces of Al-Qaeda and the United States does not seem real to people like Deborah or even of interest to her. I think it is more than that they recognize their powerlessness in the face of the struggle. I think it is more than that. Damn, damn, damn, and blast! There is a shattering of my thoughts! Before I can even get them down, because of this stupid laborious writing process, they depart from me as if they were oil and my brain was a sieve. Damn. Oh, well. It's not like I haven't written about that

before.

October 2, 2002

...Yesterday, I completed a version of „Preface to the reprinting of ‘The Stories in the Attic.’“ It was strange. The story did not turn out to be a story but it did, eventually, go somewhere. I learned a lot while writing it but I am left with the question, - what is a story beyond the ‘who, what, where, when, how, and why’? I have learned that there must be some forward flow - the protagonist must do something. That is very difficult in the description of a person’s life. The span of time is too great.

Undated note:

There are a legion of reasons why I must fail as a writer. Even the most cursory of glances reveals in stark display the necessity of this truth, I am disabled. I do not cower behind it. I am past any pretense at dissembling. I could hardly do so given my wheelchair, my impaired vision and my loss of motor control in my hands. These three things alone are sufficient condition for my inability. So I wear them instead as my badge. I pronounce in silent victory that I am special among men. I am a struck down innocent. I am a victim of nothing but chance and random circumstance and their mute testimony to the fact that it could happen to you too. I bear no malice nor envy either. I am stoic in my sufferings and ask nothing from you but that you make no demands of me. My mute testimony purchases for me for the right of failure continued and your moderate indulgence. In return, I tolerate your well-meaning faux pas’s and solicitous guilty condescension. What a wonderful pact we all have made to accommodate the reality of our shared existence.

On his Battle with Depression

Tuesday 19 January 1999

...My aging has taught me about life and death. Allan Simpson died unexpectedly following complications from surgery. It was a shock. Judy from across the street also died. Her heart transplant never occurred. In both instance, I knew the persons involved, but not well. I have learned that when your life ends, everything just stops. Your work is over, memories are all that is left and even posterity is cold comfort while staring at the ceiling of a coffin. I did not recognize life before in all its myriad phases.

March 19, 1999

...The final gasp of the 20th-century entertainment experiment in displaced existence will reach its climax when humanity discovers that our entire lives have just become reruns. No doubt we'll keep on watching.

April 23, 1999

Carol Shields is being treated for cancer. The vitality of the woman has been greatly diminished. The threat of that disease to her life makes me more aware of the precious nature of my own time. It is scarce and not to be wasted. If there is a grand design, perhaps the purpose of disease and death would be to acquaint the other people around us with the value of their lives. Perhaps the entire planet is one big organism with its various parts learning about their place in its organization through the lives and deaths of others.

July 5, 1999

The last six days have been spent in the hospital. I had another urinary tract infection. Not pleasant, but I had the opportunity of having consults with a neurologist and a

choking specialist. I was advised that my choking was being handled appropriately, and that I should take my anti-spasm medications. I was satisfied with the business, although I regret time spent in hospital. It is a necessary waste. I also learned that I have been missing meeting new people, which was an opportunity provided by the hospital visit. I enjoy meeting new people – even though what I have been reluctant to admit to is the vulnerability exposed by my need to meet them.

May 19, 2000

I don't have to do anything but sit here and demands are still placed on me. Emotional demands of supporting other people are the hardest. I have one home care attendant whose husband committed suicide, one attendant whose sister committed suicide in the past, another attendant who is going through marriage counseling and he decompresses himself on me, and it is not like I don't have enough problems of my own. Last night I struck Becca. I was in the wrong completely and without enough patience and I made the choice to do it and I did it. I cannot support other people unless I can solve my own problems. I have got to treat her gently both verbally and emotionally. I want her to remember me happily.

June 29, 2000

...I am really beginning to lose the use of my hands. Oh well, another bodily extremity consigned to the ornamental.

July 20, 2000

Three weeks away from the computer necessitated by family visits and returning to work is about as much fun as having teeth pulled. There is no interest in the heaven project

[“Letters to Deb”], I have no interest in writing in this journal, and I have no interest in writing. How much easier to sit and listen to the radio. How much easier to while away the hours and not have to worry about the horrible possibilities of failure or the natural brilliance of my niece’s writing. I know why she can write so well and I know why I have such difficulty and none of that knowledge helps me at all. What a whiner. Oh, well. Back into the breach.

Sept. 14, 2000

Today, my Victorian Order of Nursing nurse Sonya told me of a new client. A 17-year old who was diagnosed with MS. He got out of his wheelchair and while onstage walked to accept his diploma. He received a standing ovation. Nevertheless, he has got an incredible story to tell. He may never work, he may never have a lover, but he will have a fascinating life. Cold comfort, that. I wish I could offer him some magic. I wish that I could. As with K. and her suicidal aunt, there is nothing that can be done and little that can be said.

November 9, 2000

Today, my VON nurse, Sonya, told me that a 40 year old friend of hers who had MS died unexpectedly. Sonya has been visiting me once a week for the past couple of years. She seemed very disturbed about the sudden death of her friend. Apparently, her friend aspirated on her own vomit while in bed. She had been living with a rapidly progressing condition and possibly had been suffering from pneumonia as well. Sonya used the opportunity to suggest, once again, that I should get a pneumonia vaccination. My choice about quality of life over quantity of life takes on more serious implications at times like these. The bravado of a young man now has to become an older man living with the

courage of his convictions. It was easy to be courageous when I was foolhardy. I still believe in my convictions. It is not that we wish to remain alive because we fear death. We wish to remain alive because we do not wish to leave the only thing we know. This, and that we are disturbed by the absolutism and the immovability of death. So I am left with my convictions and my choice not to get a vaccination.

Nov 14, 2000

I had most poignant conversation with X, the least sensitive individual I know. In point of fact, he is turning out to be one of the most sensitive individuals packaged in the least sensitive exteriors of any of the individuals I know. The conversation we had evolved around a client of his of 11 years. The clients wife had died of renal failure and her death was expected. She had been a difficult customer both for X and for her husband. X had made her husband laugh by asking her if she liked sex and travel. These were code words for "Fuck Off." Nevertheless, her husband was in mourning and X was suffering as a consequence. We had the most curious conversation about death. All of the usual platitudes about the hereafter and not knowing what comes next but living life for today. I don't think it comforted either of us. I pointed out to X that there is no comfort either in his theory about alien monkey bitches and he acknowledges that there is neither any found in religious doctrine either. It is the condemnation of a secular technologically consumption oriented society. We are condemned to eat our own beliefs. Ignorance is bliss. Maybe that is the reason why there is no contact between heaven and earth and why we have no knowledge ZZZ (I take it Patrick went off to sleep, then woke up and poked fun at himself)

Nov, 28, 2000

God, please help me. For the sake of my family, for the sake of my children, and for the sake of my partner, and lastly, for the sake of myself. I know that when hunger strips my rationality that I cannot cope. I know that I lose control of my emotions. I know that my fears, especially of my inability to cope with physical demands, take hold. But that does not justify anything. That does not justify ill treatment. That does not justify emotional abuse.

...I put her under so much stress that she cried out repeatedly in her sleep. I did these things. She is a wonderful child. Her instincts are good. They are excellent. Multiple sclerosis excuses nothing!!!!

I cannot forget these things. And I will not excuse myself or justify the things I have done. Deborah was forced by my behavior to take Becca into her room and try to explain her father's bad behavior to her. Oh yes, I apologized to them both profusely and honestly and with tremendous regret. But that is too little, far, far too late. Rebecca came to accept my apologies but it took time, and as with her mother, I have scalded the relationship again.

I will war with this until I die and probably beyond. I am crying now. I will not and I cannot do this to my family. I love them too much.

God, please help me. In moments of stress, I only hope I can remember that refrain.

January 17, 2001

Ah, we little boys. We all deify our fathers. How else could we be? They are our security, role models, and eventually our adversaries to overcome. We work our way through these mantles our whole lives and eventually we just become too tired to go on

with these stupid struggles. Either side, or both, concedes defeat. Thankfully the limitations of human effort surpass the demands of the programming of human survival and we are left with two weary pieces of protoplasm simply content to sit in lawn chairs on a warm summer's evening and chew. If a third generation is present, we watch them in an exhausted stupor and rouse ourselves enough to growl at them something inarticulate or comment on their endless energy or inquire about the possibility of more fried chicken.

Somewhere in there, in that endless cycle of male replication, somewhere in there, is something beyond itself. Beyond what it simply appears to be and what it affords glimpses of being. There has to be more in life than the process of life and more than the collection of knowledge. Because knowledge does not appear to have much to do with changing or bettering the human condition. For some people, knowledge has made the creature comforts of human existence easier to acquire and to distribute. But the process of becoming more full of knowledge as a species has not bettered the human condition. We are not wiser, nor better, nor more insightful about ourselves.

Some people maintain that we are not capable of this. Some argue we are condemned to die the same damn fools we were when we were born. Their reasons are endless - that we are limited by genetics, or greed, or God. Frankenstein's monster was as much an exercise in self-knowledge as anything else. No wonder he was condemned to destroy his father. Technology was just the means of the monster's creation. The reason for his destruction and for the destruction of his father was Frankenstein having dared to attempt self-knowledge. The monster is tragic because he is a victim of his father wanting to know more about the human condition. I wonder if the parallel can be drawn for all

fathers and sons. Probably.

This is wonderful material for the letter about my own father and leafs into it nicely.

January 21, 2001

The Latimer decision came down this week and the Supreme Court found him guilty of second degree murder. He will now serve a mandatory ten-year sentence in the federal penitentiary.

I have listened to a number of complex and sophisticated discussions on the radio. I am left with the feeling that society did not serve anyone in this situation well. The family was not provided with sufficiently adequate resources to care for their daughter.

Alternatively, neither was Latimer given the tools to understand and to undertake the care required.

I am saddened by the whole business.

Feb. 21, 2001 Ye Gods, it is so much easier not to. Not to think, not to write, not concentrate, not to expend energy, just to sit and become a passive receptor. It is so much easier. Is my life any less if it is unrecorded? If no monument to my vanity is left standing? If no legacy is left for those who follow?

I so love repeating the philosophical conundrums that have plagued humanity since time immemorial. Apparently, I do not mind clichés either...

...I just had an inspiration. If I really want to ever have the opportunity to make a contribution, any contribution, to the "Canon of Literature", perhaps I'd better write about my personal medical experience. Proposed title: Another Inspirational Crip Guy Book. Maybe after that, if I prove my marketability, I might, I just might, in this the best

of the best of all possible worlds, I might be given the opportunity to prove what I can do. ...I had the interesting experience of listening to a listing of the consequences of secondary progressive multiple sclerosis on the television program "West Wing." I so didn't enjoy it I even made certain to watch it again on tape. Sigh. I will not repeat the list here. It gets too dull. Suffice it to say, I shouldn't beat myself up over an inability to concentrate for lengthy periods. It's a consequence of the disease. I do have to attempt, however, to undertake and strive. Deborah would get bored otherwise.

April 30, 2001

Assume, with all compassion and contempt, that I will fail at any and all of my endeavors. Why not? The little black cloud which hovers over my head may be a figment of your imagination - it may be a figment of mine - but lest hopes be raised, protect yourselves and dash them at the outset.

May 1, 2001

I must have been in a bad mood yesterday. My computer was giving me a lot of errors but that doesn't excuse the nasty entry. Oh, well.

I am beginning to think that my disease combined with my computer possibly will stop me from writing. Or my fears, my glorious fears. I listened to three young critics tearing apart a collection of essays on Ian Brown's program, "Talking Books." I was dismayed by their intelligence and astounded by the competent ferocity of their criticism. They were so skilled, so honed, and, no doubt, so correct. Well, fuck them. And fuck all others who tear up their criticism to shreds. Maybe I will never write anything publishable. Or, if worthy of publication, then unsellable. So what? So what? So what? I have to love what I do or else there's no reason to do it.

June 4, 2001

For the past four days, Robert has been visiting us. It was a strange visit. It took me a long time to realize that he is more tired than I am. That was frightening. I would not like if his life were to parallel our father's too closely. It is very strange for me to think about the fact that I have invested in my family my need for security. Probably because of my inability to take care of myself. I can't help wondering what that has taken from my family and from Deborah.

I had an interesting idea for a play. Somebody had to go to Elsinore Castle, after Hamlet had wreaked havoc, and clean up the mess. Who did it and why? Someone directed by Fortinbras? What issues could be addressed by such an investigation? Issues about inquiry. Issues about class and convention and war and peace.

Imagine a war-damaged Fortinbras returning to Elsinore Castle following his campaigns. Imagine his shock at finding the castle in disarray with the royal family dead and the king's high counsel killed by the crown prince. He could turn to his only trusted....

September 13, 2001

I think I have become infected with my mother's disease. Simple kindness. Terrible. It drives us to an ability to see all sides of a given question or problem and feel genuine sympathy for all who have taken positions on either side. It drives one to a personal position of relativism that can only be resolved by using a yardstick of kindness to measure the potential damage of future action. Unfortunately, the disease is very taxing - emotionally and spiritually - and inevitably leads to a state of worrying. The only known cure is to remove oneself from situations of conflict (either personal or societal) and live in a state of seclusion or semi-seclusion. This state can be achieved through physical or

mental removal from wider social concerns.

