

Polishing a Gem on the Surface of the Sea

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“The Gem cannot be polished without friction, nor man perfected without trials.”

~ *Chinese Proverb*

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Suffocating

In March, when the air had filled with the soft gray-white tufts of dogwood and the Sakurakai and Yoshino cherry blossoms were flush with pink and white petals I sat in my Seattle apartment and planned my trip to Tokyo. Four months earlier riding drunk and carefree Jack had died when a car collided with his motorcycle. I had no plan for being single. The sudden change in my circumstance left me gasping, wild-eyed. I was wandering too close to ledges, the freezing waters of the sound, train tracks. Until one night when, sitting alone in the house we once shared, I made a decision. It was the first meaningful one I'd made since Jack's death. It might have been the thought of waking up far away, in a place that had risen out of destruction. I can't say for certain, all I know is that leaving Seattle felt necessary.

My life had become foreign to me. The only writing I had done since Jack's death was to acknowledge those who had reached out to say that they were sorry for my loss. Life was meaningless. My thoughts had become a thousand voices lamenting at the last wall within the ruins of Herod's temple, and my future seemed as unfathomable as a trip to Jupiter. I wanted something that did not yet have a name or form. All I knew was that I couldn't wait in Seattle for my malaise to lift. My emotional waters were rising too fast.

I wasn't excited about temples, neon, Shinkasen trains or noodle houses. These things had never really appealed to me. But the idea of absolute anonymity, the kind that envelops all who travel did. I felt as though I'd become my spirit's marionette or maybe my soul's divining rod, something was pulling me toward the unknown. I was ready to surrender and I wanted to be free, free of questions, free of judgment and upward mobility. I especially wanted to be free of the suffocating, toxic and reflexive pity that people had heaped upon me. I know that everyone

was being compassionate but it wasn't helping. Words, no matter how kind, cannot penetrate newly forged grief.

In Seattle I was the woman who lost her fiancé, in Japan I could be whoever I wanted to be. Besides, I was a writer that wasn't producing pages as if my inspiration had died with Jack. Maybe I would be a good tourist. Or maybe I would fall off the face of the Earth I didn't care because nothing felt right anymore.

Japan was no stranger to tragedy. The scale of their loss was immense compared to my own but maybe that was what I wanted, for my personal pain to be trumped. But what nonsensical thinking! Too much time had gone by since WWII. Few people, if any would carry the burden of it the way I was carrying Jack's death in the 90's. I would leave anyway, to be among Japan's ghosts instead of my own.

1. Sometimes I feel like I'm in a movie.
2. I've been reading *On The Road* and now feel guilty for lusting after Jack Kerouac.
3. A certain lack of domestication is easy to accept if one's bearings were formed in the wild.
4. The day I met Jack a single yellow balloon floated into the yard.
5. Jack lacks knee jerk social conformity.
6. I cry too much and want to pin it on world events but that really isn't it.
7. Magical thinking is even more fun than the regular kind.
8. Mmm, Pavarotti with a latte.
9. I have only been awake for a minute but Jack has been on my mind for hours.
10. I stopped my car on the freeway in awe of the light streaming out of the clouds.

Gazing

Walking through Narita Airport I was glad that I didn't speak the language. I felt like my appearance separated me from the locals. People stepped around me as though they were water and I were a boulder in a stream. It was a sea of black hair. The women's locks shifted back and forth like waves. If my hair was its natural color I would almost blend in but my hair was bleached blonde and no one was mistaking me for a local. It was weird to feel so distant from everyone, disorienting. For a moment I wondered if I had died and somehow missed it or worse if I had become like an anonymous character from that film *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, distinct and indistinguishable, as those around watch my invasive being with fascination.

Everyone seemed to flow together but I was like a salmon working its way upstream. I knew I stood out because Japanese children were openly pointing at me. Soon I realized this all was a good thing. It was giving me enough distance to acclimate to my new environment even if I felt a bit like a spectacle.

Before I left home I imagined I would enter a period of solitude in Japan, disappear, mourn quietly, but each mile east seemed to blur the nightmare of my reality. I felt like I was skipping across the surface of the sea, almost hopeful. I half expected Jack to greet me as I got off the plane. I'd been reading *The Sun Also Rises* during my flight.

Hemingway had been an American in Paris. A writer on an adventure who wrote about what he experienced, perhaps that sort of immersion would work for me too. I couldn't really be alone in a small country with over one hundred and fifteen million people in it. So I thought, "What would Hemingway's Lady Brett Ashley do?" I went into the airport bar and ordered a martini, threw it back and ordered one more. I was appalled I hadn't thought of drinking as a

solution sooner. I had been deterred at home because everyone blamed alcohol for Jack's death even though the accident wasn't his fault.

I took a local line to Roppongi, a prefecture known as a hub for affluent Japanese youth, foreign artists, and tourists from every part of the world. It is Japan's Times Square and West Village rolled into one. I stood on a two-foot concrete wall and read a few poems to a small group of strangers before going to my hotel. They listened and applauded. One asked me to sing a song. When I said I was a poet more than a singer they said "Cool" which sounded like "Coor." One of them had a guitar. He sat next to me on the wall and sang, "Love me Do" by the Beatles. I laughed and sang with the people who had gathered. Their Japanese accents altered the English lyrics, "Rove, rove me do. You know I rove you. So pre-ee-ee-ease, rove me do."

11. I have locked eyes with an amethyst crystal skull.
12. KIXI radio is playing Cher's 1987 classic "I Found Someone."
13. The bald eagle that was circling over my house is now following me down the highway.
14. Jack got down on one knee on our first date and asked me to visualize a diamond ring.
15. Jack and I found a collector's box of butterflies in a second hand store, it had Jack's name carved in the back.
16. Kismet and irony is what Jack and I eat for breakfast.
17. Jack is driving, I am watching it all go by.
18. The clouds look like goose down at a distance because they are blurred and grey, softened by the absence of light.
19. I wonder who drove the pins through the hearts of the butterflies.
20. Jack thinks the Blue Morpho is the most beautiful butterfly he's ever seen.

Sleeping

American culture has a long history of imitating other dialects for laughs. It was so common when I was in high school, that I recall dozens of television advertisements that mocked Asian, African American and Hispanic cultures with impunity. But commercials weren't first. American filmmakers have had a long history of making fun of Asians. Today we call this "yellow-face" and it is widely recognized as egregious and racist behavior. How did I not know this? But maybe I did know, intuitively. I didn't know it well enough because I wasn't the one being mocked until I went to another country.

One of the best things about traveling is that one gains perspective. When in Japan I learned that Japanese children make fun of other children and adults with "round eyes" or "bug eyes" as some interpret the European featured face. I also came to realize that some adults in Japan are anti-white, just as some Americans are anti-Asian, African and so forth. About the same number of people in Japan, as in America, go so far as to use slurs to the race they do not approve of.

When I first left the USA I was so naïve, I thought only white people were racist but the more I travelled the more I realized the universality of this human flaw. I think the only thing people can do is work to learn to appreciate other people's way of being and try to avoid unintentional offense. There is, of course, no good reason for intentional offense but it happens. Misinformation is passed down from one generation to the next.

Inaction, when encountering racist behavior is as egregious as participation but one cannot undo the past only do better in the present and future. A detailed list of do's and don'ts would be helpful but none in the world can speak for all. My hope is that, in the future, people will be more understanding of one another and compassionate. The more time we spend in the

company of people from cultures other than our own the more accustomed we will become to others customs.

When I was young I recall a Caucasian teacher telling our class that the key to dealing with minorities was to try and understand how someone from another race might feel. She added, “How would you feel if you were outnumbered by people who looked and acted differently than you?” Ms. Kane’s advice, “Listen and be understanding” seemed solid.

In junior high, when I made my first African American friend, she told me how much she hated being treated differently. I said, “I understand.” It was a short friendship because she became instantly angry and said, “You don’t understand shit” and walked off. After that I changed my personal policy to saying as little as possible to avoid confrontation because I don’t like to hurt or offend people, since I have in this life been hurt and offended.

I imagine that only those who are the constant subject of derision in the United States know that mocking difference is a problem when young. Most of the minorities I met in school didn’t stand up for themselves or demand justice. This made sense to me because confrontation is never a one-off exchange. Stand up for yourself once pay the price a thousand times because people don’t like to be corrected even when they are wrong.

It must have been confusing for people in minority groups too because the majority sent mixed messages. Many people I knew were outraged by the obvious racial injustices of slavery and the horrible events that surrounded the Civil Rights Movement but would laugh at a Yo quiero Taco Bell commercial or Speedy Gonzales without giving it a second thought. I never corrected people who made fun of Native Americans, even though I have some Native American ancestry. I suppose this is because I felt removed from the prevailing Native American

stereotypes. My family focused on our European heritage, which made me a part of the dominant culture, even while we had Native American relatives in our sphere.

My modern sensibility tells me I should have known more about people with different backgrounds than my own but there was widespread stigmatism with regard to race. I remember watching *All in the Family* on TV and loathing Archie Bunker's character. I related to the liberal characters on the show but that was because Archie Bunker's racism was so overt. Right and wrong in my everyday life was less apparent.

Everyone I knew believed, and felt, that minorities deserved to be treated as equals. We were democrats, progressives, but most of us in Seattle and the surrounding areas, lacked significant interracial experience so we were also pretty lame at social interactions with people outside of the dominant culture. In the rare instances that I, and the people I knew back then, encountered minorities we sought to be welcoming but this did not lead to any ongoing friendships unless they too were more white than Native American or African American or Hispanic or whatever. This does not mean that everyone I knew was white but my friends were culturally white because that was the only drum beating from morning until night, be white, be white, be white and everyone just wanted to live and get along. If there had been more action in our neighborhood maybe we all would have felt different but we weren't in the hotbed of anything. Thankfully, nobody was being lynched and there were no race riots in our neighborhood. We watched *School House Rock* and were told that we lived in a Melting Pot called the USA. We all sang it on the playground and weren't awake enough to question it.

21. We discuss the pros and cons of alien abduction.
22. Jack and I like to play *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and are on our fourth cocktail by noon.
23. I mostly write when Jack is asleep but sometimes we write together on cocktail napkins.
24. There is so much beauty in the world, nothing else matters.
25. There are two hawks flying over our house. I wave and Jack says that we have the same spirit animal.
26. It is wine with La Wally and all is well.
27. We twirl on the lawn until we collapse.
28. Our imperfections are thrilling.
29. At 3am Jack is riding the lawn mower in the moonlight.
30. When the pale sky fades to night I look deep into the universe and I can feel it looking back.

Witnessing

I went to the movies *Gun Ho*, *Three Ninjas* and *Sixteen Candles* and never considered how racist some of the caricatures of the Japanese were. I remember being at school one Halloween when a tall white kid named Brent Paylor had dressed up as the *Sixteen Candles* character Long Duk Dong. In the film Dong was a Japanese exchange student who was geeky and sex-crazed. The actor who played Dong spoke with a comedic Japanese accent. So did sixteen-year-old Brent Paylor whose costume choice was not reprimanded and shunned by the faculty and student judges, on the contrary, he was awarded first place in the costume contest.

When Paylor got up to accept his prize he did it in the same mock Japanese accent Dong used in the film. Everybody laughed, including Kasumi, the Japanese exchange student who never seemed entirely certain what was going on because her English was quite poor. But, when we were filtering out of the gymnasium and Paylor started mocking Kasumi, “Yo Velly Sesy

Young Japanese women singing Sukiyaki.



gull!” she looked so distressed I thought she was going to burst into tears, especially when Brent flipped her blue school uniform skirt up, high enough to reveal her underwear, and said, “Velly sesy, velly sesy.” The bell rang for class and everyone scattered. I regret not helping Kasumi. I could say I didn’t help

because I wasn’t the closest person to her but proximity wasn’t why I hadn’t said anything. It had felt like I was watching a movie, the part where the sex-crazed Japanese boy teases the girl in the hall. In the movies it was certain that later everything would be fine.

As it turned out Brent liked Kasumi but when he asked her out to the Christmas dance she turned him down. I was always friendly with Kasumi but never close. My friends were Izod shirt and deck shoe wearing prepsters. We ran cross country and played tennis and, on weekends, we drank beer in Capitol Hill mansions and attended pool parties in gated communities. We were obsessed with style and belonging and we had plenty of both. White in education and action equated to being in the dominant culture even though I was marginally Native American and one of my best friends was from entirely from Vietnam.

I didn't mingle much with people struggling with English as a second language. Most around me were still assimilating. My Vietnamese friend Anh became Annie when she moved to America. She told me she learned English in about a year and a half, at age ten. She was fluent in English by high school when we became friends. Greater cultural exchange with Kasumi would have been beneficial but I learned that a decade too late and language had been my primary excuse and barrier because when you are a teen communication is everything. Maya Angelou says, "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better."