September 21, 2001

I've discovered yet another reason to limit my entries in this journal. It's too damn depressing. Listening to CBC on the radio is even worse. I hear so much information and can see so many variations that I feel immobile by the time I get away from the radio. The solution? Don't listen. Maybe the hippies had it right. Drop out, turn on, and tune out.

Once again these words are written without benefit of being able to re-read them. I still can't get my speakers to work, although this morning when I turned on my computer the volume on the speakers when Windows booted up nearly killed me. Tonight, I will have Deborah look at it.

September 26, 2001

...Went to the mall. I was exhausted when I got home, although I had done nothing even faintly resembling physical effort. My disease is getting worse. What a drag.

October 19, 2001

It is remarkable to me. I have spent the last twelve days being sick. One and a half days were spent sick at home and the rest were spent sick in hospital. I got out yesterday evening and I am tired today.

December 18, 2001

The last few days have been difficult ones for me. Excessive fatigue has combined with boredom to depress me during the day. As well, I watch Deborah coping with very young children without a break either physically or emotionally. As a result, she is exhausted and I have to address my frustration with the kids and my guilt over not being

any help to her. Same old complaint and same old refrain. There had better be some change found in our lives.

Life in a state of nature can be nasty, brutish and short. Perhaps so, but the process of death can be lengthy and painful. Over the past two weeks, we have all been the unwilling witnesses of one of our guppies killing another. For no reason but that the weaker boy's of a different species with different colouration the aggressor relentlessly chewed off the dorsal fin of the weaker. It was a cruel and painful death and it was a kindness when the tortured victim finally rolled over and floated to the surface. Perhaps the knowledge that life is nasty, brutish and short....

May 29, 2002

...The purchase of time. The ideas that purchase time from one another and from our existence and that time itself has a purchase upon us.

Plato would have laughed. Look at this, the colourized version of his Cave Allegory. They left the shadows of darkness to shudder at rainbows and light. They walk upon a carpet of discarded commodities carefully designed for their obsolescence. The knowledge, the brilliance, the light. All squandered for the purchase of brief snippets of time. Was the purpose of the human race no more than this? No more than broken plastic and discarded trivia and reckless aspirations? Better left undone. Better left ignored. Better left forgotten. Discard it all. Even this. Especially this.

Vanity of vanities and everything is vanity. Small wonder that small cupboards with mirrors are called vanities! It is nothing but vanity and mandate indeed!

But is there no hope? No rose for Ecclesiastes?

Ha! Welcome to the abyss! Welcome to the polite, solicitous, unforeseen trap with

imaginable consequences. Opposition, duality, FX, right and wrong. The little angel and devil on your shoulders acting, always acting. Temptation and the conscience. Here it comes, if you want to hear it.

Hear what?

The mythology. The truth. The lie. The idea that is programmed into the human race. The one thing we all believe and misbelieve simultaneously. That which we deny and accept and accept and deny.

What is it?

The idea. The kernel. The hub around which all of humanity revolves. Shall we say it? Mouth its flavor to the air? The freedom of choice.

That old saw.

They're all old saws. There's nothing left but old saws. What do you expect from a limited humanity, trapped in its consciousness and the boundaries of genetic comprehension? Nobody asked hairless apes to develop beyond the genetic demands of staying alive.

I am certain that the human race needs gods. If only to give us hope. Perhaps a god or gods, but we are better with them than without them. They may be conscious constructs. They may be unconscious constructs. But, like narrative, our limited genetic comprehension seems to demand of us cause and effect and when the two are inexplicable or unreasonable, we are unable to console ourselves with the thought that bad things happen to good people. There are so many subjects for consideration. The need for gods. The need for narrative. The new gods of the 21st century: fiction and fantasy and unreality and the news cycle.

Last night, Eleanor Wachtel interviewed a writer who described two competing visions of memory. I have forgotten what they were though the idea that there are different, competing visions of memory was delicious to me. I know that there are different visions of humanity - of the past, the purpose of life, etc. - but this was so adroit in its conception that I was saddened to know there are people so much more intelligent than I. I wonder what it is like to inhabit a mind so delightful.

God is a thundershower. The kettledrums of thunder began their rubble-rumble in the distance, indistinct and without edges, building slowly, until the storm is overhead, omnipresent and omnipotent. Who can doubt why early religions put gods into the elemental, always with the storm god as an important deity.

July 25, 2002

Timothy Findley has died. The passing of my generation continues. I feel as though I am the younger child of a large family and I am watching my older sisters and brothers do things before me. Following them into death is not something I need hurry to do. It will come, inevitably, as it does to all of us. But let it be in its own sweet time.

August 13, 2002

Deborah phoned me with news this morning. While traveling in Sri Lanka with his wife, Olga, Henry Enns died of a heart attack. It was unexpected...

Why did I not cry when Deborah told me? Is my imaginative life becoming so much stronger than my real one? Was it that I had already imagined his death, and the deaths of other people, in order to prepare myself? Why do we cry when people die? Is it for them or us? That our lives have changed and we have been exposed to a harsh reminder of our own mortality? Why?

August 13, 2002 - later the same day

Obviously, Henry's death did not hit me immediately. When I was speaking to Deborah at 12 o'clock today, she told me that my voice had sounded distant. I had known something was wrong when she had left the voice message for me. How well we two know each other! Later in the morning, while talking to Alex, the emotional effects of his death struck me and I began to feel strange. I phoned Deborah back and we spoke for some time about it all. I have had more time and the emotional effects have become more pronounced over time. I sat on the front porch for about half an hour and did some thinking and remembering. I just finished speaking to my parents and telling them what happened. I feel quite sad about it all now, even though I am certain Henry would not have wanted that. How strange. In death, no one really gets what they want.

August 22, 2002

Yesterday, Deborah and I attended the funeral of Henry Enns. It was held at the church where he and Olga got married, in Steinbeck. It was attended by approximately 1,000 people - including individuals from the provincial government, the Canadian government, development organizations, disability organizations (both local, provincial and national), his church and, of course, his immediate and extended family. The service was well-organized and very handsome.

Deborah arrived before me, and she and I sat together in the front. As a result, we left the church right after the immediate family and so were on display as we moved up the aisle leaving the church. I was very proud to be with Deborah. I don't know why or how she chose to be with me or is still, but I consider myself a very lucky man. The trip going to and from Steinbeck was difficult for me because I was very tired on the way

home but, with the help of others, I made it. The service was two and a half hours long, so I had lots of time to think about Henry - and my life and his life, by comparison. With the death of Henry and of Al Simpson, the only examples I have had of a life with disabilities that I would aspire to are gone. From now on, I had better start finding my own way.

August 30, 2002

This morning I am convinced that if the aliens arrived today and spoke to me, I would tell them, „The human race is only a slight evolutionary step beyond a rodent - in fact, hardly not even a step at all beyond the creation of machines in order to better manipulate our environment, which has eroded our planetary environment to the detriment of every form of life on the planet.“ I ought to know better. It's not that I believe in these words, it's just that I'm only repeating them again to myself because I'm unhappy. Probably I am depressed, or my body hurts, or I'm unhappy because of the way I treat my family, or for some other reason. Stupid. Futile to waste my precious few brain cells on such folly. Neither the human race nor my family will be bettered by my unhappiness. More reasonable is to remember the prayer: God give me the wisdom to recognize where change is needed, the strength to make better what I can, the ability to ignore what I cannot make better and the wisdom to recognize the difference (or whatever that prayer is, anyway).

My eyes are bothering me. I may be going blind. I hope not. At the same time, I have to admit difficulty holding and manipulating my mouse. Some day, if my children need to find out about me after my death, they can turn to these journal entries. Would that I had strength enough to write them long, richly beautiful entries which gave them life lessons,

which made their existence richer by far more than [would] paltry dollars. Given that I do not have sufficient paltry dollars to give them, perhaps wasting my few dollars on them will be enough. Unfortunately, it isn't. I wonder if it is better to die unknown and leave the gentle mists of memory shadow you into a figure more beautiful than you really were? Probably, but a life without legacy is a life unlived.

On Domestic Life

Wednesday, May 26, 1999

In other news Deborah is really pregnant. This is what we wanted and there will be a lot of work. But who said life was not to have work or pain? If we did not have these things, we would just be spending our time.

Tuesday Aug. 24 1999

Summer has been busy, although we have not taken any trips. I am reluctant to travel and Deborah has proposed a trip to Los Angeles in March 2000. This would be as a family of four. I do not like the idea for a number of reasons, one of which is that I am afraid. I do not like the idea of being helpless and dependent in a city where I know no one.

Certainly my disability has contributed to my cowardice.

In other exciting news, Deborah and I informed our families of the expected arrival of our son. As well, Deborah and Rebecca are in Kingston, Ontario. Deborah is attending a conference and visiting Eleanor/Eamon and Rebecca is just having fun.

April 13, 2000

It has been months since I wrote in this journal. So much has happened in the intervening

period. Our son, Cailum Matthias Kellerman Stienstra, was born on December 30th, 1999, at about 10:15 in hospital after a wonderful labor marked by a very short pushing stage and Deborah's dilating from 5 to 10 cm. So rapidly, in fact, that Popa had left the room to be changed.

April 14, 2000

Cailum Matthias Kellerman Stienstra was born in St. Boniface Hospital on December 30th, 1999. He weighed six pounds 13 ounces after a very short and wonderful labor. He gained weight at home quickly and by the time he was three months old was wearing clothing for six-month old children. At the time of this writing, he is very solid and strong and likes to smile when I make funny faces at him.

In the interests of fairness and equality, Rebecca Aisha Kellerman Stienstra is six years old. She is average height, average weight, with blond hair turning brown. She is very active and very loud. She also talks a lot and sings as well. She also likes my Great Kazoo stories.

They are both great children and I am lucky to have them.

Their mother, as ever, is the workhorse and magic that keeps us together. She provides me with big lessons on child rearing without trying to do so and is wonderful to behold. Someday maybe I will be able to grow up and be just like her.

Yesterday I took Rebecca to the Symphony to listen to Peter and the Wolf. I think I may have slept while she listened. I think she enjoyed it but she is so sensitive to the music she was frightened by the „scary“ bits. She had a wonderful time seeing friends and playing outside afterwards. This morning we had a little confusion and difficulty with alarms and she displayed her fear of the burglar alarm. What do Deb and I do here?

Is it better to confront her fears and hope to resolve them or to ignore them and hope that they get buried in the flood of memories? Parenting is a lot easier beforehand and in the abstract. This is someone's life we are playing with and I am so scared of blowing it. Every one of us, in all of our relationships with each other, face the future with our own personal combinations of worry - and faith that love will see us through.

May 14, 2000

Happy Mother's Day. Deborah has just finished hosting a conference here in Winnipeg for about ten women academics from across the country. They are intending to write a book on Canadian foreign policy and gender. Sandy W. attended and it was lovely to see her. I also played host to [a] men's group meeting here on Thursday night. Basically, everyone discussed the difficult parts of their lives that were getting them down. The only thing getting me down was my MS so I didn't have much to say.

Oct. 15, 2000

Poor Cailum has a cold. I feel for him, but like many other things in his life, I can do nothing. And I really wish, for his sake, that I could.

April 20, 2001

The weather has decreed that, „April showers bring May flowers,“ and I am a victim of the weather. Or I will be until I get that stupid back-ramp fungus washed off. Rain water is absorbed by the fungus and then the ramp becomes extraordinarily slippery, far too slippery to attempt to go down. So, once again, I am shut in. I have had so many excellent ideas for writing recently. The problem comes from my lack of energy. I really have very little but if I think about that I am concentrating on my disease instead of on more pleasant and life-affirming activities.

(later) **April 20 2001**

Oh, that we were different. Were I a perfect man, were she a perfect woman. Or perfect parents or perfect world or no disease or no disharmony or no strife. Perhaps all that we can hope is that the love from the good times will support us during the difficult ones. Or else why go on? Deborah wants a family vacation. A good time, a happy time, the time to hold fast [to], when catapults toss dimension and pride and face, and leave no reason to go on. Deborah wants a family vacation. To forget mornings like this one when I batter egos and emotions. For what? For fear? Her agenda, so powerful, so helpful, so thorough, so destructive. Where is my brain? I know better, I know so much better. Her father never shouted. His sense of himself would never allow that. She grew up with that. She called me an asshole. I don't want to be remembered as that.

June 25, 2001

Overcast. What a weekend. Deborah's Society for Disability Studies conference took place. I didn't even realize who they were, despite having been told several times by Deborah. By the time I figured it out, and that I had read their work at DPI, it was all over but for the dance...

Cailum is teething and is incredibly frenetic. Everything gets tossed on the floor. Bad behavior everywhere. I know how Deborah feels. She does share the wealth.

September 23, 2001

The marital relations of a man with MS. I could write a book about it. And certainly my partner in crime could as well. Her book, no doubt, would be rigorous, insightful, and thought provoking. Mine would alternate between rants and adoration. Well, she wanted

something interesting in her life... I haven't given her what she asked for - unfortunately I'm unable to do that. Hopefully, I will be able to give her something to maintain her interest. Sadly, I think she has become accustomed to me being Milk Toast, and is getting a rude shock this morning. If so, I blame myself. My fatigue levels and my disease have demanded enough from me that I have abrogated responsibility for many things. I must strive to the best of my abilities to take a few back. Such tempests in our celestial tea-pots. I have a feeling this minutia is so microscopic as to play dwarf to Terror in Tiny Town. Let us hope so anyway.