31. I love everything.
32. Rerun Dorothy says, “There is no place like home” while I obsess over her ruby slippers and Jack vows to buy me a pair.
33. Jack and I order six sides hollandaise sauce. When we can’t begin to get through it Jack offers our leftovers to every table in the restaurant until we are asked to leave even though we find two takers who laugh and say “Thanks!”
34. I didn’t realize I was holding my breath.
35. When my parents met Jack they said that that was enough of that.
36. Jack and I are drinking rum and lemonade on the roof and singing Nirvana’s “Come As You Are.”
37. Sometimes I feel like I’m on a meandering river headed toward a waterfall.
38. Today I am so happy it’s almost unbearable.
39. My cat Magic loves Jack.
40. Jack says, “Whisper it into my ear” and I say, “I promise not to laugh.”

Literary Heroes

I left my new Japanese friends with a smile, still imbued with the spirit of writers-of-the past but uncertain of my next act. That I didn't have a plan didn't matter to me because I had Hemingway in my head and I wanted to live, of course that might have been the alcohol talking but if it was it was talking of hope. I wasn't yet intoxicated enough to slap a stranger on the back and suggest we get "tight" together, but I suspected I might fully arrive on that front in the days to come. Company or not I was ready for another cocktail because without it the veil quickly lifted and the enormity of my loss returned.

I wanted to get situated, find a hotel, and freshen up. Even Hemingway wrote about getting settled into a city before he went looking for action. Virginia Woolf went on at great length about it. I don't mean to imply that I don't adore Virginia Woolf as much as Hemingway, I do. I could read her *Lighthouse* or *Mrs. Dalloway* any day and delight in every minute detail and abstraction. Woolf's modern style ambled in a good way not unlike James Joyce's beautiful wanderings in *Ulysses*. I suspect part of me will always be contentedly lost somewhere within these psychological realist works. And, as for the act of getting situated, it is a reasonable topic or activity for a contemporary writer, even if it seems dull. Maybe even because it *is* dull, especially if you believe that crafting form to meet a current standard is superior to entertainment by virtue of intellectual design. I actually find contemporary writers to be both intellectual and entertaining but some seem pleased with the former and embarrassed by the latter.

I can only be half on board with boredom by design. It isn't in my nature and I might abandon it on a calculated whim. This because I loathe stagnation and rules almost as much as I admire absurdity and non-traditional forms. I want to fly without a plane or plan and only an "e" stands between me, or is that my, linguistic ability to do so.

Errant behavior is, in part, why I adore E.E. Cummings, another literary hero. He was brave enough to go lower case, with his own name. He didn't cling to rules but instead molded them to his needs. I know that in the 20's and 30's E.E. Cummings was considered cutting edge because of his inventive use of grammar and syntax. He was a modern, avant-garde poet, an original.

Possibly more astounding than Cummings breakthroughs is that his style is still considered modern today. Contemporary poets sometimes borrow what he invented and recognize the act of borrowing as new. But to me borrowing seemed akin to stealing. It is someone else's work. I do very little of this sort of borrowing because I am troubled by the thought "What is genuinely new in this act?"

And, even though I just stated a disdain for borrowing, I must now immediately reverse my position because, as always, knowledge shifts misconceptions and lends itself to new appreciation for previously misunderstood forms. Some borrowing is new and, in addition to borrowing, other types of modern conceptual writing are so utterly new that the authors who write it are defining new form as they go.

Amid my thoughts, my reverie for writing, one memory bumps into another and I return to my disembodied love for Jack and recall:

"[i carry your heart with me(i carry it in]" by E.E. Cummings,

"i carry your heart with me(i carry it in

my heart)i am never without it(anywhere
i go you go,my dear;and whatever is done
by only me is your doing,my darling)

i fear

no fate(for you are my fate,my sweet)i want
no world(for beautiful you are my world,my true)
and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant
and whatever a sun will always sing is you

here is the deepest secret nobody knows
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life; which grows
higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart

i carry your heart(i carry it in my heart)"

After that poem all I am able to think of is Jack. I want to memorize new heroes work but I feel as though the rush of life is pushing me down stream before I can grab on to anything. So I recite Cummings words and I feel them like two hard candies stuffed in the happy mouth that smiles and laughs and knows how to kiss.

Jack and I were all poetry. Once a pair of honeybees that made life sweeter and took the pollen where we found it. But I am one bee, one bee, 1 B now. E.E. Cummings poems smell like flags fluttering in the wind and they sound like a Charlie Chaplin movie because they jostle the orderliness of the world and evoke a sense of wonder that is tilted at an angle.

At times nobody's words but my own could bring Jack back to me. I can lift the lid on my computer, throw the power switch and shout, "He's alive!" And, even though this will never be, I feel his fingers pushing back from the unseen side of the keyboard and imagine his ghost mixed in with the white pixels of the screen.

41. The squirrels under our chestnut tree have gathered all the nuts.

42. The car ahead of us at Starbucks buys our drinks so we spend our last thirty dollars buying the car behind us drinks.

43. Our cat jumped out of the bedroom window. When we found him outside he had a rabbit in his mouth.

44. My handwriting is that of a drunken child.

45. Rain is shooting holes into puddles in the driveway.

46. I read once that a writer has to believe that they are telling a unique story, without this belief they said, the writer would never bother to write at all.

47. Jack said, "The cat has lost some weight. He looks good."

48. I can't stop staring at a kitten with sad dark eyes and a tiny black top hat on Facebook.

49. Jack throws seeds that look like helicopters into the air, smiling and squinting in the sun, as I ask, "What will we do in Japan?"

50. Jack and I watch people. He says, "Look, those two are owls," and I nod in agreement wondering what we look like.

Disconnecting

One of the funniest things about being alone in a foreign country is how quickly one takes up talking to oneself because of the language barrier.

“Okay Kelle let’s put the suitcase on the stand before we brush our teeth.”

I turn to the mini-bar in the room and add “Or shall we have a cocktail first?” I am already using the Imperial “We” and I haven’t been in Japan a full day.

I barely let myself finish before I say, “We shall have a drink!”

“We have Jack Daniel’s whisky, Vodka, Kirin Beru or Saki.

“Whisky, thank you very much, let’s make mine a double.”

“Coming right up,” I say. Then I drink the drink I’ve made myself as though I were Hemingway sitting in the sweltering sun of Spain, moments after running with the bulls, parched, gritty, tired but mentally exhilarated.

I consider going back out to explore Tokyo. But, after a quick look in the bathroom mirror, I accept exhaustion. I haven’t slept in over twenty-four hours. I decide to take a shower but the hotel only has a square cube tub to bathe in. It is shaped like a tumbler, with a hand held showerhead. I pour myself into it and sip a can of Kirin as the water rises around me.

I was thinking of Jack and remembering the last time we ate sushi together. He had plucked the best prawn from his dish and carried it to my lips and kissed me while I chewed it. Afterward we were walking around the Seattle Center, our arms linked, and considering about where we were going to travel to next, Japan, Ireland, Australia, we considered a few places we’d already been and thought to throw a dart at a map, even though the last time we did that we landed in the middle of a sea.

I took a sip of my beer. Many had suggested I consider the transiency of life, one must, and I do. Others said I should be grateful for the time I had with Jack and I am. The water has risen to my chin. I want to disengage from reality. I dropped the empty can over the edge and heard it settle on the bathroom floor and then I catch my breath and go under.

The “we” is Jack and me, with the mottled leaves silhouetted across our faces as we sit in the shade of a maple tree and read, our eyes catching one another’s from time to time, reading each others thoughts from familiarity. Jack brushes the back of my hand with a daisy and we smile, stand, and race into the International Fountain. Laughing as the water pelts our skin. Our soaked clothes sever us from the adults seated at the outer ring that shout, “Be careful!” to their children who are squealing with glee. My eyes are squeezed tight under water. I can hear Jack’s voice calling my name but I can’t answer because I’m out of breath.

I burst upward, gasping for air. The room is empty and I walk without a towel dripping to the mini-bar, take a tiny bottle of Jack Daniels in hand and forgo the glass. The sweet and smoky liquor sends me to sleep, where Jack and I still live together and plan our future on a red cocktail napkin that Jack decides to turn into a bad origami fountain pen.

51. Our new neighbors Richard and Sheila stopped by to ask if I know what happened to their rose bushes. I say, "I have no idea."
52. I spent an hour pulling the snarl of crimson and brier out of the propeller of our lawnmower.
53. Jack hugs the Chestnut tree and tells him he is a good friend.
54. Every time I think of Jack my mouth waters.
55. The last play we saw together was *Marat/Sade*. In it Charlotte Corday walked alone through the streets of cobblestone.
56. I can fall backwards and know that Jack will catch me.
57. Jack is working on a translation when he suddenly says "Leidenschaft." I straddle him at his desk, hold his face in my hands, before he picks me up and carries me to bed.
58. Jack didn't come home from the bar.
59. I refrained from yelling at Ernest & Julio Gallo in the refrigerated section of the grocery store after I discovered that they had purchased Hornsby's Crisp Apple Cider and changed the product into something that tastes like disappointment, the eternal loss of hope and vinegar.
60. I think of Jack with his crazy blonde hair and wonder if he has fallen, like a Yellow Birch, a tree that rots from the inside out and can be easily taken down by the wind or snow.

Contemplating

When I first arrived in Japan their gray concrete didn't seem as ugly as the gray concrete in the United States. In hindsight this might be attributed to travel adrenaline but, at the time, I had felt as though I'd walked onto a movie set. The flashing signs pulsed with an array of color, bubble-gum pinks and smiley face yellows, lipstick red and day-glow greens. Hello Kitty's giant white head was on clothing, billboards and in shop windows. There was also a sort of intentional nostalgia in the scene because there were red, white and black paper lanterns hanging, in large numbers, on every block, an ode to a lost lighting system of candles and paper.

These same ball lanterns are found from the furthest east coast of Japan to the furthest west coast of China. They are in Seattle too. Prior to my arrival I associated these paper spheres with Chinese restaurants and the inexpensive lighting sold to college students at Pier One Imports. I owned one in 1984. But I wondered if by modern standards the lanterns might be considered a kind of contemporary Orientalism that has yet to be rooted out of American culture. If it is considered cultural appropriation to wear Native American designs is it not equally appropriating to borrow Asian style? Perhaps the lanterns remain popular because they are authentic to modern day Japan, Korea and China; or possibly because one is capable of genuinely delighting in something without malicious intent.

Whatever the case, everyone knows what the metaphoric path to hell is paved with. Intentions might be best used as building materials rather than antidotal justification for stealing another's culture. Lanterns aren't yet controversial but I imagine they will be in time since it is a cultural marker. One of the oddest things, true of our modern sensibility, is the idea that nothing brings people together like the division of culture. Cultural appropriation of clothes, language, religion, music, art and social behavior are already under review, why not lanterns?

I am far less rigid than I should be about cultural appropriation perhaps because other cultures have entirely devoured my Native American ancestry. There are many far more affiliated Native Americans than I, fighting the battle over who gets to use, claim, and access Native American culture. I, like so many confused people, am sitting on the sidelines eating history soup and vacillating between seething in the knowledge that what has happened to my family will likely continue to happen to others and pride that I am distantly related to, Englishman, Ralph Waldo Emerson. I'm also proud to be Irish like Joyce and Yeats and, of course, who doesn't love the fun of St. Patrick's Day? My history can be very confusing. I am both the absconded and the absconder on two continents.

What does one do with the knowledge that race mingling and genocide destroyed my Native American ancestral line? Similarly how does one digest one's Irish relatives documented fury that one of theirs married a Brit? It all sounds racist to me. To whatever degree it is my family from the British Isles appears to have won, if winning is the correct term. If they had not come to America I might not be writing these words or be at all. It is difficult to even imagine that their intentions were malicious but that brings us back to the trouble with intentions.

As for the lanterns, the Chinese appear to be the first to have used them. I suspect they were originally popular in Japan for rather obvious and practical reasons but now I think it has more to do with Chinese Feng Shui.

Feng Shui that system of geomancy that is meant to bring good luck, prosperity and protection to all who follow its magical principles from mirror placement to lantern hanging. These Chinese good luck charms don't make the Japanese feel any less proud of being Japanese because Japan is fabulous at integrating outside elements. The lanterns have been absorbed into Japanese culture like another drop in the ocean of war and reminiscence, too lengthy to detail

other than Asian wars lead to universal lighting and, of course, that there is no such thing as a good war.

It is possible that the lanterns will never be controversial because, symbolically speaking, one of the central themes of the Chinese Lantern Festival is bringing people together. The Japanese people think of the lanterns as Japanese even though they frequently are adorned with Chinese characters. Also the Feng Shui element of the lanterns is tantalizing, perhaps too much so for the Japanese to pass up. I say this because most of my Japanese friends were superstitious and happy to say, “Japanese people are superstitious.” Superstition is an accepted cultural meme, like gambling, drinking and meditation. But, like all memes they do not apply to all Japanese people because nothing applies to everyone ever. I have my superstitious moments and I definitely prefer good luck to bad and drinking and meditation well, I do those too.