January 5, 2002

Another year, another journal file begun. Might I make a resolution that the writing in this journal be intelligent, profound and adroit! Unfortunately, like most New Year's resolutions, this one will probably suffer from the inadequacies of its creator. I wonder if that is the nature and intent of such resolutions - always to exceed the grasp of their creators - sort of a built-in fail safe against the hubris of the human race.

Yesterday afternoon, Deborah and I got rid of the children and went to see the film, „A Beautiful Mind.“ It was the story of John and Elaine (???). He won the Nobel Prize in 1995 for his work in mathematics. As well as being a brilliant mathematician, he was schizophrenic. He struggled with both his whole life, and was awarded the prize for work he had done as a young man – work which had very wide-ranging influences. It was a cautionary tale for me about the dangers of too much imagination - the pitfalls in beginning to withdraw too much into the pleasures of your fantasies. I may have to watch that. Imaginings are of use, but must be used. They must be a tool toward an end product.

I have always suffered from the pleasure and condemnation and isolation of imagination.

May 29, 2002

There are few sights so pleasant, so beautiful and so poignant, so eloquent of a moment and of a place, as two young girls, perhaps seven or eight years old, strolling to school together on a late spring day. Their heads are bowed together, voices low except when punctuated by giggles. There is such a tremendously important, and yet insignificant, collusion - an innocence so overwhelming that you want to protect it forever. From the rhythmic bobbing of ponytails, to the sandwich-laden backpacks, to the slap of sandals on the sidewalk, it all speaks of youth and beauty, of what childhood should be forever. This is what the human race could do and should do and must do for one another. We can make of the world a garden if we do not lose sight of these single, little unimportant things.

June 16, 2002

What a splendid morning! The weather perfect, the Manitoba Marathon was run this morning, partially through my neighborhood, along Woolsley; race coordinators clapping and cheering contestants on and everyone happy. Contrasted with last night, when Deborah and I went to the movie theater and watched the latest installment in the Star Wars movies, it was a delightful dose of reality vs. unhealthy fantasy. Notwithstanding that the race was over even before I got to the end of the block to watch the stragglers slogging along, notwithstanding that it was an activity which I will never again participate in, notwithstanding that I felt removed and isolated and could not ignore the fact that their Marathon was juxtaposed against the Marathon I run every night and day, I still enjoyed myself.

Those last few sentences sound so bitter in my mind. I don't need them to be, because I don't feel bitter. I cannot, however, ignore my situation despite the fact that I may be dissatisfied with how I cope with it.

August 3, 2002

I had a journal in which I used to write and record the day's events, and my reflections on them. I used to try to „fix“ the day more than just [by naming] the day at the top of the page. I would take note of small, specific peculiarities that were specific to the day. I would use an item from the news of the day, or a specific marker such as a birthday or the weather. For instance, today is overcast with little likelihood of rain but it is very cool for August. Another pertinent fact about this morning, he said, is that I'm writing this in my office at approximately 8:45 a.m. while Becca watches television in the next room and Deborah and Cailum are asleep upstairs. I could note that the house has the beautiful, quiet feel of a home before the hurly-burly of the day's activities. I could record that it is my niece Sarah's 21st birthday today and I am looking forward to phoning her.

What does that tell you - you, the reader? That I love my niece, that I cherish the few moments that I get in my day of peace and quiet, and that I take advantage of them? That weather is changeable? That I follow events of the world and am in tune with what is going on in the world around me? If an author respects himself and respects his readers then there is not a phrase or a word without purpose. What you write is different than simple scribbling. Writers write for effect. The goal of the effect is what is paramount. With that word written, my family has wakened up... So much for the silence of the instant before which allowed my daughter the luxury of television watching and my wife the luxury of reading the newspaper. Once more into the breach of family life! Cailum

has entered the building (in actuality, just clumped downstairs) and the volume level in the house has gone up markedly. Becca wants Cailum to say hello and pay attention to her, his mother wants to take off his diaper so she can get him on the toilet (where he impresses everyone positively with the volume of pee he issues from his bladder) and both children want breakfast. Great discussions ensue about what to have, with the elder of the two lobbying the younger hard for pancakes. Since their mother is obliging, pancakes are indeed the order of the day. Then off to the basement for frozen strawberries (even though Mom would have preferred had they just taken strawberry jam from the fridge). Then, a happy breakfast – with clothing done by Becca, amazingly.

October 10, 2002

Well, I've forgotten my sister Karen's birthday. Again. Sadly, and unfortunately, Karen seems to suffer disproportionately from my forgetfulness. It is not intentional. I reminded my stepfather to remember her birthday and he reminded me. I reminded my brother to remember her birthday and Hugh reminded me. Notwithstanding, this morning, Deborah looked at me and said, „Your sister's birthday was yesterday.“ I am chastened. I tried to remember and I failed. I am not certain I will be able to put into place systems that will ensure I will be able to remember things. Obviously, my mind cannot do it.

At this moment, I am not thinking about my sister and missing her 49th birthday. It is of little importance - I am confident she will forgive me. But I am reminded by my predicament of the man in Oliver Sacks' book, „The Man Who Mistook his Wife for a Hat“. In the chapter I am thinking about, a man had destroyed his short-term memory through excessive drinking and was condemned to living his life in the moment. While I

do not think my case and his are identical, there are similarities. Enough, in any case, to be frustrating.

FINAL WRITINGS 2003

These essays were dictated at Misericordia and at Taché during Patrick's last fifteen months. The evidence from Loc Lu's hand written copy show very little editing. Patrick would have already done that, lying in bed or in his wheel chair to be ready when Loc Lu came to take dictation. These writings truly were composed on the inside of Patrick's eyelids.

Not having access to his computer he stopped keeping his journal but in the essays and poems he dictated he explored a deeper level of expression.

Earlier Patrick wrote stories to entertain the reader. He did not think that his physical condition was the subject for creative writing. Only in his journal did he speak personally. In this his last year, writing about his memories, he learned to draw on his experience of MS to portray both tragedy and humour. His imagination remained no less active.

Some earlier journal entries sketch a possible fantasy followed by an incomplete first draft.

Patrick finally got around to writing about Malabar, where he had first worked after university. An earlier journal entry refers to it as one of his "shames" probably because he felt he had wasted five years of his healthy younger life there, not realizing his life would be truncated.

The Quality of Co-incidence

January 2003

This is one of those moments when the intersections meet. I don't know whether or not this is a memory or a fantasy or something spawned by a nightmare. At different times of the day, depending upon how well I'm physically feeling, I would swear on a stack of bibles it was one thing. An hour later, caressed by the joys of fatigue it has mutated into another. I cannot believe I was fortunate enough to have witnessed this event, but then again, maybe it was nothing.

Such are the qualities of coincidence. They're more than a brush with celebrity and more than the elation of epiphany. They produce such a strange mixture of emotions. Curiosity, confusion, respect and awe swirl together to produce a moment which you cannot forget. At least, I didn't. It was baggage I carried my entire life and it disquiets me to this day.

There are spring nights when the evening is perfect. When the light and the air and the buildings hang together to create a space so poignant that it carries your heart away. I am not usually a devotee of architecture but there are places so arresting they will not be ignored.

The centre of the University of Toronto is one such space. Universities are usually built near the perimeters of cities where the land is inexpensive and plentiful and there is room to grow. Cities respond logically to their presence and grow around them in a predictable genesis as if the city actually had a brain. The design of the initial buildings

is crucial, however, and sets a tone that will carry the institution forward for years to come.

The central buildings of the University of Toronto are low stone affairs in what is possibly a period gothic style. Each is part of a perimeter surrounding a doughnut-shaped roadway with a small patch of green space in the middle.

I was working in downtown Toronto that summer and finding my way home after a very long day's work. I rode my bicycle just into the circular roadway and was stopped by an older police officer who asked me to remain where I was for a moment. His manner was so courteous and the evening so fine that I was more than willing to comply, with curiosity. I was surprised when a procession of stretch limousines, like a dark stream of low-slung barracuda began circling the little roadway and progressed toward a building called Hart House. At that moment my fatigue abated and I remembered that the city of Toronto was playing host to a meeting of the leaders of the G-7, who were being treated to the finest the city of Toronto had to offer. They were having supper at Hart House. Amongst the curiosities for the leaders' amusement was a tent city for use by journalists close to the leaders' meeting spaces and corporate-sponsored gardens of flowered logos lining the highway between the meeting place and their hotels. I remained where I was, made even more curious by the spectacle and stood, one leg on the curb and one straddling my bicycle. The limousines continued and in twenty seconds they were gone.

These were during the days of my innocence. This was Toronto in the early 1980's. The entire city was feting the imported leaders and their retinues. The economy was booming as a result of the deficit financing of Reaganomics and everyone was in an

upbeat mood. This was in the days before the Battle of Seattle, the protestor death in Europe, the Quebec Wall, the Kananaskis Hideaway. These were in the days before terms such as globalization had come into common parlance and had fired the imaginations of youth. Little wonder I stood rooted to the spot and watched with nothing more than a vague sensation of disquiet.

This is a murky half-forgotten memory despite the fact that a subject of my Political Science Masters' study was the meetings of the G-7 and the subject of my thesis was the attempts at financial coordination between G-7 countries from 1970 until 1990. I write these words in no attempt at falsehood. I both knew that this event happened and I cannot certify that I witnessed any part of it.

Interesting work has been done by researchers into the psychology and psychiatric properties of memory. Memories which produce powerful emotions were thought initially to be immune from distortion. Sophisticated work has been done, however, into memories of both pleasurable and traumatic events. Researchers have attempted to degrade subjects' memories by producing inaccurate variables. One such study took place in Russia following an explosion in a large apartment block. Researchers asked witnesses if they remember seeing the large white dog. There had been no large white dog present at the time of the explosion. Witnesses replied "no", but upon being re-interviewed several months later, changed their answers to the affirmative. They concocted elaborate stories about the dog, the injuries it had sustained, and what actions passers-by took on its behalf.

Another such study took place at Euro Disney. Subjects were asked if they had enjoyed meeting Bugs Bunny. The answer was invariably "No." Nevertheless, upon

being re-interviewed months later, subjects elaborated at length about their meeting this cartoon character. These meetings had to be a product of their imagination though, because Bugs Bunny is a product copy written by the company Hanna-Barbara and is not ever present in Euro Disney.

Memories, as any defense attorney will attest, are both malleable and subject to manipulation. Sadly, they do not provide an infallible history of our past. Knowing these things, how could I currently have faith in my memories of witnessing the limousines of the leaders of the G-7?

There had been too much time and too many variables in between, which may have degraded my memories. Further to this, I must add the things I know about the adverse affects of Multiple Sclerosis on the human brain. It leaves me in a place where I am left to question the qualities of my past, the qualities of my future, and even the legitimacy of the actions I endeavor to take in now.

As I watched the limousines parade before me, I could not discern if there was anyone inside or not. They exited the centre circle, turned a corner beyond my view and processed away.

Such a strange experience. I was told by the constable in charge that I was free to go. I slung my leg over my bicycle, not knowing the profound effects this experience would have on me. I pedaled off into the darkness not knowing that in ignorance there is bliss.

Canada Employment Centre

April 14, 2003

Children dislike transitions. Take a child who is involved with a number of toys and suggest to him or her a different activity, no matter how much the proposed activity is liked and enjoyed, and that child will invariably put up a fuss. He or she will make excuses or outright refuse or at worst throw a temper tantrum, telling you in the innumerable ways of children that they do not want to stop what they are doing. They have that right. They have expended a lot of energy, preparing their environment, getting it arranged, and developing its future. It is as real to them as conscious reality is to us. Hardly surprising that they do not want to see it disturbed.

Some adults never move beyond the scope of those children - possibly most adults. Many people work toward getting their jobs, getting their homes, raising their families, and trying to be happy. There is nothing wrong with this. I do it myself. Perhaps this reflects an unwillingness to accept the future as an opportunity to be embraced and triumphed over. Little wonder that none of us look forward to the prospects of actually having to look for a job.

Perhaps I speak only for myself, but I do not really think that this is true. No one I have ever spoken to looks forward to the prospect of job hunting with anything but depression verging on outright dread. It is not surprising that Canadian Employment Centres came into existence. The idea may initially have been some bureaucrat's idea of cleverly matching employer needs with the unemployed population, but in reality there was also a powerful psychological impetus. These centres have never been welcomed

whole heartedly by their user populations, with both employers and job seekers dissatisfied with their results.

Job seekers inevitably find the process dissatisfying, with the job postings either inadequate or unappealing. Employers, on the other hand, usually are dissatisfied with the quality of applicants who arrive from these centres. Job postings are often outdated or already filled as well. With these centres serving as an individual's first forays into the job seeking experience, a cycle is usually set up which condemns some "types" of job applicants into some "types" of jobs . How quiet and convincing is the hierarchical process of class structure. Only the best jobs for only the best people.

There is another level to add to this experience, and I had the unpleasant opportunity to have to address it. I had received an important piece of mail. It informed me that, as a consequence of continuing developments in my disability, I was now eligible for moneys provided to me under the Canada Pension Plan. While I had looked forward to this moment, I also faced it with displeasure. I knew both that the moneys I would be offered would be small and that it meant a curtailing of future possibilities. There was no denying my several disabilities. By this time I had difficulty both seeing and moving. I would never again live without the aid of my wheelchair and I had already lost substantial amount of movement in my upper limbs. Obviously, retirement from gainful employment was the only practical option. I did not look forward to this new stage in my life, since it was both premature and obtrusive. I read the piece of mail, realizing that I was turning a cornerstone in my life while unsure about what the future held.