In my mind memes and racism are very different. A meme is something that is passed down culturally or by observation of others within your collective. Memes jump from one collective to the next. When someone observes a behavior they think is fun, creative, or perceived as beneficial, it is borrowed and integrated.

My family has cooking memes and my various heritages have cultural memes. They arise out of repeated behavior and are passed down from one generation to the next. Whether it is the best way doesn't matter, it is our way. They do not need to be logical. My grandmother cut the ends off of a roast before she cooked it. My mother did the same. I acquired the habit until one day I asked, “Why do we do that?” My grandmother said, “I don't know why you two do it but I did it because I only had a small pan.” A meme is a custom or practice born of observation with little inquiry. To the other issue, everyone knows that racism is the idea that one's race

characteristics or traits make one superior or inferior to another's and the majority, myself included, know this is nonsense.

The difficulty is our races and cultures live closer together. Occasionally one race or culture will demonstrate a behavior perceived to be fun, creative or beneficial by another culture and borrowing begins. The "us" and "them" slips away but the fear that what is "ours" will be lost if "they" use it emerges. The fear is valid. If one isn't afflicted by the fear of losing one's culture, it could be that one disapproves of another's half-assed use of one's culture. Some feel that an outsider's use or borrowing of culture diminishes the value of the culture being borrowed from, this is also justifiable. But what is lost if isolation and fences are preferred to community and sharing? Today a sort of separate but equal philosophy is valued. One does not know what will be valued next but I am certain it will change because separate is never equal.

I was told it was good luck to visit the Buddha. When I developed the picture I was told it was bad luck to cut the head off of the Buddha in a picture. Did the bad luck cancel out the good?



61. I worry about Jack even though Jack says, "Worry has never solved a single problem."
62. Jack is on the phone saying something about gypsies and that throwing knives is even more dangerous than it looks in the movies.
63. I am never going to say Jack's name again.
64. Jack. Jack. Jack.
65. Jack says he misses me and that I am an unapologetic distortionist of events.
66. What sort of assholerie is this?
67. On Mad Men I always hope Peggy will get Don Draper in the end but this probably won't happen.
68. Quit finishing my sentences you don't know what I'm going to say.
69. I spent an unknown amount of time watching a raindrop as it appeared to contemplate whether or not to let go of the leaf it was on.
70. I am writing around the clock.

Tokyo

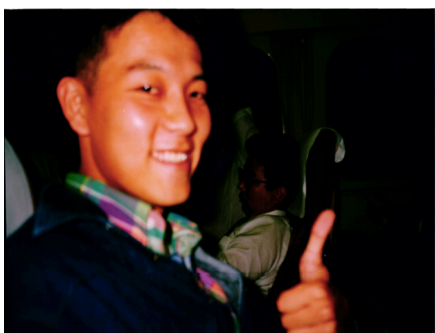
I woke up in my hotel feeling foggy headed and got dressed to go to the beer machine at the front of building. I purchased a can of Kasai Biru since I had finished off the mini-bar and asked a twenty-something English teacher I met about the open sewers running before us. The smell emanating out of them was particularly pungent after the rain and I was surprised I hadn't noticed them on my way into the hotel. For a moment the two of us stood in the street and stared at the grey concrete slats and the foul rush of brown fluid beneath. The shape of the grates reminded me of the electric heating vents in the house that I lived in with Jack. The teacher shrugged and said she had no idea but added, "Pay no attention to the rats because they are good rats."

In Japan rats pop in and out of alleys and fearlessly rush through the night crowds taking what they find back to the sewer. People ignore them because they are natural waste disposal engineers.

I picked up a new writing notebook from a drugstore before going to one of the first Internet cafés to search for more information on the odd sewer system. I settled in and scrolled through English data on Japan. It looked like the Japanese Sewer System had been way ahead of its time, from 1920 to 1943 but got shoved to the side for more pressing 1940's matters.

There was one article that said an immense renewal project was just getting underway. The entire country would be overhauled and refitted with new drainage pipe systems. The old waste flowing in the grate would be widely a thing of the past by 2015.

I met Hiro on his way to work.



I have a one clear image in my mind of a Japanese sewer worker standing in one of the pipes of the future. The pipe was about two stories tall. It

was an interesting picture, a giant tube with a man, who seemed tiny, wearing a headlamp, smiling and giving the camera thumbs up. I could tell he was so happy and proud to be a part of it all.

When I realized people had formed a line for the computer I decided to move on, even though I was enjoying the browsing. It was difficult to enjoy the overly crowded, claustrophobic, café, people were leaning on my chair, standing a few inches from me while I read. The concept of personal space was different in Japan. This would take some getting used to. Outside thousands more people were milling through the streets in every direction.

I waited in line at the vending machine and bought a second breakfast beer. The businessmen in front of me bought two. One lifted his beer in the air and said, “Campi” with a friendly smile and walked off. I leaned against a building and drank my beer to its bottom and

then stepped into the stream

wishing Jack were here to explore

with me.

The rain dramatically reduces the pedestrian traffic in Tokyo.



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War Heroes

For as long as I can remember I have loved candy. My childhood was bountiful in red licorice, jelly beans, Dots, Almond Joys, M & M's, giant jawbreakers, Butterfingers, Tootsie Rolls, Sixlets, Candy Cigarettes and Bubble Gum Cigars, wax lips filled with a liquid we called, "bug juice" and many other sugar treasures. I was particularly fond of hot treats like Jolly Rancher Cinnamon candy, cinnamon sticks and Hot Tamales. There was no such thing as too much candy. In fact too much, in my mind, was never enough. So when my Uncle Frec (Frec is somehow short for Francis) came to visit I knew my sugar high was going to go up a notch from bountiful to Willy Wonka crazy ass abundant. Frec had been fighting the Vietnam War. When he walked in the door he said, "I wanna party!"

My parents kept a lot of candy in our house. When Frec came to town they stocked up on liquor too. We had a "junk drawer" in the kitchen that wasn't filled with miscellaneous tools and thingamajigs like our neighbor's junk drawer; ours was full of candy. If the junk drawer even slightly reduced in bounty my parents would restock. If anyone dared to ask why I was eating candy before dinner, my parents took a "So what if our kids eat candy" attitude and I loved them for it.

I recall one of my best friends having health nut parents. She wasn't allowed to eat anything with sugar in it, not even brown sugar. The thought of a life without candy was horrifying to me. My food pyramid had a bottom of bakery treats, a middle of store bought candy and it was topped with ice cream and sprinkles. Frec gave me foreign candy. Sometimes he even let me drink out of his flask when it had peach schnapps in it because it tasted like candy.

My favorite and most coveted candy was purchased on the Seattle waterfront, a place we always went when Frec came to visit. Frec said the Pier bars poured strong cocktails and I loved it because of the huge Pier One Imports, renowned among children, for its awesome candy. After dinner my parents took us there and Frec pointed out candy from Asia.

Frec was talking about when he went on leave to Japan. I noticed he gave my dad a wink when he said he'd met some friendly girls. One, he added, had given him a whole lot of sugar. Then he turned to

my sister and I and added “Rice candy, she gave me rice candy.” I got all kid freaky ecstatic when we found the candy he was talking about. We bought Japanese Rice Candy, Pocky sticks and Chocolate Pandas. He said Japanese candy was better than the chocolate covered ants and roaches he’d tried in Vietnam. I nearly dropped my Rice Candy box when he said that he had eaten bugs.

There was a prize inside the little box, Japanese themed stickers with some cute oddly shaped yellow cartoon character on it. To me rice candy was exotic and delicious, way more than America’s “treat” candy Cracker Jacks. I remember opening the outer paper that was covered with Japanese writing and seeing the thin and clear inner paper. I told my parents, “I can’t get the clear wrapper off.” Frec had laughed and answered for them, “You aren’t supposed to take it off. It’s part of the candy. It’ll melt in your mouth.” He was right on all counts. To me dissolving paper tasted like flavorless gelatin but the idea of it disappearing when it touched my tongue felt like magic.

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Falling

When I was four and my sister was five we lived on the cliffs of the Tulalip Indian Reservation. Sis and I were alone on the beach making sandcastles one afternoon when a group of local teenagers came by and told us about a swing about a mile down the beach. They said that if we went with them we could ride a rope swing out over the ocean. When we reached the swing it was higher than either of us had imagined. We didn't want to swing anymore and were about to leave for home when two unfamiliar teenagers reached the cliff top. One girl had thick arms and a black eye and the other one had a long dark braid and holey jeans. Holey jeans said, "Leave them alone; they're just little kids." But the black-eyed girl didn't listen. She lifted me onto the swings knot and told me to hang on before she pushed me away from the cliff. As I flew over the beach I realized I wasn't going to be able to hold on to the rope. When I fell away from the rope, it felt like forever had passed before I hit a weathered log and split head open and bit deep into my lip. My body bounced onto the rocks, I landed face down unconscious. When I woke up my sister was dragging me the mile to our house. I recall hearing my mother's voice high on the cliff and I recall her screaming for my father to hurry. When my parents reached us on the beach. My father grabbed me and carried me up the cliff, to bandages, peroxide and

eventually, the hospital, while my sister sobbed.

Kobe Beach, Japan Erin & I, Americans at play.



Nobody in our neighborhood recalled seeing the teens we described. Most likely even if they knew them they wouldn't have said anything. People on the reservation don't like to get other people in trouble. It was the 1970's. People let stuff go all the time, especially if they were

afraid. Not to say that fear of negative repercussions justified protecting abusers, it didn't. It was more like the concept of "child abuse" wasn't widely recognized yet. People of all ages were expected to just get over things.

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Jack Daniels

I grabbed a bottle of Jack Daniels from a corner shop and went back to my Roppongi Hotel. Jack Daniels popularity in Japan was curious to me. The first week I arrived I learned it was considered an excellent gift. People gave it as a gift at job interviews. It was equally appropriate for birthday and wedding gifts. Every restaurant in Japan with a liquor license served Jack Daniels.

This is mildly ironic because most restaurants also served some kind of sushi. Sushi is as revered as the Nisshoki or “Sun marked flag.” The irony stems from the fact that Jack Daniels advertisements mock sushi. This type of mockery is commonplace in the United States, or it was. Raw fish is common today but it got funny looks from many Americans back then, some said they would never eat such a thing. It is funny to me now to recall someone telling me that sushi would never catch on in the US.

The Japanese are proud of their sushi and American travelers either know or learn that sushi jokes are not wise. This is why I was amazed to see Jack Daniels “Sushi Free Zone” posters and coasters everywhere. I wondered how this campaign got popular? And, how is it that Jack Daniels the product and legend could do what an ordinary American traveler could not? I have always liked sushi but if I didn’t I wouldn’t have dissed it. That is like going to someone’s house for dinner and telling the host or hostess they can’t cook. I’ve never liked the obnoxious American overseas. The one’s who ignorantly put down another’s culture, overly confident in their own tastes, style, and way of life to the point that they can’t even imagine or value another way of being.



Jack Daniels's label is different in Japan. It says, "Freedom Is A Right – Independence Is A Choice" on one side and "Jack Daniels Old No. 7 – Tennessee Sour Mash Whisky" on the other. It is a distinctly American beverage. There are several whisky brands in Japan that are in the same league as Jack Daniels but Jack Daniels is still Japan's favorite. At the time I had wondered why the USA Jack Daniels didn't carry the "Freedom Is A Right" label. I think it would have been popular in the US.

All Americans were seen as rock stars. More than once and in more than one way the Japanese told me, "Wow, you are so free and individual. I want to be like you!" But then, when encouraged to stand out in some way my new friends universally passed. I wondered if I would have behaved the same if I had grown up in their culture instead of mine. I assume so since culture is learned behavior. The USA and Japan have changed a lot since then. 2014 America is a workaholic nation and individuality is on the wane. My nation is either growing up or feeling defeated. These things often look alike from the outside looking in. Japan has suffered more but their culture has become popular. Americans gobble up sushi, manga, the Japanese language and Hello Kitty and many in the USA are now as big of fans of Japan as Japan once was of the USA.

In spite of WWII we, in the USA, are very chummy with the Japanese and might as well promote liquid freedom by selling them Jack Daniels since sharing culture is, sometimes, what friends do. I was happy to play into as many of the Japanese stereotypes of America as I could. Hell maybe they were stereotypes for a reason. Sometimes I did drink Jack Daniels in a bikini, surf, wave a flag with pride and speak my mind in public. This was what the Japanese liked about Americans. It's what they liked about me.

The Japanese people I met had made many Chinese and American icons theirs. Some were savant like in their ability to make connections that transformed something from another nation's identity into something distinctly Japanese. With this talent in mind I thought the Jack Daniels popularity might be due to the fact that it is the best selling whisky in the world and Japan loves the word "best," a borrowed word for Japan that I associate with their culture far more than any English speaking nation. I couldn't list all the examples but Best Language School, Best Hair Style, Best Bike, Best Sushi, Best Dry Cleaning and so forth are common. These examples were all on one block. There was always more than one "best" on any block in Japan.