The letter required that I present it at the nearest available branch of the Canada Employment Centres in order to begin completion of the necessary paper work. I booked transit, waited the required period for my ride, and went down to the centre.

It was weird. It was weird.

I will not forget those moments. I left the best behind me and entered the centre. The first person who greeted me was not a job seeker, as I had expected, but a young member of the staff. He took one look at my face and an exuberant grin spread across his face. He said something exalted in recognition. Something like, “ the very last time” or “Is it all over?” It was as if my answer would signal his liberation from that place, instead of mine. I got the impression he wanted me to share in his rejoicing. It felt so odd.

The rest of the staff processed my paperwork without comment and without outward emotions. It was easily obvious to everyone involved that the likelihood of my continuing employment was remote at best. I sat waiting and wondering what the appropriate emotion for this moment was.

The strangeness did not continue, however, until I was sitting by the double doors exiting the building and waiting for my return bus ride. The doors were double doors in two senses. There were two doors side by side as well as two doors spaced apart with an entrance foyer in between. I sat staring at those doors, waiting for my ride when the feeling of oddity returned.

Entering the building was an older gentleman, probably in his early 50's. He was well groomed in appearance wearing a cardigan and slacks and nondescript in every way. He came into the building from outside, let the outside door close behind him, then turned, pulled the door open behind him, and released it to close behind him. He repeated

this unusual ritual with the inside door. The door was pulled open, he walked through it. He turned around, made certain the door was re-opened behind him and then released. He was deliberate, he was methodical, and he executed the activity without a fuss of any kind.

He ambled quietly into the room and began surveying the job postings. Five or ten minutes later, he was back at the doors, leaving the building and repeating the process exactly as before. I did not know what I was watching but I had some suspicions. I had recently completed reading a book by a noted psychiatrist, Dr. Oliver Sachs, entitled “The Man who Mistook His Wife for a Hat.” Sachs used the book to detail a number of case studies of unusual brain/body interactions that he had observed. I suspected I had observed what Sachs had described as Tourette’s syndrome.

According to Sachs, Tourette’s syndrome were odd forms of compulsive behaviour that individuals manifest despite their willingness to unwillingness. These mannerisms could take many forms. Inappropriate shouting, strange ticks or faces, or walking or moving upper limbs in strange manners. The persons with Tourette’s were capable of complex and very difficult skills, but the strange behaviours would always manifest themselves somehow. I did not know for certain, but I thought I had witnessed an individual with Tourettes” Certainly if it had been the case, it would have gone a long way in explaining why he would have been at a Canada Employment Centre. He gave me pause to wonder if indeed he was a harbinger of things to come. I felt very much as though I had entered a very strange new world.

A Cautionary Tale

(undated)

This is a story for a little boy and a little girl. Hopefully, they will never need it.

On the Cabot Trail, on east side of Cape Breton Island, there is a beach which is strikingly beautiful. So strikingly beautiful, in fact, that the provincial government recognized its beauty by building a parking lot right beside it so tourists could make use of it. One of the things that make the beach so striking and so unusual is that the north end of the beach is marked by having a waterfall. The waterfall is not large, perhaps sixty or seventy feet high. It does not so much cascade as it trickles in a very determined fashion.

If you were to climb the shoreline beside the waterfall you would notice immediately a rough path leading upward. This pathway would in turn lead to a bridge which traverses the creek which feeds the waterfall. On the other side of the bridge the path is more pronounced and has obviously been trod by many feet.

The path continues on through several hundred yards of beautiful woods and emerges into a striking vista. You see the rocky promontory first. Then, to the east is the Atlantic Ocean, all the way to Europe. On the other side of the promontory is a very narrow and incredibly beautiful cove, the perfect size and shape for swimming. The promontory on the cove side curves down into a cliff that is ideal for jumping and diving. It is fifty feet or so to the water and you can see the bottom about ten or twelve feet below the waves. The water is blue and clear and the bottom is sandy. It is so inviting to leap from the promontory into the cove below.

I first saw this cove on a gorgeous day in July. My friends had gone down before

me to the edge of the cove and I so wanted to leap. I didn't. I didn't know how cold the water would be but I expected it would be very cold that early in the summer. Also, I had never swam in that cove before and even though the bottom looked deep enough to leap off the cliff, I didn't know that for sure.

I went back to that cove just once more in my life on a day that was not suitable for swimming. So I looked on not having jumped from that cliff as a glorious missed opportunity.

Later in my life I became a wheelchair user and rode the bus frequently with other young men like myself. They had made sudden irrevocable choices which had marked their lives. One had tried to ski between his friend's legs. Another had tried to back flip off a floating dock. Both had ended up with broken necks. They had been 19 years old, at the most dangerous time of a young man's life. They were at the height of their physical abilities and at the lowest point of their mental ones. They would have tried anything.

So I didn't try leaping from the cliff. I ended up in a wheelchair anyway. But I did not have to live with the fact that I had done something incredibly stupid and very horrible to myself.

Night Traffic

May 12, 2003

There are times when the distinction between memory and fantasy becomes clear. Perhaps this is as a consequence of shared memories that, if we verify a memory with another person, we can then be more confident about it as a fact. It is as if we humans accept certainty in numbers and are most confident when we are granted that reassurance. Maybe it is a result of the social origins of the human race; maybe it is a result of the corrosion of human memory by the technological developments of the preceding centuries. Who knows? These answers are probably too biologically or technologically deterministic, but I consider the evidence of the general thesis incontrovertible. We believe our memories when somebody else says that they actually happened as well.

The following is one such memory.

Traveling along a two-lane highway that twists and turns through mountains covered by dense forests at night-time is an experience I encourage anyone to engage in at least once in their lives. The closeness of the trees to either side of the road, the knowledge that mountains loom somewhere out in the darkness, the security provided by the sanctity of the enclosed space of the car, of movement through darkness – all these combine to instill a sense of fragility and confusion. Those were the feelings I shared with my companion one night. We were traveling on a north-west route toward the city of Kelowna in British Columbia. We were young. We were foolish. Despite the bravado that both of these qualities are blessed with, the passage on that night became so surreal that eventually we both completely stopped speaking and stared out of the car without really knowing what to expect.

We had no reason to be afraid. We had experienced no traumatic moments. Our car, although old, was working properly and we had no doubts that it would keep working. Still, there was that strange sense of vulnerability, and it was about to be tried.

Without street lamps, without bright markings to provide confidence, a midnight ride through the mountains makes one particularly acute. Two city boys, half lost in the country, can be forgiven for nearly jumping out of their skins when they were suddenly confronted by two luminous orbs in the roadway ahead of them. These strange lights were about five feet up and moving slowly across the road. As soon as the first to appeared, two others appeared behind them. Then there were more – how many I don't know – but I slowly guessed that we were seeing the eyes of deer, and I could scarcely believe how bright, how shining, how like spotlights they were.

We did the obvious and slowed. We chuckled at our misgivings over what must be commonplace in this strange new environment. The night was to become stranger still.

A few miles further – how many I couldn't tell you – as the road turned to the left, we came upon a sight guaranteed to create more misgivings. On its side on the shoulder of the road before the start of the wall of trees was a huge logging truck. The driver had obviously been negotiating the turn, missed it and the truck had flipped. We pulled over and jumped out. We had no way of knowing whether the accident happened a week earlier or five minutes ago. Was there a driver somewhere near? If there were, how would we find him? If we did, how would we be of help?

We clambered closer to the truck. No one appeared in any immediate danger. The truck was somewhat damaged but had the stillness of something that had happened a

long time ago.

While my companion and I stood staring at the enormous truck and the considerable violence the accident must have caused, a large late model car pulled up behind us. Four men eased themselves out of the car, commenting on the state of the truck. They were large. They were beefy. They were obviously fortifying themselves for their evening's passage with two large bottles of Wild Turkey.

They quickly reached the same conclusions as we, and went on their way. We watched them climb into their car and quickly motor off into the night. My companion looked at me and said, "Let's give them lots of distance." We laughed quietly, got into our car and proceeded cautiously, the lesson of the truck fresh in our minds.

Our travel that night ended shortly with our arrival in Kelowna. I wish I could report that we drove more cautiously thereafter, but we didn't. I wish I could say that I finally came to understand the meaning of that night and any lesson it provided, but I cannot.

So I am left with the feeling that I had a memory but I do not know what was its import or how it could be interpreted. It is a memory, nothing more and nothing less. It provides me with the sense that, despite our memories, we get no reassurance and continually are left strangers in a strange land.

Memories, Metaphors, Magic

June 2, 2003

Antonio Gramsci wrote his Prison Notebooks. If only I can find the strength to write my own.

At some point in life each of us comes to the recognition and the personal admission that we are not what we always hoped we would become. The child's dream of becoming the sports superstar falters as we recognize our own physical limitations. The dreams of the scholar change as we recognize the immensity of the problems we confront. Our comprehension of existence dwarfs us so completely, as we broaden our understanding, that we are almost always humbled into emotional impotence.

Something of this nature also happens as we confront our aging bodies, our inability even to shuffle in the places where we used to dance. On becoming disabled, and recognizing the limitations of your failing body and the immensities of the barriers that confront you, it is hardly surprising that some sink into places of despair. Nevertheless there have to be solutions to this conundrum. Life has got to be worth more than a simple striving with absolutely no hope of success.

One such solution lies in the delights of metaphor. The ability of human beings to suggest that two things – objects, but also ideas or feelings - can be likened one to another, no matter how apparently incongruous. This provides us with the possibility of hope. You could say that it is like watching a frog eat a toaster. It won't get very far, it's a senseless thing to do but you gotta give that frog points for trying - and it's kinda fun to watch.

When we poor humans attempt to understand our selves and our world, we are like that frog. We may be futile and senseless but perhaps we're also fun to watch.

When I was in school, I had to deal with the fact of my failing eyesight. A great deal of reading had been assigned. By dint of technological aids, human assistance and academic kindness I got by. But there were always more interesting things yet to read and more to discuss and not enough energy to do it. So it was that I was confronted by the work of Antonio Gramsci.

Gramsci was a puzzle that delighted me. I understood only his personal story and that by way of hearsay. I never studied his work. I never even read his work - but I so wanted to.

Gramsci may have been a genius. Gramsci was definitely determined. He had unflagging confidence in the importance of the ideas he was determined to convey. Who was he? What did he do? As I understood it – and, remember, that I might be wrong - Gramsci was an Italian put in prison for union organizing and he probably died there. No doubt I display my failing intellectual abilities by writing this without researching the particulars of his life story. No matter. For the purposes of my understanding of Gramsci it is more important to me that I don't know of the things he wrote. For me, what is important is that he was put in prison, wrote a number of notebooks about his ideas and died. A jailer smuggled his notebooks out of prison and so Gramsci is known to us today.

It is a story of unflagging optimism in the face of impossible odds. Odds so impossible that they actually consumed the man himself, even though the ideas live on. How could I not feel akin to this man?

I currently inhabit two prisons. The first prison is that of my living arrangements; they provide me the necessary support to continue my existence but also constrain and limit my aspirations. The second prison is that of my disease which provides only constraint and limit.

How arrogant and egocentric to compare myself to Gramsci... He wrote in prison. I write in the lap of luxury. But therein lies the magic. That I am prepared to make this particular leap of faith. To dare to say that I feel like Gramsci whom I have never read, and whom I am probably not at all like, given our dissimilar circumstances. Maybe he and I are both just frogs trying to eat a toaster - futile, ridiculous, arrogant, possibly courageous. I flatter myself in thinking that there are parallels.

And if there are not, so what? These illusions are indispensable: they make some of us human and render us foolish enough that we continue striving to survive.

Four Angels

June 12, 2003

Like Ebenezer Scrooge, in Charles Dickens' classic story 'A Christmas Carol,' I have been visited by four spirits. My spirits, however, were not interested in having me celebrate an annual holiday, nor were they dead. My spirits arrived dressed as women, one by one, each carried by her concern for another person. Each was grappling with facets of the same problem and from each I received a gift.

The first was the youngest and as such her emotions were the freshest and most vivid. She came to me during our street's Block Party and we sat on my front porch and watched children gamboling in the street while we discussed what was, for her, a most difficult subject.

Her favorite aunt had been diagnosed with MS a few years previously. Her aunt had become increasingly worse, having more and more difficulty with her living arrangements. Her aunt had become depressed and had chosen what was, for her, a logical solution: she had attempted suicide. She had done a bad job of it and, now, people like her niece were left to deal with the consequences.

I said what I could. That I had been there. That the disease often appears to curtail options. That the suicide attempt might have been no more than a cry for help that was being heard. But throughout all my kind words I was left to consider all the times that had I the option I would have used it.

The second came to me at a party. She and I were introduced by friends and she was in many ways the easiest of my four angels to deal with. She had MS. We talked of

her symptoms, we discussed her management, her choices with respect to medication and her coping mechanisms. She seemed to be in a more precarious situation but she was coping. I liked her and it pleased my heart.