Jack Daniels is the only drink served at the Heavy Metal Bar in Osaka



If not the “best” connection then it might come down to the fact that Jack Daniels, master distiller, had devoted his life to making a whiskey that, thanks to charcoal filtering, and other factors, tasted pretty good. Or, maybe just that it is an American whisky and the Japanese people like American culture, if not to live to taste.

My Jack loved Jack Daniels so it was around our house but rarely in my glass. But, in Japan, Jack Daniels reminded me of Jack. I also appreciated the motto I’d read on a Jack Daniels poster next to the liquor display in a grocery store, “Everyday We Make It, We’ll Make It The Best We Can,” Jack Daniels

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Acting

I spoke less than rudimentary Japanese and most of the Japanese I met only spoke rudimentary English. My exchanges with locals felt surreal. Someone would say a string of words I didn't understand and I would say a string of words they didn't understand, then this would repeat until one of us turned red and waved goodbye. This made the environment seem illusionary. It amplified the feeling that I could do anything or be anyone because nobody understood me anyway. I occasionally slipped into one of the characters out of a book I was reading. At other times I would try to be the author. Identity lures sampled to see which identity caught the most fun?

One could say none of these characters were part of my personality but one could also argue they are all renditions of me since I was the one acting and behaving in a certain way, and what is one's personality other than what one says and does? It was surprisingly easy to do. I have always loved to read and had an arsenal of authors up my sleeve. James Joyce, Charles Bukowski, J.D. Salinger, Virginia Woolf, Plath, Hemingway and Yeats were all read and reread.

It felt as though I could be they or they might be me, a way out of nightmare or into a dream. Whatever the case it seemed just the thing for the time and the place. The more one reads an author I readily deduced that one might need to feel Seuss-y or at other times Carroll but these authors were feigned during childhood perils.

I imagined myself in their company, a writer among writers. When I went out for the night as one of them, or rather as some rendition of how I imagined they were, I found the world more agreeable. I had performed in plays in Seattle and this was another stage. I integrated how I imagined they acted, gestured, spoke and dressed and even practiced a few lines they were known to have said. It was liberating.

My different behaviors attracted different types of companions. It also allowed me to interact and be creative outside of my own history. As Yeats I didn't have to revisit Jack's death. Keep in mind my idea of W.B. Yeats didn't convince anyone else that I was Yeats. It did, however make me think I was, and *that* is what mattered in the game I called "outside my skin."

My Yeats disguise or identity was the most popular personality in a pub. This might have been the Irish brogue I used or perhaps it was my happy demeanor when using his wit or wisdom. I borrowed his quotes such as, "Happiness is neither virtue nor pleasure nor this thing nor that but simply growth, we are happy when we are growing." Interesting enough if one says that sort of thing enough (not overnight but eventually) it becomes who you are. That I wasn't the first to say those words didn't matter. The words were true. I also quoted Yeats poetry, "Wishes For The Clothes Of Heaven was one of my favorites to recite to a group.

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

This sort of outward musing made me popular with men and women alike. It was too soon for this to translate to love for me because my love was still in the ephemera of memory. I was thinking of Jack. I wasn't prepared to be interested in anyone who was interested in me.

If I tried to focus on what I left behind in Seattle I couldn't. Those memories were shifting all the time, like the odds at the racetrack, if I thought of Jack he would fast become my favorite in a rigged race. Past moments, images, the fragments of love and sorrow that might have fallen away with each day's upload of new experience could be brought back in an instant and all that was new seemed to vanish behind pain's opacity. I wasn't happy but I wanted to be

and if I couldn't do it within the confines of my own identity I could do it as someone else. Several years after the game I realized why Yeats was my best performance. It was because I wasn't acting out Yeats at all. I was being Jack.

Enjoying a midday pint with Margie.



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War Heroes

I had two southern relatives who fought in the Vietnam War. They must be dead by now but maybe not. The people in my family seem to live forever but some of the war heroes have been known to just disappear. I met several dozen cousins, including the brother soldiers from Alabama, in 1970. I was at a family reunion held on the stateside of the Gulf of Mexico.

Cousin Russell was a Republican and had planned to be a minister but over time, as our country's mood shifted so did Russell's political beliefs. Eventually he would become more aligned with the people than the government, unfortunately for him he had been drafted. Russell's spiritual odyssey had begun when he learned that the Beatles were exploring Hinduism but by 1970 he was more interested in surfing, meditation and the emerging healing movements.

Russell's little brother Curtis didn't know what he wanted to do with his life but to avoid being drafted and ground combat, he volunteered for the Navy. He later would be assigned to work with The Physical Security Division, the group that built the DaNang Civilian Guard Force in one of the worst ground combat zones.

As child I didn't understand war, not fully. I didn't give it much thought. When I was with the military men at the gulf they were just people, not soldiers. The Gulf was and is a place of peace. The ocean's movements pull at you in ways that feel both alluring and threatening. I loved all of it. The sand pipers trying to grab a meal before the next wave crashed on the shore, the ocean air, and the sparks that rose from the nightly fires, fragments of my past that are moments of beauty. My family and our life was a way-of-being in the world, all life moved at an acceptable pace and felt certain. At six I knew I could walk to the edge of the water and look out at the horizon without any fear of being swept away because of all of the love that was tethered to me. I knew where and how I was supposed to be and every breath I took felt like peace.

In later years I would be reminded by the sound of a gull or the smell of the sea of how I felt at the Gulf. I would close my eyes and imagine myself, at whatever age I was, connected to the six-year-old me breathing at the ocean's edge. Younger me had captured peace and let it stand. A wave of resonance that could be returned to, older me could ride that wave, surf time, back to the shore. Time is an illusion. A fabric of sorts and I am neither here nor there but at both simultaneously, all of me can find the resonance of peace time and again, a chain across time, linked moments of power.

Jack was as fond of Quantum Physics and metaphysics as I was. He understood the illusory nature of the world. Once we designed a meditation that allowed he and I to meet as children. We had played at the beach and I realized that after that I had felt as though I had loved him longer.

Cousin Russell taught me how to meditate. I liked putting my fingers into little rings and saying, "Om." Curtis couldn't sit still for it. He talked about women, especially a girl named Jenny. He hoped she would wait for him when he was at sea. Russell had told him, "Man if you love her let her go. If it's meant to be, it's meant to be" then Russell said, "those are hippy wisdoms you can count on." I remember both brothers laughing, we all laughed and joked as we built our sandcastle in the moist sand down at the shore.

The waters at The Gulf filled my eyes with azure, cerulean and verde-mar and happiness was as easy as gathering shells or floating in the ocean. The sand smoothed away nightmares while the fire of the sun warmed and transformed my skin to a tawny gold. The wind, as it suctioned our clothes, sounded like the snapping fingers of an audience at a poetry reading. Not that I knew that at the time but I can hear it still and so it is.

memory is selective. I can even see them now. My family, at The Gulf, tonight we are on the beach and I am being tossed into the night's sky on a blanket and my father is telling jokes while my mother roasts marshmallows and the war heroes drink beer with shots of whisky and everybody sings.

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Osaka

After two weeks in Tokyo I decided to move to Osaka. I found a job in a bar run by an older Asian woman who went by the name “Susie Z.” Susie’s bar had a stage. I imagined it as a poetry venue with an open mic. I was writing again and had filled several notebooks with poetry, prose and drawings. I also was feeling more comfortable in my new world with every glass I lifted to my lips. Japan was better than aspirin, better than Plath’s recipe for how to prepare oneself when faced with despair, and it was a decision already made, one that I wasn’t going to change anytime soon.



I didn’t want to give up my newly forged identity as the mysterious stranger but money was as necessary as beer and it went down as fast as a shot of whisky. I had left Seattle in such a hurry, without any real plan. I definitely was not adequately funded for a permanent stay. I should have acquired a work visa to broaden my options but, lucky for me, Susie Z. didn’t care about work visas. She said, “Foreign bartenders attract Japanese customer.” She said, “She was a small potato.” When I asked what she meant she said, “You know, small potato, small potato, not a big important potato.” Japanese language schools love to teach American slang and it can be charming to hear.

Susie was right, foreign bartenders do attract customers and I was Susie's foreigner. Every Japanese bar owner wanted one. I got free rent above the bar and worked crazy long shifts. What some might call, "slave labor" but I was fine with it. It was my voluntary internment and why not? I didn't feel like doing anything else and somebody in my family history probably owed somebody in Susie's family a good turn. And, as it turns out, Susie wrote poetry too because destiny is funny like that always trying to align you with like minded souls and steering one away from those who don't meet your needs.

Without Jack I didn't feel like myself. I was me, minus happy, plus cynicism which everyone knows equals bitter. I was able to function, write, carry on in countless inappropriate ways, but I wanted to feel the love in Jack's arms when he held me. I wanted to be loved and feel warm, safe, wrapped in sensuous dreams, one of two in a duet of creativity.

At times I felt between worlds, half asleep, half conscious, still with him. I could see the sun streaming through the sheer curtains in our bedroom, their delicate movements in a carefree summer breeze, an idea of us that we had cultivated, lived, an idea plucked from every foreign film we had watched together, borrowed splendor.

I wanted certainty but got irresolution. Sometimes it felt as though the oxygen had left me. When I was with Jack even the air felt tangible and approving of our love. He was supposed to be here. Our life wasn't supposed to have unwritten chapters. But I couldn't tolerate the futility of this type of thinking because it punctured holes in my soul that let the light slip out.

My memory troubled me as well. Mine seemed to be located in the Travel & Leisure section of the mind and, at other times, it was tucked into the script of a romantic comedy. My mind was operated on by Love's editor in chief. This editor wanted a positive spin on things regardless of the facts.

Susie liked to drink wine. We toasted our new arrangement and like that I had a job. Susie Z made it so I could stay. All I would have to do is take a boat to Korea every now and again to renew my tourist visa.

About six months later I was with Trevor, a bartender at Tri-Color that I had become good friends with because people who live, work, and play in bars often become fast friends, especially when far from home. He was pure congeniality. Trevor was looking into getting me a job at one of the two clubs that Ian, a New Zealand expatriate, owned. The second club was called "Pierot," I would eventually work at both venues. I preferred to work all the time because work and play were barely distinguishable. The biggest difference was that work paid.

I took a night off from Suzie Z's and met Gabriella Rios, Miss Colombia from the Ms. Universe Pageant, in Tri-Color. Gaby was a DJ on Kansai Radio, the only English speaking music radio station in Osaka, and Tri-Color was one of the most popular nightclubs in the city. Gaby was with her soon to be ex-boyfriend John who was a musician and a couple of his friends. When I first saw Gaby she looked ticked off. She stared at her red fingernails even though John was talking to her.

Gaby was considered somebody in town, beautiful in spite of her excessive make-up, a celebrity from the pageant circuit. People asked for her autographs and regularly took her picture. Her face was on billboards. She appeared on TV Talk shows and in liquor commercials. The Ms. Universe pageant made her a star in Japan, probably much more so than in the United States.

Gaby introduced herself to me and pointed to John and said, "We are done. Let's go get a drink." Meanwhile Trevor had fallen in love with a local man whose name I couldn't pronounce.

They were headed to Trevor's place hand in hand. For an instant I felt what I thought was déjà vu but later realized it was my picking up on something that would happen again and again.

71. Contemporary writing is monotonous.

71. Contemporary writing is monotonous.

71. Contemporary writing is monotonous.

71. Contemporary writing is monotonous.

71. Contemporary writing is monotonous.

71. Contemporary writing is monotonous

71. Contemporary writing is so monotonous.

71. Contemporary writing is monotonous

71. Contemporary writing is monotonous.

71. Contemporary writing is monotonous.

Fragmenting

Sometimes Susie Z would ask me to go buy cigarettes for the bar or some liquor that had run low. I would take my time, often sitting down for a smoke break at a nearby mini-park that had a ten-foot square water-lily pond teeming with Koi fish. Koi are pretty carp and they are everywhere in parks and ponds. Koi is also a homophone for another Japanese word that can be translated to mean “love” and “affection.”

Sitting at a pool of love and affection I realized I hadn't had a hangover in months. This didn't even seem possible because I drank all the time. I was a little worried that I might get some sort of monster hangover when I was done but I pushed that thought aside as I watched the park keeper feed the Koi, his hand methodically tossing what looked like seed into the pond. The light shifted and the pond caught the sky in its reflection. The mirrored sky was pristine, except for the corner where the Koi fought just below the surface for the feed. It all made an impression on me, a mental photograph or maybe more of a mental film reel. This is written in me, in a book without words, a double-sky dos-à-dos bound in my mind, one for me above and one for Jack below. This is how that memory is linked, something learned in 2014 has caught hold of a moment in the 1990's, artists' books have pushed into the past. Now the world and my mind encompass limited editions of ephemeral work and stout fish as one. But it is also distinct, connected to nothing but Jack. A moment that in the 90's pushed my idea of love and asked can love last between worlds?