The third angel appeared at my bedside, acting as an attendant and giving me aid. She wanted to know about MS desperately because she was in love with a man whose first marriage had fallen apart, possibly as a result of the fact that his wife had MS. I told her of the strains the disease had put on my friends' marriages, about how no one could be blamed, that there was no purpose to blame, that the disease was stronger than any single person and that there was no reason that it would not be stronger than the union of two people. I had seen this so many times before.

The fourth was a nurse who came to me to discuss a friend. Her friend persisted in climbing steep, precarious stairs up to her bedroom on the third floor even though there were different living options possible and the ascent had become dangerous. I thought then of all the things that I had done which were dangerous, which were foolhardy, which were my means of proclaiming my resistance, my unwillingness to submit to this pernicious, stupid disease. I told her to have confidence. Her friend would die as she lived, as we all will.

After they all left, I sat reflecting. They had come to me searching for answers because my personal experience might have given me some particular insight. I am not sure it goes beyond what they could have found inside. But I may have provided them with something of a touchstone to direct them to where they needed to go.

Four Angels

August 5. 2003

Four battered angels by night came searching,
A tiny flickering candle each held, in one hand,
In the other their love for a dear friend,
Their certainty vanquished before cold remorseless quicksand.

Disguised in appearance as women,
Each came privately to my quiet island's lee
Asking questions of responsibility and duty -
Unfortunately, they asked them of me.

So I spouted some platitudes and truisms,
Silly nonsense that all of us should know -
How to take heart, how to give heart, where to find comfort,
When to hold tight, when to stand back, when to let go.

Perhaps I said something that helped still their nightmares
Perhaps I said something that helped them hope
Perhaps I said something wise despite my misgivings
In the end though, I think I just helped them cope.

Folklorama

June 16,2003

I can't blame the guy. It was a good focus for the beginning of the performance: hammering on his bongo drums, holding them before me and playing them just to me. I was a good way to start a performance. All eyes turned toward us and I was the centre of attention.

I had never before minded being the centre of attention. I was always prepared. I always had something to produce for the audience's amusement, or their amazement, or their sympathy or despair. It was my stock in trade. It was what I had done, both recreationally and professionally. I know how to work an audience's emotions.

But at this moment, I felt naked. Like a little child in the dream when you are inadvertently exposed before the classroom. Beyond embarrassed – I was disarmed and confused.

His attention was directed to me because I was in a wheelchair - something that made me just want to blend in and not be noticed - and here I was the centre of the crowd's attention. They did not watch to see what he would do; they wanted to see how I would react to what he just did. There was no ill will on their part toward me. I was not being depended upon to do anything to warrant their attention. But I was on the spot and I knew it.

Strange, that such a memory should be my moment of incapacity. I have overcome hurdles which would embarrass the most resolute; I have held the attention of many on a word or a gesture, and I was left at this moment incapable.

Our weaknesses are strange. This disease has given me some new ones.

Questions

June 16, 2003

It's all about the same thing. Everybody always thinks it's so different because each one looks so different. But they're not. The differences are not important. Because at essence, they're all the same.

When a Ballerina floats up, apparently effortlessly, on point, when a running back cuts and is gone, when a pitcher places a hundred mile-an-hour fast ball in exactly the right place sixty-six feet away, time after time, they're all the same thing. We catch our breaths and our excitement explodes. We are left holding our chairs and saying to our companions. "Did you see that?"

It's all the same thing. The fascination with the precision of motion must be rooted in genetics. In the life and death struggle that tells us when to hide and when to flee. How else to explain our interest in the tiger which is caught exposed in the open, bounding toward shelter. That incredible beauty, when form has entirely met function and there is no purpose in the action but to achieve the animal's end.

How often do we touch it? That moment when we have one purpose, when that and nothing else matters. Do you remember those moments?

I know I did. I know that I remember them still.

Sometimes they are for sharing. Sometimes they are not. But those moments become a critical part of our memories.

No wonder we remember our youth. The strength we exulted in, our delight in our own motions. They were more than just the relentless monotony of assembly line manufacturing. Most of that has been taken over by machines. More power to them.

They have stolen the jobs of a generation, they have taken from us monotony and that type of stupidity, but they have also replaced the pride of our youths and our imaginary glories.

Does our genetic legacy condemn us to this? To the liberation from our confinements? Possibly so.

It is the little things that get remembered. There was running over grass on a warm summers day, there was the intake of breathe by the audience at the making of an impossible ping-pong ball return, there was looking at the route of a successful ascent and thinking to yourself. "I did that. I know I did that." Following that, to go home content.

I can see it on people's faces when they look at me and they know such precision is gone. In its place they expect a moral wisdom. Too often I feel not up to the challenge. I have not been cursed by the fates. I have not been blessed by the gods. I would that I were now a better man by virtue of this apparently divine touch. If this is the case I haven't been able to discern it. So be it.

Keep reading, I might still come up with something that surprises you.

The Emperor of the Air

Journal Entry April 27, 2002

My best time of the day is the middle of the night. At 4 a.m., after six hours of sleep, I lie awake, a body rested and cramp-free, and dream dreams of fantasy and desire and longing and reflection. These are the moments when I am most myself, when I do that thing which I am best able to do and which no one is capable of doing in that way which is unique to me and, of all things I can do, most satisfying to myself. These moments I would take into my day if I could, but only seldom can I even glimpse the monuments I earlier stood atop. The concrete hurly-burly of the day sweeps aside these fragile less-than-nothings and I am left with disquiet and frustration and the necessity of inadequacy. Little surprise that I write. Little surprise that I dislike my writing. The painful selection of words and phrases and punctuation and cadence trying to replace the inspiration of thought! What a folly, what a weakness, what a trial is this!

Although they do describe me and my situation, I could put these words into the mouth of the Emperor of Imagination. This will be a story in which the emperor lives in his cathedral of the air, with its altars of emotion and its shower of words. It also contains its wellsprings of longing from which are drawn buckets of effort and endeavor. Each altar covered by a cloth which is removed to reveal the well which is beneath. The emperor has tremendous power because he creates the fantasies we all choose to submit ourselves to. He does not have any power to either persuade or coerce. Indeed, he seems completely uninterested in such realities. The emperor is scrutinized, no matter what he does, by the magpies. These beings, half human and half bird, flutter between the

cathedral and the ground, dazzling everyone below with their flamboyant plumage and gabbling incessantly and confusedly about whatever tidbits they may have observed as they argue with one another. The emperor knows what he is -- an ideal, a nightmare, and, in the end, a metaphor.

Empire of the Sun

June 23, 2003

Strange, so strange, so very strange, indeed! The first words I remember hearing. The first words I remembered hearing and understanding, later to repeat. Strange, so strange, so very strange, indeed!

They were the first things I remember ever seeing. An iris – no, two; openings, portals into possibility surrounded by color. Before I had words, before I had concepts these beacons stood there before me with the promise of hope. Were these the eyes of a he? A she? I did not know and it didn't matter. I looked into those eyes and I knew without thinking, I knew in every bit of my being that I looked on the wellspring of my purpose, on all that was and could be and all that I could be and was. I looked into the eyes of everything and nothing, and everything made me look and nothing could have made me look away. In that instant, I sank within those eyes and surfaced into that face and realized that we were two. I looked in and not out, was distinct and at a distance. A very short distance indeed: an arm's-length away.

It is no use and there is no purpose trying to describe that face. The colors, the planes, the very indentations themselves were subject to change without notice, in a heartbeat, in an instant, a glimmer of time. This was more than the play of shadow and light. The face and the form were a dance set in motion, like leaves rustling, like a breeze, like waves upon a sea. He laughed and his music put the lie to indistinction. “Such confusion,” he said. “Fear not, you shall learn. Come.”

We began to move and I swayed with the motion, on the end of that arm. I rode on that fist, air brushing against my face, and I knew sorrow at the birth of shadow for we

were traveling into darkness. Leaving that balcony, a parapet open toward the sunlight, I learned the harshness of decision, the permanence of action, the loss of the path not taken and the folly of ever leaving the sky.

“Hush,” he murmured, stroking my body; my heart was both stilled and fired at the comfort of that touch.

He strode beneath an archway of magnesite and granite, and turned down a hallway of filigree and cut glass. Hangings of rice paper and flowers in cane baskets sprouted from the walls; statues of small horses grew from pedestals in corners. Stretched between a microscope, sitting on a table, and the top of a flower in a basket there was a single strand of spider’s web, bisected by a sunbeam. So many things, so many ideas and so many ways to describe them! We passed through a doorway into a room full of mirrors and plants and waterfalls and he placed me on a ladder standing unsupported, all by itself, resting on nothing. I noted the insignificance of this feat.

“Stay here,” he said as I wobbled on this perch. “It is time for my morning ablutions.”

I noted the sudden admission of physicality.

“This,” he said, “you will find hard,” and he stood before me and aged.

(What is the plot of this monstrosity, this allegory about the human race? Gulliver traveled from place to place in order to have a quest, an adventure upon which the story was hung. On what does my description of the Emperor hang?)

Such a way to enter consciousness: a gigantic face before me, muttering words in a tone of support and approval. The words? I didn’t understand them. It didn’t matter; I

didn't care to. I was too busy extracting my body from the eggshell, flapping what were to become wings, and squeaking.

“Such a beautiful magpie. You're going to grow into something beautiful. Ah, what I won't have to do with you!” The face looked different: gentler, fuller, capable of a tenderness and devotion that a moment before had been less obvious. “Don't worry, little one. Breathe in. You'll feel better. Life is more fun than the other. You'll get used to it. Just take a few moments.”

I did take a few moments. I breathed in and out. I squeaked in protest: what was this? Where was this? What was right? I shook my wings - although they could hardly be called such, as I had barely grown feathers. I breathed in and out, each time feeling stronger, and with a little more comprehension of my surroundings.

“That's right, that's right. I told you you'd feel better. You'll like this.” The face was back. It was earnest and concerned and dedicated to practicality, with more lines, more planes and more harshness than the last time. “That's a lot better. Just wait, you're gonna be a big one. You are going to be the master of everything that you see. Just don't tell anyone.”

And the face laughed. The explosion of noise was almost too much for my timid ears to manage. Head thrown back, the noise spilling out from its mouth in all directions until I was left with no shelter, no place to hide. The giant receded.

Another giant appeared on my other side, frightening me near to oblivion. I was to be eaten! There was fear, but no flight. I fell forward on my face and the hard surface of the nest, and eggshell, awakened me to hard realities.

“It fell down!” said a smaller voice.

“It’s all right,” boomed the first. “Life deals hard lessons. It’ll be alright.”

And I was. I was already struggling forward, freeing myself of eggshell, struggling for freedom - for something. I wanted to survive. I couldn’t see - not really, just barely.

Go away. Feed me. You’re not right.

“No, no, don’t touch it. Your smell is already on the nest. The baby will be alright as long as we don’t touch it.” The same voice again - the first giant, the strange one. They make more noise than birds! They don’t understand anything.

I needed so much. Even breathing was strange. There was an ache in my belly. It had to be filled. I was cold, but I didn’t know that. I didn’t know anything. How could I know about cold?

“No, No, as I said before: don’t touch it. Don’t even touch the nest unless you have to. Oh yes, you did right. You brought me the nest. You showed me the treasure. Everything will be alright.”

So, I have your attention... Stop your gawking and gabbling and pouting. Stand there and listen. There’s so much that you’ll learn. You can learn it from me. Me, just a bird. Sit on the ground, shut your mouths, open your ears and listen.

Of course, I didn’t really remember what they were saying. I guessed at it from the memory of what must have been going on. It is the truth of fiction. I can make it up. Maybe it *is* what they said - maybe it’s even better.

“Step back; pick up the nest. Show me where you found it.” That was the first giant, the big one. I was flying in the air – no, that’s wrong. I was in the nest! I shouldn’t have been in the nest.

“It was over here. It was behind this tree. It was on the ground. Oh! What are they doing?” These were words from the little giant, nervous and questioning. I couldn’t see any of them. There’s no way I could have. But I can see it now, in my mind’s eye. I know how it must have looked.

“Oh, don’t move: just keep watching.”

There was a pause and then the voice of the big giant again. “How strange, how sad. This is something not many people see. Look on this and remember. Oh, my little refuge, that has such strange beings in it.”

The big giant was quiet then - and safer, I think. I have never felt it before. I could feel the softness throughout the nest, even while in the air. Like a blanket of warmth on my being. But what did I know of warmth? There was a noise that I would in time come to know as clapping, and then there was a rush and I knew that whatever had been there had gone.

“You did well. You were afraid, but you did not stop all of them. What you have seen is not seen by many human beings.”

Calculation

June 23, 2003

It's a strange use for the wasting of time. I wouldn't do it but for needing a justification. Some reason to explain myself to me, to forgive myself for the harder realities of this existence.

As near as I can figure it, it's all just a matter of numbers. In the Province of Manitoba there are approximately one million people. Neurologists studying this disease estimate there are approximately 115 cases of MS in a population of 100,000 persons in Canada. This means approximately 1150 persons with MS in Manitoba.

There is a huge range within that group of 1150 persons with MS with respect to the severity of the disease and the disabilities that result from it. The absolutely worst cases end up living in nursing homes and care institutions. The nursing home I live in has about 50 residents with MS. I do not know how many nursing homes there are in Manitoba. Nevertheless, I suspect the severity of my disease places me in the top one percent of the group of people with MS. I've become a member of a pretty select group. Nor is anyone really struggling to join the group.

The situation does make me feel better, however, when I think of my children and my reasons for leaving them. It was not a matter of choice. I stayed in my home as long as I was physically capable of doing so. This will not make the moment any easier when they ask me why I did it, but it may in some way explain my absence from their lives.

My fixation on this probably has something to do with the fact that my father died of a heart attack when I was seven, and all I can think of when I think about their childhood are the losses in mine. Oh well, I cannot change what I cannot change – either for myself or my children. So much for being psychological.

Just in passing, I noted that the MS Society was motivating people to participate in their fundraising walk by reporting that 3,000 people in Manitoba have MS. I am not going to blow their cover. But it's pretty obvious to me that they can't do math. In terms of honesty, it's right up there with the weights boasted by professional wrestlers or the assertion by Olympic athletes that they don't use drugs.

The Folly of the Finest Moment of Young Men's Lives

July 28, 2003

Do you remember that moment? When you had it in your hands or could see all around you? The possibilities were infinite and the choices yours to be had.

It had been coming for the better part of a week. The radio had kept mentioning it, and when that morning finally came, nothing needed to be spoken. We all knew what we were going to do. It was Toronto in the early 1980s. Reaganomics was creating an artificial economic boom in our town. Real estate was being flipped and house prices were skyrocketing. Investors were making money hand over fist in a way no one had ever dreamed of before. There we were in a four-storey building amidst all of this on a fine hazy summer day, and at noon an unprecedented event was going to occur – an event which we knew we had better take advantage of because it probably would never happen again.

At 11.50 all the young men in the building began to congregate. We didn't exchange words. We didn't need to. There were three floors to climb up, steep with high ceilings. We raced up them with the agility of youth. On the top floor, racks of costumes to negotiate, onwards towards an unobtrusive corner where stood a steel ladder bolted to the ceiling. It was underneath a trap door that was locked shut. By now our group was virtually incoherent with excitement.

We raced each other as we tore up the rungs of that ladder. The padlock of that trap door was open in an instant and we were on the roof. It was hazy, but we could see. The roof top was unimpressive. It was simply a square of tar with little pebbles that hurt

the feet but we were all strained into the distance towards Lake Ontario, because we knew it was coming.

The wait was rewarded. There it was on the back of a huge 747, being carried like some strange aerodynamic turtle, the space shuttle, on its way from its landing strip in the western US to its launching pad in Florida.

This was in the innocent before period: before disasters which destroyed a space shuttle during ascent and another as it returned to earth traveling eighteen times the speed of sound. This was when the space shuttle meant possibility and hope and would bring us things like the Hubble space telescope and all the mysteries of the universe.

We were there, on that rooftop, watching it circle downtown Toronto three times and we were all certain we were experiencing a special moment in a special place at a special time. We all knew that it was horse shit, but the elation was true. It could not be denied.

We looked at each other and our faces all wore broad grins. We had it all. So that was the finest moment of my young life. I had yet to experience falling in love, the heady confusion of a wedding, planning a life together, watching the birth of my daughter. Compared to what I had thought was everything, there was so much more besides. That doesn't detract from that moment. It was unique. We were almost dancing on that rooftop. But it is a cautionary tale: no matter how magical, no matter how magnificent, there will be more. Always. There will be more and there will be change.

The Legacy of our Ancestors

July 30, 2003

It becomes a problem of nature vs. nurture. It becomes part of the process of being human and the evolution of that process. It becomes our legacy from our ancestors.

It's part of the greatest mystery of all time. Children are fascinated by it. Where did they go? What took them away? Can we bring them back?

It's a harkening to the biggest kid on the block. The kid who cannot be triumphed. The kid who is secure from all opposition and therefore safe. What happened to that kid?

Human beings have been on this earth for approximately 3000 years of recorded history. Cave paintings are older and suggest earlier origins, but they're not very exploratory. The big mystery goes back way further than people. We've ruled the earth for maybe 20,000 years. That's what archeological information suggests and it's hard even for biblical scholars to argue with big, gigantic dinosaur bones.

So, where did they go? If they were so phenomenally successful, where are they today? Children's storybooks notwithstanding, they did not get up on rocket ships and fly away. Archeology, one of those branches of deterministic science, suggests an answer. Recent work in China suggests that the continued evolution of the dinosaur species was toward that of birds. Think of that. Dinosaurs turned into birds. It makes your trip to the corner park an actual journey into a Jurassic Park.

For years I loved the biological interdiction "grow or die". Perhaps the better suggestion should have been "evolve or die". Because that is what they did.

So birds wear the legacy of their ancestry on the beaks on their faces. Human beings wear the legacy in their shoe size and shape and that is used by archeologists to categorize us. How tremendously frustrating! It is also biologically deterministic! That we are condemned by virtue of our ancestry to cope with the tensions of compassion and conflict,

Our teeth are both incisors and molars. Our front teeth are for tearing and rending flesh. And our rear teeth are for pounding bones and nuts. We are omnivores. At least that is what our teeth suggest. We can consume anything.

Maybe that was the failing of the dinosaurs. Maybe with the evolution of flight, they just learned that there was a more successful evolutionary path for them to take.

I don't know. It's another one of those questions I don't know, and will never find out. Part of being human is that we must be content to live with unanswered questions.

Is it nature or is it nurture? Can we evolve beyond our evolution? Can we find an evolutionary path that predisposes us to survival better than violence does? I hope so. I do not want the human race to become the cattle for a more aggressive species to feed upon. But at the same time, I do not want us to be the feeders. Let us hope there is another way.

Dead Kitten

September 22, 2003

The lessons of life come in all shapes and sizes. Often we don't recognize them as such.

When I was fourteen or fifteen, during the summers, in an attempt to subject my brother and me to French immersion, my mother sent us to Lac Saint Jean in Quebec. Once there, we spent our summers working on dairy farms, learning about the life of a farmer, hard work, and animal husbandry. It was a great experience, but it was stranger than anything an anglophone Ottawa city boy had ever seen before.

One of the most vivid experiences was my education into the realities of life and death on the farm. This education has colored my understanding of animals ever since, and my perspective has often seemed hard and cruel to my fellow city dwellers, even though I have meant for it only to be seen in a practical light.

Cutting and baling hay was a difficult and laborious job, which seemed interminable but one which I always enjoyed. It gave me the opportunity to throw around bales of hay, to stack them and organize them in symmetrical patterns. This was the type of work that suited the abilities of a fifteen-year old boy.

Where there is hay, there are mice. The second floor of every dairy barn is stacked to the ceiling with hay, which is used to feed the cows over the winter. Every dairy farm keeps a few barnyard cats to keep down the mice population. and not too much attention is paid to the cats or the kittens they inevitably produce.

A dairy barn is full of large, clumsy, stupid animals, and is a dangerous environment for a kitten. Each summer the cats would produce another litter and each

summer that litter would be winnowed naturally by inconsiderate cows. I became conscious of the fact that our cat's new litter the day that I saw one dead kitten in the manure trough after it had been stepped on by a cow. Such accidents were grizzly but inevitable. A dairy farm is a dangerous place.

Not only for kittens, as it turned out. One day as I stood in the barn watching the cows moving into their regular stalls, one cow was noticeably different because it was staggering and moving disjointedly. The farmer did not hesitate for a moment. He reached over to a shelf and pulled out a knife; he gripped the knife so that only an inch of the blade protruded beyond his fingers. Then he stabbed the cow carefully along its spinal column.

He must have known precisely where to do it because the cow dropped to the ground as if it had been shot in the head. I looked on amazed as he calmly continued to apply the tubes of the milking machine to the teats of the other cows. He did not seem dismayed or upset. Later that afternoon, two men – officials of some kind – came by and inspected the dead animal. By that time it had been raised slightly in the air so that the mucous from its nose drained into the manure trough and the veins in its neck had been nicked so that it was bleeding profusely. To my immense fascination, its stomach had been sliced open and had expanded enormously. I do not remember how the body of the cow was disposed of. Perhaps it happened when I was away from the barn doing something else.

The lesson of the death of the kitten and the cow should have prepared me for what came next, but it didn't.

The remaining cats from the litter were becoming larger. There were two remaining. One was a strikingly beautiful tabby, large and strong. The other was a smaller, unattractive grey and black kitten that did not appear to have many redeeming qualities.

One day the farmer called me over to the back door of the barn. This was where the manure trough began its slow ascent up a steep slide until the manure fell over on to a great pile behind the barn. The farmer was talking to me in quick, heavily accented northern Quebec French. I didn't understand what he was saying. My brother and I worked very hard to find the most English-speaking member of the family and spent most of our time talking to them. Now here was the francophone farmer holding the kittens, one in each hand, and talking to me. I thought he was asking which one I liked more, which was the more attractive. There was no contest. I reached out and touched the tabby. It was obviously the finer of the two kittens.

Quietly, suddenly, he turned the hand holding the tabby and slammed the back of its neck on the corner of the manure trough. The move was decisive and complete. I knew the cat was dead. He casually tossed its carcass onto the manure pile.

I stood there in stunned silence. The kitten I thought little of was walking by my feet. The kitten I liked was dead. It was not the fact of death that stunned me. It was the part in the process that I had unwittingly played.

It was a lesson I have often thought about since. We often do not understand the import of our actions, yet they have deadly consequences for something or someone else.

Wet Behind the Ears

September 29, 2003

It really was inevitable. My health had been deteriorating to the point where I could not move at all. I had always suffered recurrent urinary tract infections (UTI) and it was inevitable that one day I'd develop a UTI at the same time as one of the bouts of pneumonia. The pneumonia put me in the hospital and the UTI kept me there while I received drug treatment. When it came time for me to leave, I realized I didn't have the strength to manage at home any longer. Even with the assistance of my homecare workers I was now too weak to manage safely. This was not an unexpected twist but it had happened sooner than I had anticipated.

Following discussions with my doctor, it was decided that I would move into the Misericordia Interim Care Facility. This was a small, converted downtown hospital where residents stayed while waiting for placement in a nursing home. I had been on the waiting list for the Taché nursing home for about a year so I didn't expect I had long to wait.

The first day I was brought into the facility, I realized that I'd entered a new stage of my health care. The health aides at the Misericordia were mostly of Filipino descent. They seemed very jovial and, very obviously, they had their accustomed ways of doing things. The first thing they wanted to do was to give me a bath. This was standard operating procedure for a new resident. Five of them had me in a plastic tub chair very quickly and my clothes off. I tried to explain. I had previous experience with bathtubs. People with multiple sclerosis are unlike individuals with conventional neurological systems. When our limbs are immersed in hot water, they immediately become flaccid

and weak. I tried to explain to these five smiling, laughing women that I was about to give them a great deal of trouble. But no, they had dealt with reluctant residents before. They were undeterred. They were bound and determined to give me that bath.

The bathtub was an immense apparatus, with the chair being picked up in a sling and lowered into the tub. The women had wrapped two straps around me that appeared to be sufficient for any difficulties. I knew they weren't.

They lowered me into the water. Immediately upon hitting the warmth of the water, my limbs relaxed completely and I became Mr. Jello. I quietly told them that we had a bit of a problem, as I started to slide out of the chair.

At first they didn't take me seriously. Two minutes later, I was in the bathtub with five women trying valiantly to stop me from drowning.

I wasn't frightened. I'd seen this before. My response was standard and organized: "Ladies, ladies, one at a time. I'm not as young as I used to be. Just promise me, nobody tells my wife." They hoisted me up and got me out and took me to an available bed nearby, where they changed my clothes and then took me back to my own bed. By now they were laughing, but they hadn't been laughing earlier.

Once back in my bed, I reflected on the experience. Five women in a bathtub, the dream of many a young man... Be careful what you wish for, I thought - some day you might get it. I wished my partner had witnessed this. She would have laughed her head off.

Thirty seconds more and I would have drowned. How close humor and death are. I will have to keep my eyes open for what comes next.

April 24, 2002 Journal entry

... I have, in the past, been ashamed of my shames. Even the reading of science fiction was a shame. Malabar was a shameful indulgence. Someday I am going to have to write something about the shameful indulgences.

Malabar

October 7, 2003

Malabar's physically expressed the convergence of the human imagination. It was dedicated to the creation of a possibility, one within which we each played a part. It took from you your desire and gave it a physical impetus; everyone who climbed the stairs to the front door knew that was what was happening. You could see it on the customer's face, whether that of the oldest jaded professional or of the most naïve youngster. They were there for the experience and they were going to be a part of it.

Who was responsible for this morass? Who created and fostered this possibility? How did it continue? Why? How to explain its strange existence?

Like I said, it started at the front door. To the right was a doorway into the men's department. To the left a hallway opened onto makeup. Directly in front of you were the stairs, surrounded by posters advertising everything artistic in the neighborhood; these led up to the second floor and the mysteries of the workroom and the ladies department. Beyond that was another flight of stairs, up to the opera department, where some of the best and most beautiful costumes were stored. The men's and ladies' departments maintained stocks of costumes appropriate for public rental, or for rental to high schools

and community theatre groups. Completely unseen were the warehouses, a couple of blocks away, full of even more costumes.

Need to rent a sword? First, we don't do it unless you're an opera company, and willing to negotiate. Then, 'We'll mail you the swords, but it's going to cost you.'

The props department was in the basement – that was where the magic really did take place.

Who was the source of this inspiration? Probably old Lady Malabar. Although she was long dead and gone before I arrived. So was her son. It was he who had separated the business into sections and sold them to people who were already working there. Each had carved up a piece of their specialty.