My life in Japan wouldn't be a permanent way of being because nothing is permanent. If Jack wasn't, nothing was. Later that night I searched the cosmos, in meditation, for Jack. I found him on the rings of Saturn and we delighted in every star and moon as we rode the rings around.

I have more mental images than photographs of Japan, not because memory is reliable but because travel heightened my senses. I became more conscious and both adrenaline and emotional intensity worked as anchors to what I was experiencing, keeping events lodged in my head. These fragmented memories are lifted or pulled from the photo album of my mind by associative cues.

The Japanese pop group TM Network's song "Gravity of Love" is forever linked Yoshi, my first and best Japanese girlfriend and co-worker, dancing in six inch purple pumps with enormous black and white polka dot bows at the front and back. The Pretender's tune, "Talk of the Town" is equally imprinted in my memory because that is what Yoshi felt she had become when her fiancé had left her at the alter.

Doppelgangers can also activate memory. I saw a heavysset Asian man who reminded me of a heavy drinker, I recall from Susie Z's place, named Takumi. Upon spotting Takumi's body double I remembered Yoshi, Susie and I struggling and laughing as we tried to help Takumi's two hundred body off the bar's floor. We had flopped him about but his feet didn't work, dead weight that wouldn't stand. We eventually gave up and him sleep under a table. Sometimes it is the unusual, the meaningless, that lingers.

Some memory fragments, like the night I had at Sam & Dave's Bar along the Dotonbori, are surreal. I was about to leave with my friends when I met what can only be called "an almost-Jack." The almost-Jack's name was Daniel and he made me laugh, really to the core of my being laugh. His Irish accent was charming He said, "You're a lovely girl. I'm going to give you a ring." He then twisted a red cocktail straw into the shape of a ring and slid it on my finger. The more drinks I had, the more he began to look and sound like Jack. I accidentally called him "Jack" and he corrected me. I was happier than I'd been since I left Seattle until he began to talk

about his ex-girlfriend. Suddenly I couldn't get away from him fast enough. I didn't want any of my real Jack memories corrupted by this imposter. I told him I was going to the restroom and slipped back up the stairwell. To him, most likely, I was just another woman in a bar but for me he felt like danger.

My fragments of memory are linked to accidents too. At Susie's bar, I encouraged people to drink to excess, dance on the bar, throw peanuts or anything else they wanted. I told Susie that if the peanut shells got deep enough it would make the place more American. I welcomed bad behavior and it was only when somebody climbed up into the ceiling beams and fell down onto a bar stool, breaking both it and their arm, that I reconsidered my anything goes position. When Maasaki, our wounded faller, came back into the bar with his cast I had suddenly remembered what the doctor had said about Jack, "When the car hit Jack it propelled him with such force that, when he hit the lamppost, his neck must have broken on impact." He added, "He probably didn't feel pain for long or at all." I have been haunted by the word "probably" since.

I dialed it back by providing entertainment. Susie bought Karaoke equipment and when this wasn't enough for the crowd I did my Godzilla impersonation. An act that consisted of my taping white cocktail napkins and straws together to form a lizard ridge or spine and attaching the contraption to my head, then I would roar and chase the patrons around the room. The last person caught got a free Kamikaze or shot of their choice. I want to say that my favorite thing about Japan is how childlike and playful the people are but I worry that this might offend someone. If it does that isn't my intention. I just haven't been anywhere else in the world where businessmen and women eagerly play bar tag.

Stewardesses on the left and my drunken co-workers and I on the right



My fragmenting memory feels concrete but is more like the Japanese names that appear in my mind, words and names that either I never knew or I am unable to fully recall. They were beautiful letters, symbols, nothing more because my

Japanese is tragic and an English translation wouldn't have improved anything.

A writer selects what they want to remember and what they want to forget more consciously than most. This is not to say that books are more reliable than memory because that is the well the book is pulled from but, as the bucket rises up with its water, it is likely to encounter imagination along the way. Sometimes this makes me think that nothing is real and that I'm not here at all just another hallucination in an illusion or a dream dreaming itself into being.

Real or illusion I felt that Japan was the right place for me. The Japanese people seem to have mastered forgetting. Most favor progress and politeness to holding a grudge or wallowing in despair. In this way I wanted to be like them but I wasn't sure how to be. I made sure I was busy, that seemed key. My days began to flicker by like the linked pictures that form a Super 8 film, one frame indistinguishable from the next but all coming together to create something more than the sum of its parts.

71. Contemporary writing is so monotonous.

72. I have reached a spiritual point where I believe it is my enlightened duty to never get upset.

73. Fuck you Jack!

74. Why am I fantasizing about working in advertising?

75. Jack tells me that I make him laugh as he kisses me on the nose.

76. We both laugh.

77. I want a "Save the authors" bumper sticker. They've been killing the author since the 60's there can't be many left now.

78. Jack likes to say that his characters drag him to the typewriter.

79. Jack never watches television.

80. I just watched thirty-five episodes of Mad Men in two days.

Enduring

After months of working ten to twelve hour shifts, six days in a week, I had a new identity. I no longer was “The mysterious stranger.” Now I was “The fun bartender” who travelled alone and was unmarried at age twenty-seven. Three weeks into the job I learned that in Japan women over twenty-five are called, “Christmas Cake” because no Japanese man will marry her after her twenty-fifth birthday. When this “wisdom” was shared with me I was nearly twenty-eight and my friend Yoshi had just turned twenty-seven. Seattle me was offended but Japan me couldn’t be bothered to fight this facet of the host culture. My behavior was my protest, besides I wasn’t looking for love so why would I care if Japanese men thought I was past my prime.

At my friend Yoshi’s birthday party, I realized that she didn’t hold my “whatever” attitude. I watched her typically happy face transform into a rigid mask with a fixed and forced smile. She had clouded over when one of the Japanese men at the party had joked about her being “Two year old Christmas cake.” All the men laughed but I knew she was really upset and I touched her arm and gave her a look that said, they don’t matter.

But something had shifted, even as I resisted it. I was alone too. Did I have this to look forward to in the US? I shrugged it off and got Yoshi to laugh by telling her she could come back to the states with me and marry Brad Pitt or whoever she wanted. Then, after Yoshi opened her presents, I went to the women’s restroom and looked at myself in the mirror and wondered if the chauvinists in the states would be mocking me soon.

Women at home were granted a few more years past twenty-five before people started to sneer at their perceived misfortune but that was all. I still only wanted Jack and wouldn’t date, even though I had men in my sphere that I found attractive that were also interested in me.

The problem was that there hadn't been a break-up, no finality, other than Jack's sudden stark absence. Funerals aren't final because they feel like theatrical events or like they are happening to someone else. The closer the connection to the deceased the less real the event. Even when I was standing at Jack's funeral holding an urn of ashes, I remember thinking I wish Jack were here.

Later that night Yoshi and I were drunk on champagne in a dry canal until the sun came up. A couple of American men we had met had bicycles. We rode the handlebars while the men peddled us through the mile long, mostly dry, riverbed. When we reached an end, or at least the end of where bicycles could travel, we rode in circles around and around. I could see Yoshi was drunk and I realized that I was probably drunker. What did it matter? We were two hands spinning on a clock face and the sky above was a shifting sea of clouds more black than blue and I was dissolving the past and folding the corners of my reality into and in, and in and up and down, with action and distraction and purpose born of newness and cocktails and language and laughter, an origami life, a crane, a jumping frog, a cube of questions written in Kanji, Hiragana and Katakana.

Three years later I invited Yoshi to visit me in Ireland. One month after she arrived she fell in love and married a man named Johnny Sheehan who is ten years her senior. They own a pub in Cork.

81. Jack and I shoppe for ye' old nostalgia kitsch.
82. I don't know what to do with the butterflies in a box. Jack says to, "Hang on to them because one of these days he's going to find the owner."
83. If I look too closely at the Monarch's wing I fear I will fall headfirst into one of those little black holes.
84. Jack says, "Ask yourself what would Bono do?"
85. The clouds have wound through the Evergreens like cotton through the teeth of a comb.
86. Jack and I look at a box of pictures of us. We're in Thailand, Mexico, there was one of us on the beach in Belize. We plan our wedding.
87. Jack put his hand on my head and I put my hand on his head and we walked down the street holding heads because holding hands is so passé.
88. Giggling we bite into wintergreen mints in the dark and watch the sparks fly.
89. When Jack knocked the mirror off the wall he cried for an hour.
90. I hug him and say, "Don't be so superstitious."

Working

I woke in the early morning to the sound of yellow robed monks chanting in the temple below. Their daily morning ritual gave rise to my own ritual of writing. While riding the trains, so packed I could barely work a pen, I wrote some more. On my work breaks I jotted down ideas, sentence fragments and dialogue in my writer's notebook and, because I didn't want to lose my notebook, when out with friends I wrote on napkins, coasters, receipts, even my hands and arms if paper was nowhere to be found. I felt like a writer in a novel and it felt real.

I sought out places to read my work, just as I had at Susie Z's. I started reading poems and short stories on stage with other foreign and local writers at the Tri-Color and Pierot nightclubs before the musical acts came on. And, as an English teacher, I encouraged my students to write poems. When they shared their work, I shared mine. Audiences seemed to be everywhere.

As a Tri-Color bartender I was host to two thousand people a night. The club had four U-shaped bars and a huge performance stage. All the bartenders were from different countries. It was a multi-cultural extravaganza. Ian, the New Zealander Trevor had introduced me to, paid me twice as much as Susie Z. I had more time for my English Teaching day job because my new bartending job started three hours later than the job I'd had with Susie Z. Suzie was sad when I left but she said, "Business is business" and seemed glad that I had provided her with another opportunity to use an idiom from her English class as well as a legacy of a weekly poetry event.

I'm embarrassed to admit it but the English teaching job I had was given to me because of my appearance. I wasn't technically qualified to teach students but they told me they wanted "Western looking teachers" so I took the job. I was earning \$5200 a month, not bad for an illegal alien who had not yet finished her bachelor's degree.

Japan although one of the most expensive countries in the world ended up being very affordable because my Tri-Color job came with an apartment above the bar just like my first job had. It was cramped and hot, two words that typify Japan. My main problem was that at Tri-Color the club only closed for two hours a day for cleaning. This meant it was thump-thump-thumping loud when I slept. I often had a musical earworm with a pulsing club beat that tormented me as I taught English. The best bit was that I never had any trouble sleeping, even though that was mainly because I was required to drink on the job. On the job drinking is an offshoot of Japan's no tipping policy. Leaving money for the bar staff is considered rude by the majority. If, however, a customer buys a bartender a drink this is a compliment that cannot be refused.

My teaching job paid for my train pass as well as for my Korean passport stamping excursions. All of these things meant that saving money was easy. But, since I only had a tourist visa, I couldn't open a bank account. I ended up stuffing thousands of dollars into Panda Dango tins that I kept under my bed. I had decided it was safe enough. We lived on the fifteenth floor of a building in a country that was, at the time, not known for theft.

91. Jack gets a ticket for going 110 in a 55.

92. I say, "Jack, I'm not really mad."

93. I'm sorry that I said that I wished you were dead. Nobody means those things.

94. I didn't mean it.

95. There is a giant X in the sky from two jets that flew in the same airspace.

96. Really Jack, I'm fine.

97. Jack is a love "10" and a responsibility "2" on a scale that doesn't exist.

98. My fortune cookie says, "You will know true love."

99. Jack looks so happy when he makes his peanut butter and banana sandwich.

100. Contemporary writing is—

Reading

I tried to promote the American tipping system but it didn't catch on, a pity because both meditation and writing are difficult when intoxicated and these were the activities I did everyday before and often after work. I would meditatively travel back to Jack or forward to some future where I was a successful writer but, when one works in a club brimming with customers who want your attention, work also meant being in the now.

I did finally figure out how to not to look inebriated while on the job. If a customer offered to buy me a shot like a kamikaze, B-52, or whatever, then I would have to drink it because the appearance of the drink is too distinct but if the customer said, "Bartender's choice" that meant I could make myself whatever I wanted. I would tell the customer that I was having a vodka or Gin and then make myself a glass of tonic water with lime.

Also, since the first cocktail of the night is the most challenging, the one that might make me sound buzzed for an hour, I usually just had that beverage when I arrived to work. This gave me time to I acclimate and soon all signs of intoxication would vanish, even after a dozen shots customers would say, "You look too sober, let me buy you a drink."