So there it was, a four storey building in downtown Toronto: not so much a unified project as one that contained divergent directions and separate goals. But everyone in the building was committed to one single goal – satisfying the human imagination - and we all conspired with each other to reach that goal.

I was the lowest and least skilled of the artisans in that place. I greeted customers and assessed their requests. I had to determine exactly what we had that they would like to rent, and I assembled it for them. The request might be for a marvelous costume to attend a private party. The request might involve a Santa Claus costume for Christmas. Or it might be for a high school or civic production of *My Fair Lady* or *Guys and Dolls*. Regardless, I would try to match the vision in their minds with the costumes we had on hand. The goal: another happy customer – and, mind you, some of these requests were phenomenally good moneymakers.

By the time I worked at Malabar, it was a successful business. There were probably upwards of one hundred people working there and although the owners weren't getting rich they made a living. I loved the place. I worked there for five years and although I was paid virtually nothing, I felt a great deal of loyalty toward the organization. Everyone who worked there felt the same. Or, at least all the costumiers did: the workroom and the props department were well paid so their outlook was different.

It took a very special kind of brain to work in the props department but if you had it, you could make a fortune.

Here's a little test. A coffee urn, full of hot coffee, had been put on a table with a plastic tablecloth. The tablecloth had immediately glued itself to the hot coffee urn. How is it possible to separate the two? Remember, the coffee urn has been allowed to cool on the tablecloth and they're welded together as tight as steel. A problem like this baffled everyone in the building except one genius from the props department who didn't even bat an eye.

Did you figure out how to get the coffee urn off the table? It's so easy you might feel as foolish as I did when I learned the answer. Remove all the coffee from the coffee urn. Pour in hot water. The tablecloth will re-melt and you will be able to just lift the coffee urn off.

Like I said, their brains were constructed differently from everybody else's.

A Treatise on Imaginings

Have you ever considered your considering? Have you ever reflected on your reflections? More specifically, for the purposes of this examination have you ever spent time with your imaginings? What are they? Where do they come from? What purpose do they have? What and where is the line between nothing and imagining and between imagining and activity?

First, what to call these strange things? Human language is so clumsy in its construction. I have already used three terms -- considerations, reflections and imaginings. The human language has used so many terms with so many varied definitions, each descriptor emphasizing some different nuance and shining its particular light on a different facet of the same thing. Imaginings? Ideas? Fantasies? Visions? Dreams? Each colours the thing with its own perspective and comes burdened with its own unwarranted...

We have all been progenitors of, observers of, participants of, recipients of, and victims of these strange things which serve as the wellsprings of human activity. Possibly they have their genesis in human need, that desire for food or warmth or companionship or reproduction. But perhaps that is too biologically deterministic. Perhaps they begin with the possibility of possibility and are fueled by curiosity and the desire to answer the eternal question, *what if?*

At their most innocent these are the moments of the child's exploration of the world, when the questions of what, and where, and why, and how, and eventually when, are first asked. Of these questions, how and why become those most critical for the purposes of this discussion. How does this work? Will it work if it does this? Can

something else be done? That first step begins so early. Perhaps it begins with the first comprehension of cause and effect, such as when the child cries and the mother's breast is offered. But the question grows in complexity. With the recognition of the separation of the child and the object comes that first critical question, what will happen if I do this? The child's understanding of the world enlarges and continues until the most rigorous questions of science and arts are being asked and investigated. At their most innocent and most detailed, these imaginings can be the most beautiful and most elegant achievements of humanity. They can contribute to both the quality and quantity of life, to our understanding of the universe and to our understanding of one another. But at their most dangerous, these imaginings lead to cruelty and domination and injustice and such nightmares as genocide.

Journal Entry

May 26, 2002

...An oddity I have been giving some consideration to. Namely, that as the attention span of children has lessened and their understanding of their environment has become more literal and their use of the imaginative has been dulled by television, and video games have trained them into the expectation of immediate gratification and response, the type of people we are creating may have changed. We may be creating individuals who are evolving, not with the creation of new or specialized body parts, but through the creation of changes in the pathways of the brain. Not new pathways, just that the brain is being re-organized. What the shape of this reorganization would be, I don't know. But, it could be a good topic for speculation.

May 26 2002

It happens when I least expect it. Probably when I am well rested, and well fed, and my bowels have moved recently and I have eaten enough, but not too much. It happens usually in the middle of a fantasy about something else, about somewhere else, when I am not too engaged with my reveries but am prepared to go elsewhere and follow that thought. It happens when I think about an old thing, but think about it in a new way and begin to walk along that new path. It happens when I am prepared to think about it, when I am prepared to let things go, to not let the hurly-burly of life intrude and am prepared to ignore my own impositions, the negativity which denies creativity and stifles the possibilities of new thought...

Dreams:

I had a dream last night. I had another just before I woke. They were so strange. I have a lot of dreams. I think I have them because my body is uncomfortable while I am sleeping and is trying to tell me something. But, that's just a theory. I don't really know for sure. Maybe aliens are trying to communicate with me through my dreams and I am just too stupid to understand it and answer back. If that's the case there must be lots of frustrated aliens out there somewhere, because I don't think anybody is consciously answering back either. And I know other creatures are dreaming, too. Even dogs twitch in their sleep. If that's indicative of them dreaming, then those aliens are probably really pissed. There they are, up all night, dialing, and at the end all they have to say for all that effort is, "I don't know, I think I got another dog. Whatever it was, it just kept barking and chasing this stupid squirrel." You think aliens would have the good sense to hire better switchboard operators.

My dreams are so strange. I don't seem to have much of a gap anymore between consciousness and wakefulness. I transition so nicely. I am asleep and then I have this strange state where I remember night dreams so vividly and they seem so accurate and solid and real that there is no distinguishing them from information I know to be correct and then I move into complete consciousness and I know they were just dreams and, wow, really stupid dreams at that. I once dreamt I was so lonely because I had MS and because of that I was unlikely to ever get married or have a family and then I woke up and remembered that of course I have one and of course I'm married and of course I'm pretty happy except for the stupid MS. Although, I am sort of learning to enjoy the weird dreams.

Which brings us to the explanation of my dream last night and my dream before I woke. Last night, I dreamt that within two generations no one would be communicating by printed words any longer. It was so powerful. It came to me with the clarity and accuracy of a vision from God. I have never had one of those although I have had experiences where the beauty of nature gave me a feeling like I was in the presence of something greater than myself. I feel a loss at the fact that I never had a vision from God or that I never saw a gigantic blue whale. I felt a very great loss at the idea that no one would communicate by reading and writing anymore. I have always suffered from the pleasure and condemnation and isolation of imagination...

Jan. 5, 2002

...Yesterday afternoon, Deborah and I got rid of the children and went to see the film, "A Beautiful Mind." It was the story of John and Alicia. He won the Nobel Prize in 1995 for his work in mathematics. As well as being a brilliant mathematician, he was

schizophrenic. He struggled with both his whole life and was awarded the prize for work he had done as a young man that had very wide-ranging influences. It was a cautionary tale for me about the dangers of too much imagination -- the pitfalls in beginning to withdraw too much into the pleasures of your fantasies. I may have to watch that. Imaginings are of use, but must be used. They must be a tool toward an end product.

POEMS

Patrick loved to write poems. He liked to write poems some to people and some for himself. As his shadows lengthened and his struggles grew more difficult his poetry became the crucible for his pain.

This collection is divided into his earlier poems written before he retired from the workforce and his later poems written during his last five years.

EARLIER POEMS

The Beach

Take me somewhere that is sunshine and bright,
And silly and laughter,
And running in water,
With beach towels and sunscreen,
And floating and frisbees,
And flip flops that go slap, slap, slap, on your heels when you walk.
Take me to the past the funny long grass

The Coup de Grace

"I met someone," she said to me.
"You don't look so good."

I thought,
Go look at the worm in a bottle of tequila,
Go look at that worm,
Go see how it looks.

No prisoners taken between love and affection,
"No" can be rolled in a kiss,
In a gesture or moment,
That can be quite chilling,
That'll pin you immovable, frozen.

"I'm fine," I said.
"I hope that they're nice."
But she inhaled my thoughts,
All so different.

A Little Something for Eleanor

This is so presumptuous
Wrap me all around your belly
But don't get the wrong idea
Well, maybe a little I'm coming on

Biology is exclusive
I've no way of getting closer
To the actual and the moment
The hidden presence of the spark

My father walked the girders
Of our suburban enclave
Tall stooped, in gathering darkness
Gently, his hat in hand

Presuming on affection
Accosting unfamiliar neighbors
With "Can I see the baby?"
Warming something by that spark

So here I am, a repetition
With a heritage of intrusion
A collection of compulsions
Bound to mysteries still dark

The wait before the greeting
Will be saved in your remembrance
I grieve for my lost presence
Wrap me closer to your spark

Feigned

This feigned face
I've worn these emotions
Ten thousand times over
All the dies have been cast

Sincerity's eroded
My honesty's abated
A face become a light bulb
Contrived - I am aghast

In her jolly jumper

Rebecca's a space explorer
A pirouette of the instant
Weightless without a past

Each moment a conception
Unique to all existence
Her face a barless conduit
To a place so young and vast

And in the moment of recognition
Between soft clay and stony impasse
A gift is given, so strange, so vital
Rekindling faith, it binds it fast.

Mountain

I wanna be a mountain,
A great big zit on the face of the planet,
Totally repulsive and ancient and angry,
Uncaring and unchanging and a blot on your horizon.

Purse

I will be a genuine purse of soft leather
With gold coins of true value nestled inside,
Partaking of raindrops that will wash me clean
and providing for the souls on whose bodies I ride.

Susie

It's a little more complex than that
Her ready recourse to aggression
Violence as a sort of caress
With its strange undertones of affection

The sudden burst strike of the instant
Holds her anger, assertion, and teasing
A physical telecommunications
Of a threshold beyond gentle seizing

At war needy love and independence
Where actions speak louder than words
Her life fluttering in gilded cages

Like the buffeting of terrified birds

Undaunted, inviolate, and trembling
Worlds watching with reservoir eyes
Space defined by the arcs of her dimensions
Toward a future before which she shies.

Privileged

I stared into the face of bliss,
Or nearly something like it.

It smiled, "Not the first time...
But the first very very best time,
Six days of wild abandoned,
Mindless kabouki sex."

Awed before this magic presence,
Face and irises wide wide open,
Sated and simply joyous,
Silently proclaimed.

Before such scope and grandeur,
Resolve and resolution crumpled,
Welcome, with this pleasant passage,
To the second age of innocence.

Circular Motion

Fragments of phrases and snatches of song,
Are wrapped 'round my memory,
Like strands of spaghetti,
Cling to the boiling bowl,
Or flung to the wall,
To hang incomplete,
Like a naked librarian,
Caught without trousers,
(His wayward nightmare),
Who wakes up enchanted,
With dreams of perfection,
Riding a breeze
Of rosehip and burritos,
Which land on a platter of Thanksgiving turkey,
To lie sodden and doggo,
Like a chow beneath the table,

Dreaming of rodents in fields of clover,
Where butterflies flutter,
Preening their excess,
Buoyed by beauty and insectoid muscle,
To shine in the sunlight and bounce on the moment,
Like fragments of phrases and snatches of song.

It took a while

On unsteady legs
I was swept away
By a force of nature.

A sooty ember
Burst aflame
Fanned by a force of nature
The earth moved
While the air stood still
To the whim of a force of nature

There was a cry
That brought another
To replenish the force of nature.

I am bound by my choice
And by my being
To the force of nature
My elemental
Both inside and out
Rejoices to the force of nature.

Writing for what?
Condemnatory dilettante,
Withered weird compulsion to engage,
A rigorous exacting science
No social profit,
No shining glories,
No filthy lucre for my pains.
But the silence of those voices,
And quiet inside, inside my brain.

MS Before and After

Vitality, energy, strength, and conviction,
In a here, there and everywhere
Explosion of myself.
Nothing done, and done so badly,
Wanting it all, wanting it all,
Time infinite and elastic
All the flowing vista'd horizons

Squalid salad days lived through,
Redeemed to the someday promise
Not age stolen,
(That strange embrace of life's enhancement)
Nor the shrinking of soul or private capacities,
But random chance and absurd irony.
I thought I had so much time.

Summer '93

Unremittant deluge, I've been drowned by your drizzle,
Excised in the excess of Pinatubo's gift
No soulshine, no glowing where's the glimmer inside?
I staggered and swaggered through the external core
While critics complained, my ignorance was bliss
Until ducts rose in the river of Pinatubo's gifts
Every patter has sodden my vanquish inside
No choice and no denial, this suppression of the self
I would rewrap the paper and return for refund
This torrent of teardrops called Pinatubo's gift.

If anyone ever likes this

Sorry, I'm no guru,
Just an apologetic apoplectic,
Aghast at the mental gymnastics,
Of the things I need to say.

So here I sit a-scribblin'.
Wronging what's write and righting no wrongs,
Codifying my existence in alliterative prose,
And praying you'll take no notice,
Of the things I need to say.

If you like this, well and good,
(I kind of like it, too)
But it's resolute as marshmallow and stalwart as a flea,
So please no soaring adorations and immortal affections
For the style and the substance of the things I need to say.