If anything gave me away in the club it was my judgment after double-digit numbers of cocktails. One night I started my shift with a Kamikaze, to prep but moments after that a group of businessmen came in, drinking heavy, and insisting I take "tips." I had a Pink Lady, A Daquiri, a shot of Jack Daniels, a margarita, another shot of Jack Daniels, I was feeling like they were trying to take me down, Ian moved me to the back bar so they could work on Travis for a while. But the back bar had a bachelorette party that wearing matching dresses and singing songs and not exactly taking it easy. They bought me an Absolute Passion shot, an Absolute Nut shot and an Absolute Suicide. When I went on break I had to step all the way outside to get air. I see

“almost Jack” in the queue to get in and he waves. I feel like I have to let him in even though he is on a date. When we go back inside I focus on pouring drinks but then I see “Almost Jack” kiss the girl. I suddenly jump up on the bar and start dancing and reach over to grab a fifth off the shelf and, to the sound of applause, take a long drink straight from the bottle.

On a different night, after my thirteenth cocktail, I stripped down to my black bra and underwear to Soundgarden’s “Black Hole Sun,” not really strip music but it made sense in a surreal, slow motion sort of way. I still had my surf body because I caught the train to Kobe Beach to surf fairly regularly and walked everywhere. This meant that I wasn’t at sufferance of local chauvinism, only that which had been instilled into me, every American woman, from birth. That voice that asks, “Do I meet slim standards?” and “Will he approve?” Whoever “he” is. But, in spite of all my excess, I still looked fit. Youth is funny that way. The Japanese aren’t uptight about nudity so partial nudity was nothing to them.

I pulled a large American flag off the wall (the bar had several flags from around the world about the place) and put it on like a skirt. I took a cowboy hat off Trevor who quickly offered up his boots and sunglasses too when I told him I was going to read a great American poet. We had spontaneity in common; being left barefooted behind the bar wouldn’t have troubled me either and my impromptu need to read didn’t bother Trevor.

I took the stage, grabbed the microphone. It was already live for the DJ coming on at 10pm. I said, “I want to read a famous American poem by Allen Ginsberg, this is “Howl.”” There were about two hundred or so people in on a weeknight for an English DJ, whose name I have long since forgotten, the place fell silent, ready to listen and I began to read from Ginsberg’s book *Howl and Other Poems*.

*“I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked,
dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix,*

*angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo
in the machinery of night,
who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking in the supernatural
darkness...*”

The room was humid and I could hear Trevor, the consummate American, hooting with glee. Trevor was a southern boy who liked to say, “Hot damn!” and “Whoo-wee!” when he got excited. I didn’t think people actually said those things and, prior to Trevor, I didn’t think I would be a friend with anyone who did but I loved him. He was a bisexual who seemed to crush on every man or woman that walked through the door. He told me he was in love with me shortly after we became friends but I told him that he wasn’t my dating type. He had said, “I’m everybody’s type.” In hindsight I can see he was probably right. Trevor was handsome and funny so he was what most people wanted but he was no Jack.

My Japanese audience appeared to be focused on my every word. One or two began to say “Whoo-wee” along with Trevor. The locals might have thought that that was what Americans did at poetry readings because imitating the actions of foreigners is a very common practice among young people in Japan. It is easiest to see on the dance floor where moves are shamelessly picked up no matter how silly. On the Tri-Color dance floor I once had about fifty people doing jumping jacks along with me as a test of how far this could go. I wish people in the United States were that uninhibited. But America is not just “home of the free and the brave” it is also “home of the puritanically oppressed.” The extra “Whoo-wees” coming from the crowd made it so that I had to swallow a giggle but it also put a smile on my face while I read.

I spotted Gaby in the corner. She motioned that she had her hash pipe burning. I was already out of my mind with drink and still reading Ginsberg but was starting to feel a bit out-of-body too from the combination of cocktails I had drank earlier.

*who ate fire in paint hotels or drank turpentine in Paradise Alley, death, or purgatoried
their torsos night after night
with dreams, with drugs, with waking nightmares, alcohol...*

Now it was in my mind that this was a damn long poem. I was sweltering under the stage lights in the already hot room and I could see the DJ, just out of the corner of my eye letting me know I had seven minutes. I picked up the pace afraid I was going to run out of energy before I reached the end. I began to think of my beer reward or whisky, anything, even water would do because this was a mouthful and I was thirsty. I had already decided against the full-length version of “Howl” and wondered if I could make it to the end of the first part without asking for a sip of beer from the closest table because my mouth had gone dry.

Gaby and Trevor would later say I spat the words out without hesitation, confident, and that I had had the whole place engaged. Even in the state I was in I didn’t want to let Ginsberg’s work down.

*who wandered around and around at midnight in the railroad yard wondering where to
go, and went, leaving no broken hearts..*

My flag was slipping from my waist and I was perspiring under the lights. I said, “Thank you!” The audience applauded and our host came on stage and said, “Thank you Kelle G. for getting our night off to a good start!” He then introduced the DJ and, after I reworked my flag into a sort of sarong, I sat down at Gaby’s table. She gave me a few drags off of her smokeless pipe and said, “Holy shit Kel, that was amazing.”

“Thanks,” I said feeling like a happy performance artist.

Before I went back to work about a dozen customers asked for my autograph and I thought, *that wouldn't happen at home*. Ginsberg's words made me feel like I was radiating poetry.

101. Jack and I play nude croquet on the lawn under a full moon.
102. We see Richard and Sheila watching us from a window.
103. Sheila shakes her head back and forth and I think of a metronome.
104. When the neighbors ask us to keep it down we shout, “Off with their heads!” like the Queen of Hearts in *Alice in Wonderland*.
105. Jack opens the car door for me everywhere we go.
106. At the movie *Very Bad Things* we laugh until we cry.
107. We agree that anyone can fly a kite in summer so we try it, Benjamin Franklin style, with a needle in a lightning storm, our kite crashes but we feel as though we have captured electricity.
108. Jack and I both say, “Drunken Boy” at the same time when we see it in the film credits.
109. The wind is rattling the windows.
110. I am laughing so hard in my dream that I wake myself up.

Literary Heroes

Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac and William S. Burroughs, the icons of their generation, are mentor like gods who seared their pages with emotion and an ineffable essence of being. They were writing what they wanted to write, fearless authorship, poetry and poetics, living to write because writing was life and I love them because that is what writing is to me.

I read Jack Kerouac's *On The Road* in tenth grade and knew I would wander with literary luminaries someday. When Jack Kerouac was in his twenties he was hanging out with Ginsberg and talking about revolutionizing the writing world, actually the whole world, while I was being born. When I finally got to wander it was with musicians and everyday adventurers and my time on the road gave me lots to write about. Kerouac enhanced my fondness for men named Jack to the degree that when I first met my Jack he gained ten points just by saying, "I'm Jack." My Jack loved Jack Kerouac too, said he wrote like a Jazz musician, riffing out pages in a fit of passion. Jack and I were all about passion.

Kerouac, not afraid to take risks, not at all. He is said to have used Benzedrine and coffee to keep him going as he wrote an entire novel in three weeks. Anyone capable of that sort of intensity is my kind of guy, even if I'm not interested in the Benzedrine. I did try his method of Bebop and Buddhism, solid methodology. Buddhism is a good gateway meditative experience but dogmatically limiting to me. Kerouac might have agreed because he was a literary iconoclast, content to blast religion, politics and the writing style of his day apart. I have always admired his literary courage.

William S. Burroughs came into my life when the movie version of *Naked Lunch* was released. I was one of the few people I knew who liked the film and the only one I know who bought the book. The book, another head-popper, shebang goes the brain when the eyes spot

wow, experience. Burroughs was ahead of the pack in the contemporary writing movement. So consider this encomium to you W. B.S., wherever you are.

The novel *Naked Lunch* is a conceptual masterpiece. It is written in vignettes in a non-linear narrative style. If this style seems familiar to you as you read this, I would consider that a good thing. Burroughs style makes traditional plot difficult to discern, presumably to allow the reader to make story connections independently rather than forcing a singular view. It is a style that I seek to emulate because who among us doesn't appreciate a little intellectual *have it your way* or *Why-the-fuck-not-ed-ness?*

The Beats were armed with pen and paper or typewriter and ribbon and they stood at the circumference of conflicts screaming, "Stop!" They dissected the government, the culture, the law and they taunted conformity, whose favorite cry is "Shame on you!" But what their conformists needed, what all conformists need, was or is to turn inward, not to scream silently but to open one's ears to hear the poet on street corner who offers a new way of thinking, to feel music light up the entirety of one's brain and to see the paintings or digital artists capture the light or essence that everyone instinctively knows can turn being into BEING.

I, like them, don't want any prepackaged conformity, even if the first pack is free and comes with a lighter and a coupon. Because I might have to beg for the next one, because I'd need it, *have to have it because my neighbor has it* and it might cost me, forty, fifty, sixty hours a week, plus some weekends and over-time without time and a half because I'm on salary. And all because the second pack is as hungry as a black hole and as insatiable as the hungry ghost. But, I don't have to worry about that because I've got two Jacks, a Ginsberg and a Bouroughs and that Beats all.

Ginsberg's personality, humanity and soul are in his work. Ginsberg wanted wars to end

and equal rights for god damned everybody as well as sexual freedom. He was an individual, a distinct voice both out and outspoken. He insisted on being himself, man, writer, poet, professor and genius. He was authentic, real. Ginsberg fought battles and still produced, unencumbered he and his contemporaries rolled into town shouting, Wait just one goddamned minute. This is my life and I will write, as I will!

Years later I met Allen Ginsberg after his Seattle show at the Backstage in Ballard, Washington. I was sitting at the front of the house at a small table with a friend when mid-show Ginsberg stopped chanting, “Don’t smoke, don’t smoke, it’s the legal dope. Don’t smoke, don’t smoke it will make you choke,” some verse he must have made up on the spot. He just stopped, grabbed a handkerchief from a table, wiped his brow, and pointed at me and said, “I can’t stop staring at you. Wait there after the show.” I said, “Of course!” After the show he joined us at our table, declined a cocktail in favor of a glass of water.

He asked me, “Are you a writer?” I said I was.

He said, “I can tell.”

“I thought I had something on my face when you said you couldn’t stop staring.”

He said, “You have an amazing aura.”

Then we talked about writing and meditation until someone from his staff came out and told him he needed to go back stage. He laughed and touched my shoulder and said, “Kelle, read William Blake. He’ll be one of yours.”

I said, “I’m so glad I came to see you. You’re amazing.”

He said, “So are you.”

I left the venue elated. I’d had an encounter that felt like a dream.

Just crack open a page of anything these men have written and feel the world gyrate and

check my heart, my record, my CD, my audiophile because the jolt will have knocked them out of sync. I believe, although one can never be certain of invisible emanations of brilliance, but I would swear that light shot out of space and into my brain and does every time I read anything by Ginsberg, Kerouac and Burroughs.

They simply inspire. Their various works read like a guide to writerly joy and if you read *On The Road*, *Howl* or *Naked Lunch*, read them close, like a lover, hold that pen in your mouth and then write a line of syntax so wrought with sweat, sex and passion that it knocks the Space Needle from its base. I try to do it just to say thanks. Thanks for the freedom gentlemen, thanks.

111. My hands are amazing. I really love my hands and my brain. It's awesome too. Everything is awesome. No Jack, I'm not high, am I?
112. Seattle and Japan are on the ring of fire, the ring of fire.
113. At times I sense the earth shifting under my feet.
114. As I watch the policeman walk away from our house I feel strange. It's like a hole has been torn in space and time. The illusion flaps wildly with tattered edges, into the darkness and I am sucked into the void.
115. Jack was nimble and Jack was quick but he died wrapped around a modern metal candlestick.
116. I drove all night alone in the HOV lane.
117. Please stop asking. There isn't anything you can say to make me feel better.
118. I consider driving an icicle through my heart because Jack would have thought that that was hilarious.
119. Nothing tastes like anything.
120. Our cat Magic has been missing for 24 hours. When, Richard comes to the door with a bag I become so hysterical that he drops the bag and runs away shouting, "I'm sorry! Our dog got over your fence, it was an accident! It was an accident!"

Misunderstanding

When I escaped to Japan I didn't wonder or worry if everyone got the wedding cancellation notices I had mailed out and, thankfully, because it was the 90's people weren't sending me email 24-hours-a-day. There was no Facebook. Cell phones existed but they were not yet commonplace. Nobody was texting, tweeting or using Skype to bridge the distance. My sudden exit gave me space and a chance to recover on my own terms.

Two men who asked me to take their picture.



I recall the day before I left Seattle. I threw away a dozen dying poinsettias that were given to me by the mourners at Jack's December funeral. I had wanted to destroy the past by cutting myself off from it. I wasn't going to let myself or others feed it. I couldn't handle my pain

getting bigger and stronger. I hoped to kill the past by starving it. It could wither and fade away because I couldn't take the daily dose of pain and remembrance.

Unexpected was the fact that one's identity among strangers in a foreign country is not entirely up to the traveller. I could keep Jack's death to myself but I wasn't able to repress all that the United States had done in the world. Our nations carry their own baggage this is why it is good to choose a country who either likes you or who has forgiven you. The best is to pick a country that likes your culture so that you can benefit from your home country's stereotypes. I was an American and, in Japan, that somehow linked me to Hollywood, wealth, and the right to do whatever I want. It sounds selfish, conceited, but that is the USA for you. In Japan we all

misunderstood each other completely and were getting along fine in our misperceptions of one another. When I was there I knew such an illusory comfort couldn't last. We would eventually recognize each other's complexity and a new set of rules would have to be devised.

121. Jack's mother is a pastor at a Unity church. She doesn't cry as she performs her son's eulogy but it is a moving service. She holds a beautiful citrine crystal that she later gives to me and says, "It can't hold negative energy."
122. Christmas tree lights blink and snow tumbles from invisible clouds.
123. I listen to the story of when my parents met Jack and I love what they have done with it.
124. Jack showed up drunk and late for dinner.
125. My parents reenact how Jack kissed my mother, as if he were comedian doing a gag, bending her way back until his back couldn't hold her. They both collapse onto the kitchen floor.
126. I can't help but smile as I remember.
127. My father says, "Jack was a joker" and I can tell that both of my parents miss him.
128. I sit and watch the fire, the embers and the ash.
129. I had a nightmare that I was a hawk that turned into a plane that crashed into the sea.
130. There is a squirrel on the lawn that can't seem to find the nuts he hid last summer.

Disappearing

I now know that the stars over my head have been disappearing all the while. Most stars are so far away that it is necessary to express our distance to them in the distance traveled by light in one year. Logically, we call this measurement “a light year.” The next closest star to Earth is Proxima Centauri. This star is 4.3 light years away and its light takes 4.3 years to reach us. Earth’s galaxy is about 100,000 light years across. Some stars in our galaxy take tens of thousands of years for their light to reach us. For stars that we can see in nearby galaxies it can take millions of years. The farthest objects we can see are quasars. They are so distant that the light we see from them today left its place of origin billions of years ago. When we look up at the stars we are looking back in time. This is useful for astronomers because when we look at very distant objects we can see what the Universe was like a long time ago. Sometimes when I look into the night’s sky I imagine myself looking through a giant telescope into the past.

There Jack and I are on the beach near Cape Canaveral, wearing sunglasses, lying on huge towels on bright crystalline sand. We are drinking Hurricanes, that wonderful southern drink that tastes like fruit punch. We are playing chess on a miniature travel chessboard. I want to be in the memory but it is like looking at the sun. I turn away and watch the light change color behind my eyelids, red, orange, yellow, blue and then violet, blinking and fading to black. I cannot say for certain, since nobody knows what’s inside a black hole, but it feels like our beach blanket, his white shirt, my sundress, our tans were pulled into one of the hidden black holes that suck the light out of space.

There are new discoveries in space all of the time because technology is always advancing but we currently have no idea what is going on in the farthest reaches of the galaxy. The most consist data is that every time we create a new measuring device it is larger than we

had previously imagined. I believe there is an echo out there, Jack and I together, radiating through space. We are riding a beam of light, like Einstein, and we are happy in a way that most people will never understand and that isn't hyperbole. Most don't have the measuring devices necessary to view our reality. Jack and I were like Copernicus, Bruno and Galileo visionaries, quirky, outward thinking because forward thinking sometimes was too linear.

Higashi Hongan-jo Temple Kyoto



131. The house is too quiet.

132. Holiday cards, in bright red envelopes, arrive for Jack from his friends in Berlin.

133. As I drive in the rain I see a sign that says “Apocalypse Muse” but then realize it says “Calypso music.”

134. I sleep with Jack’s sweater over my pillow and dream I am on a balcony in Pamplona, cheering him on as he runs with the bulls.

135. Richard and Sheila say “I haven’t seen Jack in quite awhile. Are you two still together?”

136. I tell our neighbors, “Jack and I are moving to Japan. He has gone on ahead of me.”

137. I put Jack’s sunglasses on and watch the snow turn gold behind his lenses.

138. There is a white owl in the chestnut tree.

139. I walk on the ice until stress cracks burst in every direction beneath my feet.

140. It takes me two hours but I bury the butterfly box in the frozen ground.

War Heroes

I must have been eight years old when I met our family's oldest war heroes. As I write this I can still imagine us sitting around the campfire and the near constant laughter, people drinking beer or spiked lemonade. There were cards, a card table and poker chips. My sister and I were both blue lipped from too many Otter Pop popsicles. Gerald, one of the older men, told stories about World War II. I remember he called the Japanese, "Japs" and said he wished he could relive the war all over again.

It was near the Fourth of July and I was wearing a blue and white horizontal striped top and red shorts, and my sister was wearing a red and white striped top with blue shorts. Our clothes had the "Made In The USA" labels at the back of the collar. The cousins who fought in WW II had brought sake to the party. It was the first time I'd heard of this drink. Cousin Gerald Emerson told us he'd loved Gekkeikan Sake since the war. Then he clarified this statement by saying, "Since the good war, not the one going on in Vietnam." This is now a cliché but only because people actually said this all the time. I don't remember the other cousin's name but I sometimes imagine his name is Johnny Walker but I know that isn't right.

I'll call him Johnny Walker anyway. Johnny Walker jumped in and said, "Gerald, you know the girls are part Indian right?"

And Gerald said, "Yeah, they aren't being raised Indian."

Johnny Walker adds, "Jim doesn't look Indian at all."

Gerald, "Sake?"

Johnny Walker, "Sure; no, not much. They are all more Irish than Indian. Aren't you part Indian?"

Gerald, “We left all that behind. My family take after the English in the family, do you know Ralph Waldo Emerson? He is one of ours, on the family tree.”

Johnny Walker, “Yeah, I know who he is. I think of myself as an American.”

Gerald, “Hell, I’m an American too! I’m just saying that if you trace our roots back to England, Emerson is there.”

“And here. Here is there.”

“No, not here, here, North Dakota.”

“Yeah and Oklahoma.”

My family didn’t keep in touch with the sprawling cousins, however many times removed, but I know these men were in Japan forty years before I was. I don’t know why but the only way I can imagine the two cousins from the beach is in an unrealistic way. I see them in blue and white US Navy suits, white caps cocked to the sides of their heads, drinking with the local Japanese girls, who I imagine dressed like Geishas or the nineteen-forties American pin-up girls that I associate with auto-mechanics. These images are likely born from watching old movies like *South Pacific* and *Operation Petticoat* and they are completely untrue because I think both of these relatives were airmen.

141. Jack vanished from before my third eye.

142. I hope nobody notices that I'm wearing Jack's clothes.

143. I'm not answering the phone.

144. I watch the movie *Ghost* on Showtime and then wander about the house whispering Jack's name.

145. The kettle steams the glass behind the sink until I can no longer see myself. This reminds me of the film *Fatal Attraction*. I remember that in the movie the killer had put a pet rabbit in a pot of boiling water for the lead to find.

146. There is a spider web in the dining room, I leave it hoping that Jack will haunt me but sweep it away when I realize he already is.

147. Love looks different from the outside.

148. Jack's side of the bed feels like sacred space.

149. There is nothing good on TV.

Drinking

Every spring in Kawasaki Japan the Kanayama Shrine hosts the “Festival of the Steel Phallus.” The festival’s concept stems from the ancient Japanese religion known as Shinto or “The way of the Gods.” The religion includes a tale of a maiden who castrated two young men with the pointy-toothed demon that lived in her vagina. Men were afraid to marry her until a blacksmith conquered the dangerous girl by forging a steel penis that knocks the demons teeth out, leaving it chomping at the bit but unable to cause harm. Some call the event “The Fertility Festival” but this is too limiting because not only does the Festival of the Steel Phallus protect men from vagina demons it promotes fertility among men and women, protects prostitutes from venereal diseases, generates good fortune and increases the chances for elegant childbirth and marital harmony.

One of many giant penis floats.



The festival is an all ages event and utterly hilarious to most westerners. The view of the festival as “hilarious” is an acute example of what African American scholar Houston Alfred Baker Jr. calls “universalizing.” Baker cites the “universal” elements of beauty, for example, or universal standards of behavior, judgment, and values as sources that can eliminate the original, personal and individual spirit of something unique to a culture. He goes on to say that, “Spirit, contained in and expressed through a physical body of a certain age, creed, gender, class, and race, can never be universalized without being reduced to an abstract essence, stripped of its complexity, marginalized, and silenced.” He is of course

correct but at the time I didn't know such things and I was as amused as every other foreigner I met by the cultural differences between westerners and the Japanese people.

At the event Japanese people of all ages wear penis hats and eat penis shaped food. Penis lollipops are very popular. Phallic fruit and decorations are everywhere and there is a parade of enormous penises on floats with singers singing into microphones, made to look like penises. These singers are flanked by sexy schoolgirls, in school uniforms and penis hats, dancing and pretending to give blowjobs to bright pink penises. It is a penis frenzy and there is a lot of liquor fueled mock fucking and some actual sex in certain tents that make it reminiscent of New Orleans Mardi Gras but with a more singular focus on the penis.

I didn't want to mock the Japanese culture, something in the tone of the westerners I was with put me off of participating in the costume portion of the day. Instead I went into the sake tent where our Japanese hosts held one drinking contest after the other. I knew going in the sake tent meant that my passing out was a likely. This was a serious drinking event. The host would say something in Japanese, presumably funny because of the crowd's laughter, and then he would ring a bell and people would drink large bowls of sake until he rang the bell again. The last one standing wins. There were people stacked off to the sides of the room in various phases of alcoholic delirium. I wasn't in it to win it necessarily but this seemed like the sort of cultural exchange I could get behind. I had never intentionally passed out from drinking before. It seemed safe enough since over two hundred people were doing just that in the tent. I wasn't worried about being attacked if I was rendered unconscious because, at the time, Japan was considered one of the safest places to travel for Americans, no rape statistics and petty theft was all but unheard of.

I did feel bad for causing the people I went to the festival with to worry. I didn't reunite with them until the next day but at the festival my fellow Sake drinkers were the company I wanted to keep. They were more adept at excess than the picture snapping schoolteachers who spent the better part of the day posing with penis props.

Happy American tourists at the Festival of the Steel Phallus



In hindsight the most amazing part of the festival for me was the unabashed acceptance of inebriation. In the United States people drink themselves unconscious but it is not considered something worth celebrating and never intentional. The

sake tent might not have been healthy or helpful in healing the loss of Jack but it was what I felt like doing, and it is what I chose to do and I have no regrets. All of which is unthinkable behavior for a woman in the United States.

150. Our friends told me they thought that Jack and I would be together for the rest of our lives.

151. It is clear to me my friends don't know Jack.

152. I'm watching a video that I made of Jack surfing when we were in California last summer. He rides his wave all the way to the shore. Then picks up his board and walks toward me as I'm filming. He says, "Gertrude Stein might have surfed if she had lived here."

153. My cat Magic was cremated like Jack.

154. I'm reading Sylvia Plath's *Ariel*.

155. Everybody keeps saying, "Happy New Year."

156. I make two snow angels in my pajamas.

157. The frozen briars sparkle and look both menacing and beautiful when they catch the moonlight.

158. Two months after Jack's death and everyone seems ready to move on except for me.

159. There is a blue bottle bobbing in the bay.

Observing

I am a person who believes we can influence the outcome of all matter. Quantum science agrees with me. This is why scientists created the “double blind” procedure to prevent observation bias. This procedure prevents subjects of an experiment and the person or persons conducting the experiment from knowing the critical aspects of the experiment. The Double Blind procedure guards against observation bias. Quantum physicists now have greater understanding of the depth of impact that both human observation and expectation have upon the physical world. The “Double Slit Experiment,” sometimes called, “Young’s Interference Experiment” has revealed that observation alone can impact how an electron will behave in an experiment.

In the Double Slit Experiment electrons are shot through two slits cut in a steel frame. This tiny piece of matter should have behaved as larger matter behaves under the same conditions but it does not. Electrons do not behave, for example, as marbles do. Small marbles shot through the two slits would form two bands of matter on a catch screen on the far side of the double slit device. But when electrons are shot through they do not behave like matter they behave like water or frequency and spread out in waves to form multiple bands upon the screen. This is an interference pattern. An interference pattern is expected of water and waves because of their fluid or non-solid make-up. When a single electron (which is matter) was projected it split when it reached the double slit board, only to rejoin itself on the other side, where it interfered with itself, and hit the wall as a particle that had encountered an interference pattern of its own design.

If this were not odd enough mathematically the particle is determined to go through both slits, neither of the two slits, only through the slit on the left, and only through the slit on the

right; all possibilities occur at the same time and the factors that appear to influence electron behavior are observation and expectation. The double blind can remove the initiating scientist's expectation but even an electronic measuring device like a camera, observing one of the two metal slits, was enough to change the behavior of the electron.

Brad Cameron of Dr. Quantum video fame says, "It is as though the electron knows it is being watched." If we can influence an atomic particle we should be able to influence all matter because tiny matter is still matter. Another way to understand this information is by applying to our physical reality. Reality is not limited to what we observe. If I, or anyone, can genuinely expect another possible outcome or configuration of any material thing in the world then those things can be changed. I imagine this isn't limited by possibility, since what is possible is boundless, but by the limits of the measuring devices and one's ability to expect change regardless of what is considered logical.