Fourteen

I remember Fourteen
Perhaps you weren't idealistic,
Just a little bit too wasted
To remember where you walked
I will not condemn you
We've strode that shore together
Drugs, like desire, are a heady addiction
One way of coping with the vertical chase

Goodbye Fourteen
What's true and what isn't
No longer matters
Your act is now fodder
For the concentric mills
And the uncomfortable half truths
And the need for understanding
Myself, I went there with them
We did not give you your fair due

Rest now fourteen
Who you were will be remembered
By a select and quiet few
For the rest; the fall and for what purpose
Dismiss the questions and misgivings
They need not trouble you
In the place between dawn and mourning
Is the large and final quiet
It is a gift
It is a blessing
It is the chases's simple truth.

My Carapace is Wearing Thin

Stop battering me,
My carapace is wearing thin,
I am losing my defenses
Before your vehement emotions

I have just strength enough for Jeff
The maelstrom inside,
The grinding gears between,
My head and heart.

There is no more support here,
And no more condemnation,
Even love is gutting,
I need more energy.

Go fight the battles elsewhere,
Ephemeral conflict is depressing
I taste complex reflections
And the joy of touch.

Prayer

It was cold today
So cold
Not a subject for poem
It was cold today
So cold
Not a subject for a song
It was cold today
So cold
I didn't want to be out.
It was cold today
So cold
I wanted to rest inside your arms
Curled with you beneath a blanket,
In that expanse of warm and self,
Limbs entangled all together,
Magic toys on a hidden shelf
But it was cold today
So cold
On account of the bad weather
It was cold today
So cold
On account of my bad clothes
It was cold today
So cold
On account of my bad feelings
It was cold today
So cold
Feed me from your mouth
But we were not together

Cramped in a space so far apart
It iced my skin and clawed my gristle
It chilled me to my heart.
And it was cold today
So cold
Dependent on another

It was cold today
So cold
Dependent on my self
It was cold today
So cold
So dependent on desire
It was cold today
So cold
Take me in and save this shell.

The Jury of my Peers

I feel like an ugly old troll
Fat and wretched, repulsive, depressing,
Driven to bitter sweet agonies,
From the wounds that I'm roughly caressing.

My psyche, esteem, and desire
Enshrined in sharp cruel broken glass
The cathedral of my own condemnation,
I, the penitent, returning to Mass.
In the bile of my own gall's production,
Tormented, I'm determined to swim,
Raging to a far distant shoreline

Another god before to raise up my hymn.
Before you, the outward appearance,
Inside me, self hatred complete
Despising my self defined failure
And reveling in hell-fire's heat.

Changing

Ptolomaic elements
combined in
alchemical manner
to create a change
within and without
ourselves from
the commonplace to gold.

LATER POEMS

Primadonna

(On hearing Anna Russel on CBC)

A Primadonna on a moose,
It was a sight astounding,
She hit high C, he hit his heels,
And off they went a-bounding.
Truth to tell I cannot say which was more afeared,
She of the vibrato and really loud voice,
Or he of the antlers and beard.

Requiem for a Radio Host

(on the death of Peter Gzowski)

It was the ridiculous glee over living,
The exploration of ideas and people and stuff,
Like a kid getting to open a treasure chest,
Getting to look at anything he wanted,
That moment of eyes wide-open,
Of all the way in and not coming back,
Until you've got it, until he'd got it,
With confidence that it was there,
Provided the right key was put in the lock,
Provided the right question was asked.

Litmus test

I am a litmus test,
The world's woes are scratched upon my parchment,
I protect my scabs with brazen utterances,
And calk a bleeding heart,
My own,
Move on, move on.

In this whirling backwater,
Jostled by eddies of information overload,
I am indulged to carp or create,
And scratch at the edifice of culture,
Stupidly,
Move on, move on.

There is nothing in my head at two in the afternoon,
Except bilgewater and abeyance,
Which takes us nowhere,
Peevish author's thwarted reader,
Be gone,
Move on, move on.

Report on Planet Three (with apologies to Arthur C. Clarke)

A Martian scientist once wrote:

The atmosphere is poisoned with high concentrations of oxygen,
The lowlands are flooded and dried depending upon the pull of the moon,
Clouds blot the sun from view and pour water like tears on the horizon,
And, occasionally, "fire" erupts, searing everything in its path.

Sadly, the following conclusions must be drawn:

The environment will never support intelligent life,
And, it is doubtful in the extreme, that even life itself could exist.
On this tiny mottled marble,
Lost in the ocean dark of black,

Huddled for warmth against permafrost,
And overcome by everyday demands,
Our only shelter is the vainglory of love,
Like a rose for Ecclesiastes.
Will you be my valentine and help prove the neighbors wrong?

The Price of Admission

Writers write about things they're scared of,
At least, according to author Margaret Atwood.
Well, she ought to know what she's saying,
She's written a lot of novels.
I've even read one or two of them myself.
I just wish she hadn't ended her assertion with a preposition,
Because if there's gonna be bad grammar in this poem
I want to be responsible for it myself.
That way, when the poetry police start shrieking,
Screaming that they always knew I was just an imposter,
I can say, I never told you any different;
I split infinitives with a little axe.

W. O. Mitchell wasn't ever scared by the subjects of his stories,
He was a small town prairie humorist who made everybody laugh.
Unless he was actually afraid that someone would stop to
Accuse him of being small town stupid -
Woo, this is getting heavy,
Better watch out before I strain my back.

There's a lot of things that scare me.
There's a hole in the ozone layer,
There's environmental degradation,
There's everything American,
And now there's SARS.
Because I know I can't protect my children,
I can't even romp around with my children,
If that SARS ever comes a'calling,
I'll be the first one dead and gone.

Now I'm not afraid of dying,
Any fool born can do the other,
I have a different deep and darkest that I'm ashamed to drag into the light.
I always thought that life was just for living,
Maybe I should have climbed out and started pushing.
That way now I might have had more satisfaction,
Known I was of a little more use.

Because I want to be remembered
Beyond the memories of friends and family.
I want to be remembered even by
People who haven't met me yet.
So, in this you can do me a little favor:
Should I happen to predecease you,

Hold this moment in your memory,
Think of this as a little poetic kiss goodbye.

There are things that hit me closer -
That I can't protect my children,
That I can barely even play with my children,
Or wrap my arms around the woman that I love.

Now there's SARS and I'm really worried.
Because I already have 'an underlying medical condition'
- I've even had pneumonia - so if SARS comes a calling
I'll be moving from dead slow to dead stop.

Cathedral

I sat staring at the ruins of an old burned-out Cathedral,
Thinking about the bursting of distant bombs,
Because fires make such pretty pictures,
With their whiz-bang and their crackle.
They're always someone else's problem,
Unless you stand too close.
The fire can shoot out and singe you,
Seeking oxygen and freedom,
In the moment of transformation
Making relics out of shrines.
What is left?
The need for salvation
And the hope of resurrection,
While the smoke of human sacrifice
Still lingers in the air.
But the aftermath is often wanting,
Needing more than just intentions.
The final text of misadventure is writ
on human soul.
The consequence of insufficient is the choice
of alteration.
Tearing down burnt wood and garbage,
All scooped up and hauled away,
A coat of paint for brick and mortar,
A monument created
Of striking grace and beauty:
To the devotions of past souls.

Chez nous

Tuesday night was tofu
Now it's chicken, maybe stewed.
An angel fed me supper
She left feathers in my food.
You looked so cute, you wiped my bum
- I'm sorry if I got crude.
Us old dudes think we still got stuff:
Actually we're just lewd.

Wednesday morning controversy – John's dentures lost;
Better find'em quick,
Janitor gets'em they'll be tossed.
Parrot at my lunchtime table
Squeaks real loud if she gets bossed.
Nurse, she keeps her bottle hidden
- Man, I sure wish I was sauced.

Thursday afternoon it's Bingo,
The moon I've just gone over.
The fun is never ending with the numbers called by Grover,
Friday night it's Bingo and people all in clover,
'cause everyone knows the words to the White Cliffs of Dover.

But it's all fun and games here in the land I call Chez Nous.
There's a cold room in the basement and dark drawers without a view.
My complaints are miniscule, ancient words that ring too true.
There was vision and strolling, little things that I once knew.
Their aging eyes all pleading, screaming, 'What am I supposed to do?'
I don't know,
I'm just a little animal without choices, a resident in this - the human zoo.

I Didn't Know

I didn't know I needed beauty,
till I felt its absence in my life

Didn't know it was my cradle,
till my ropes were sawed by that sharp knife

Didn't know I'd hit rock bottom,
till I hit those rocks with my head

Didn't know that I was damaged,
till I felt those wounds and knew they'd bled.

There is nothing in my head at two in the afternoon
Except bilge water and abeyance,
Which takes us nowhere.
Peevish author's thwarted reader,
Be gone,
Move on, move on.

Memories

Another corpse is buried in my bones
Another ghost to haunt my memories,
To shamble through the misty shadows
Behind the tombstones of my much cemeteried past.

They are not what they once were
Nor were they that then.
They've been gloried by the dusts of remembrance,
Faded wanderers in a fantasy might-have-been.

Moted sunbeams on cobwebbed horizons
Shroud the harsh bright into memories surreal,
Entrap images of delicate insubstance,
And protect me from the damage I feel.

Words for Time

Time weighs heavy on my hands.
Upon my arms,
Upon my shoulders.
It leans upon my forehead,
Carving furrows in my brow.

I wish I'd used it to more constructive purpose,
But these words keep interfering.
I would that they were better,
But they will have to do.

With Thanks to Charles Taylor

No path blazed up this strange ascension,
Each of us finds a private route alone.
Would there was a map of more than
word of mouth
That might gently open weakened eyes
to see.
There isn't.

Instead we follow Alice's beckoning finger
And tumble down to Wonderland together,
Hoping to take up Residence and
Refuge in Plato's Cave of Allegory,
Straining to discover that we are more
Than mere shadows of what once we were,
Clawing upward to the daylight of that Good Life
- Fat chance.

Once there, sunlight exposes our
stigmata to the scrutiny of public sympathy.
Embarrassing to both the purveyor and the purveyed.
Caught in a geography of rigorous no options
Some slide into a private sinkhole of miserable despair.
Such waste.

Let us make a space where justice
Is intermingled with mercy, where
Every answer deserves a question,
Diversity cohabiting with respect.
Every answer deserves a question
Until everyone gets to climb that lonely
Hill together.
So that Hamlet's plaintive cry
Is answered in resounding triumph:
To be – Hell, Yes!
Anyway, let's hope.

(Note: Charles Taylor is the name of an African dictator and Charles Taylor is the name of a very profound Canadian moral philosopher.)

Epilogue

This poem was written and read by Jodi at Patrick's funeral.

JODI'S POEM

How am I to write of one who could dream all my thoughts in a single evening?

You with the grin the size of the cheshire cats and that contagious silent laugh.

How am I to write of you?

May I call you a teacher?

You who said you were not here to give me the answers,

but here to help with the questions.

Who told me to never be afraid to be who I am.

You with the mind of a poet, imagination of a child.

May I call you a friend?

For all the words you gave me overflowing with the color that had left your skin.

For how we would sit and paint the world with our words until when I left you it would all seem a touch brighter, it would all seem swollen somehow, full.

May I call you a mentor?

You with the teasing light in your blue bright eyes, and the million anecdotes, who laughed at me when I was 15 and thought I wasn't going to university.

You who shook your head and slowly began to plant the seeds, which now hatched,

have broken my mind wide open.

May I call you an inspiration?

For how you seemed to look back without much regret, always forward, with your joyful smile.

Who came full cycle peacefully, and left gently, without fear.

For how you had always said the way to think was as follows,

“If you get hit by a car,

Hey, be glad it wasn't a big ol' bus.”

May I call you a lesson?

For each thought you've birthed,

For how I've learned to live each day better,

To hold each moment a little closer,

Like you always somehow knew to.

May I call you a prayer Patrick?

For the way I'm sending your name up with the questions I'm still collecting for you,

waiting for your voice to rise with these cool winter winds.

Patrick?

May I call you a prayer?

Rebecca's Speech

Ten year old Rebecca's love for her "Papa" father was recorded in a speech (originally spoken in French) that she gave in front of her school some months after he died.

Most of the world has a father. They could be 50 or 30 years old, but all fathers are special. My father is very special because he was a writer even with his Multiple Sclerosis. I love and admire my papa. In my story, first I will tell you about MS. Second I will tell you about his stories. Finally I will tell you why I admire and love my papa.

His sickness is called Multiple Sclerosis or MS. It caused him problems with his eyes. My papa was almost blind and could not walk and he visited the hospital alot. Since I was born he was in a wheelchair. We have an elevator in our house. It helped him get around our house.

My father was a writer, he wrote lots of beautiful stories everyone loves. His stories are very funny. My papa's stories were written about a character he called The Great Kazoo. The other characters are Deborah, Susie Derkins and Pat. My papa recorded cassettes full of stories for me. He has also written poems. My mama is trying to get them published.

I love my papa because he is very kind and he drew me lots of incredible drawings. He drew me a drawing of the three little pigs. He did all that when he could still use his hands. With MS he lost the use of his hands. Then he had to use a computer program to record the stories. The computer screen was also special. It was about double the size so he could see the words. But the reason why I love him most is because he did all that despite his illness.

Now you know a little more about my papa's life. When I think about these moments it makes me smile because my papa was an extraordinary person.