Historians have been rewriting history since history was recorded. This is another way of changing the tangible by observation. The idea of "truth" is equally subjective. If, when writing this book I rewrite the facts I do so with relative ease. In so doing I enter into another of the simultaneously existing possibilities of quantum physics and any number of people who later observe the work can and will decide upon the accuracy of its content, "It's true," "It's false" and "Some of it is true and some of its not" will all exist simultaneously.

160. When I open Jack's desk I find a box that says "Japan" on it. Inside is money and a picture of the two of us.
161. The last time I saw Jack he gave me a kiss and asked, "Will I see you later?" I told him I wanted a night in.
162. Every day should have a do over button.
163. Sometimes the most reliable thing is the rain.
164. I bought a scratch ticket with a *Jack in the Beanstalk* theme and won \$1000.
165. I threw away my black umbrella because I found its dome oppressing.
166. I found a penny and tucked it in my pocket.
167. The bluebirds are on the lawn singing and looking regal. One loses a feather. It is the color of a Blue Morpho butterfly. I decide it is a message from Jack.
168. I can still get lost in Tess Gallagher's sensualist words of salvation and love.
169. Jack is standing at the end of my bed saying "I found a four-leaf clover for you." I reach out but he disappears.

Enframing

In Japan my vision for the future was obscured by tragedy. When I left Seattle I had been meditating for over a decade. I had achieved a certain level of consciousness and had successfully created things in my reality. I'd explored the stars in astral travel and altered my night dreams by lucid dreaming. I had sent out a meditative beacon to manifest a partner who was charming and intelligent and Jack walked into my life.

None of this meant that I was exempt from chaos, wild with all possibility both light and dark. Jack's death was an example of dark chaos and I wondered if the intensity of darkness was a counter to all the light chaos I had known, good fortune, great love, personal gifts of all kinds but that isn't a provable postulation even though there is considerable evidence of the duality of nature. Neither my logical mind nor my spiritual self has ruled it out the possibility of a force that seeks balance.

Prior to Jack's death I had failed to recognize the fragility of our security. We lived dangerously. Our love was like a supernova or a blinding light. Any possibility of danger was eclipsed by passion. Jack and the person who hit him were reckless. My denial of the reckless possibilities meant that I was at sufferance of these possibilities and suffer I did when Jack disappeared into what Heidegger called, "the objectlessness of the standing reserve." For those who aren't familiar with Martin Heidegger's book *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, Heidegger describes his concept of "Enframing" as follows,

"Wherever man opens his eyes, and ears, unlocks his heart, and gives himself over to meditating and striving, shaping and working, entreating and thanking, he finds himself everywhere already brought into the unconcealed. The unconcealment of the unconcealed has already come to pass whenever it calls man forth into the modes of revealing allotted to him. When man, in his way, from within unconcealment reveals that which presences, he merely responds to the call of

unconcealment even when he contradicts it. Thus, when man, investigating, observing, ensnares nature as an area of his own conceiving, he has already been claimed by a way of revealing that challenges him to approach nature as an object of research, until even the object disappears into the objectlessness of standing-reserve.”

I expected something less sudden but, even as I write these words I realize that isn't true. I had not been *expecting* anything, I had been assuming that everything would continue as it was and assumption is a gateway for dark chaos.

Before I studied meditation and before I'd read Heidegger I recognized that the past is an opaque filter of the present. That I was lost in it for a period of time was a mistake because one can never find one's proper place in the here and now by looking through the filter of the past, at least not without recreating whatever light or darkness is fixed there. Just as I had recreated pain over and over again in Japan as I focused on the pain of losing Jack, new pain of loss was born or if emotionally happy my body entered into the resonance of pain that my thoughts had created. My focus aligned me with more of the same, an obsessive loop.

Heidegger's "Enframing," suggests that we all must assemble, gather, order and reorder, our world so as to reveal a new self, one whose measuring devices have been recalibrated to accept the temporal nature of reality. To this end I sought and seek to make myself new because I agree with Heidegger on this score. One must make sense of the unthinkable, the unbearable, the inconceivable in order to exist.

170. There is nothing more relentless than grief.

171. I love to hear people laugh and I want to laugh but can't remember how.

172. I imagine Jack as a chord lifting through eternity. Sometimes he sounds like the end of Beethoven's "Ode To Joy" at other times like a song played by Keith Richards on the guitar, direct and unpretentious.

173. Do you miss me? I ask myself in the mirror.

174. There are thirty-two boxes of Jack's things going to his mother. Ironically this is one for each year of his life and also the same number of butterflies in our box of dead butterflies.

175. It is the longest winter but today I saw signs of spring.

176. I see a little girl walking with her sister. They look like my sister and I at their age and I think of how repetitive it all is.

177. Silence fills my ears.

178. The stars are disappearing overhead.

179. When I walk to the store I found a single playing card, the Jack of Hearts.

War Heroes

My mom had hung-up the yellow wall phone in our 1979 kitchen and said, “Do you girls remember the cousins from the beach vacations?” I had asked, “The old ones or the young ones?” “The young ones,” my mom said, “Well, Curtis was killed in a drunk driving accident.” I said, “Curtis who made up the song we all sang?”

Later, I had overheard my parents referring to the other young cousin, Russell. They said he had quit drinking and joined Alcoholics Anonymous. Our neighbor John Daly was there and he said, “Oh no, not one of those boring people who sits in basements of a church and tells their tales of How liquor kicked their ass.” My Dad said, “Russell’s a double war hero now.”

“He got a medal for something,” my Mom added.

“Do you know if he still meditates?” I asked.

“I think he gave that up in Vietnam.”

In Osaka, Japan dressed as a sailor for Halloween



I don't think of my extended liquid holiday as war. Perhaps you have to be an alcoholic to understand it. It seems for some the party never ends, until some tragedy ends it for them; for me it was the opposite. I had my tragedy

first. When I was done with my liquid vacation I simply reduced quantity and frequency. In the absurdity of excess one can forget one's troubles long enough to create the space to heal and transcend one type of grief even if this manifests another. That said sometimes things go wrong

with extreme cures. There might be side effects both physical and social but none that I couldn't resolve by moving and never mentioning it again. But, then again, nothing is real or as it seems. It is possible my sadness might have escaped me if I hadn't held it down with sorrow. Perhaps none of this happened. It is a type of PTSD. Drinking was the worst thing I could have done. It was the best choice. It was a long time ago. It is timeless but fragmented. It is long forgotten. It is on my mind. Whatever it is, it is.

180. The neighbors leave a note on the door asking if someone or I might cut our lawn sometime soon.

181. There are all these people around me living their lives.

182. I pray for the return of magic. Then I see a steel drum player make the people dance in the street and I wish that I were under his spell.

183. When my flat stone hits the smooth surface of the water it leaps forward again and again and again.

184. A, E, I, O, U and sometimes WHY.

185. My thoughts are like palindromes.

186. When the wind blows the trees whisper, "She's leaving."

187. The world isn't the world without Jack.

188. I bought a notebook covered in butterflies.

189. I imagine a greeting card and postcard mash-up. The picture on the front is of me wearing a hula skirt and holding a camera. It reads, "Happy Anniversary Jack, wish you were here."

Hoping

I was amazed by the physical skills of Jackie Chan when I saw him play the role of Wong Fei-hung aka “Freddy Wong,” in the 1978 Hong Kong martial arts film *The Drunken Master*. In the film Chan’s character begins as a ne’er-do-well, lazy, semi-inebriated son of a stern father. Father Wong wants to send son Freddy Wong to train with the current drunken master, Master So. Master So is tough, dangerous and brutal on his pupils. Too tough for Freddy Wong who flees to save his skin from Master So’s abuse. Wong encounters many obstacles. He fights a few

battles and loses them all and, dejected and beaten he voluntarily returns to the stern Master So. Under So’s training Wong learns to drink, drink, drink and to fight, fight, fight. There is a time lapse and Wong emerges the new drunken master.



Freddy Wong’s drunkenness never detracts from his ability to fight. The drunken master is at his best with a belly full of wine. When Wong becomes sober, he becomes weak, tired, and legless. But all he needs, to be instantly restored, is a gallon or two of wine. Then he is again highly skilled, fearless, and strong.

The drunken master survives outrageous accidents and, instead of meeting an untimely death by sword, fall, or great battle he always manages to land on his feet and triumph. In the film many characters underestimate Freddy Wong, thinking he will be easy to beat because he is drunk but this is never the case because Wong’s drunkenness relaxes him to such a

degree that if he falls he isn't injured. Plus he usually falls into something, causing the item to fly through the air and hit his enemy, who is immediately rendered unconscious. Wong also uses a special "drunken boxing" style. Where his hands are curled into open fists so as to appear to be holding invisible cups of wine.

Freddy Wong is funny, adventurous and, at times, romantic, but most of all he is unpredictable. This makes him a threat to others who do not trust what they don't understand. A drunken master is not what he seems and this is his great weapon. He is unstoppable because he is so relaxed as he careens around, seemingly off balance, when he is really working from his core, his gut, to overcome obstacles and win. In reality there is no such thing as a drunken master but there is also no reality. This makes reality all the more confounding when it upturns one's life. One can only hope that Freddie Wong is right in his chosen path.

190. I do my own tarot cards for the first time since Jack's death and they indicate travel.
191. I run as fast as I can through the forest at night barely missing tree branches, up and over rocks, until I sense the edge of the cliff and my body knows to stop.
192. There are foot positions, dance steps, embedded in the sidewalk on Broadway in Seattle's Capital Hill neighborhood. I watch a couple dance and think of the time Jack and I did this on our way to see the movie *Wings of Desire*.
193. Apophyllite crystals are supposed to lift one's spirit and make you laugh. I buy a large heart-shaped stone and feel a little lift.
194. When I read W.B. Yeats I imagine that Yeats looks like Jack.
195. We are all layers of sediment, accumulated memory, across the riverbed of time.
196. I think most of the people who say they never look back do look back. We all look back in our minds even if it's only for a moment.
197. When the twister tore across the plains of Kansas even re-run Dorothy's house knew it was time to move on.
198. Jack, I'm writing about you.
199. I'm rereading Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road* and love it even though the character names are over the top.

Embarrassing

Japan is a land of contradictions. Many Japanese men look and dress like the 1940's Japanese actors you see in Godzilla movies, at least they did when I was there. I'm certain culture has changed since then, it always does. The Japanese Business Man, JBM, was the ultimate example of this sleek and polished style. Many looked like the affluent characters on Mad Men. Don Draper blue, grey and pinstriped suits, polished shoes, slicked back hair, fabulous. Attention to style is one of the reasons my time in Japan felt surreal and fascinating. I see Japan as a fashion culture. I think of them of them in the same way I think of American fashion followers of Vogue and GQ, wealthy and image oriented.

The JBM pressed and dressed for success by day and then unrestrained, like bachelors at Vegas bachelor party, at night. They made me feel like I wasn't alone in my attempt to stupefy sadness. Many seemed under immense pressure to perform.

One woman, Hairi, who taught English with me at my day job, stated, "My son was killed last week in a car accident. I'm not going to be at the meeting today because I have some business to take care."

I said, "I'm so sorry for your loss."

And, she said, "Oh, I apologize, I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable."

I thought, *are you kidding me?* But said, "Oh no you didn't, I'm fine" and then added, "I meant that in my country we often say, I'm sorry for your loss to express compassion for another's difficult situation." She looked at me and said, "Thank you, if anyone asks please let them know that I submitted the paperwork."

I said, "Of course."

Hairi and I weren't close and I didn't become closer to her in the wake of her son's death even though we each had lost someone we loved. We were business. I still don't know what I might

have said to make the conversation more fluid. She didn't go to a bar after work so I couldn't connect with her there. She was just a normal worker, wife, and mother.

Another man, Hiro, who came into Tri-Color nightclub told me, "My mother is dying of cancer and my father is not able to live independently."

I said, "I'm sorry to hear that. It must be very difficult."

Hiro said, "I won't be in the bar for quite sometime and I don't want anyone thinking I was upset with them."

"What do you want me to tell people if they ask where you are?"

"Tell them I am attending to family business."

Japanese men, like men in the United States, don't often share private information with strangers. At least I never thought of them as people who did this but reality reveals a different story. The absence of tears and tone didn't mean the absence of emotion to me with regard to either my co-worker or the man at the bar. It is the worldwide rigors of chauvinism and possibly an excessive fixation with courtesy that force people to navigate difficult situations in unemotional ways. Crying seems to be acceptable behavior for women if they have experienced bodily harm or if they are at a wedding but men only seem to be allowed to cry in Japan when they are very drunk, this was similar in the United States in the 90's.

The Japanese businessman or JBM (an acronym used by the JBM) can be divided into two subtypes when it comes to drinking. The first and most common type arrives at the train station devastated by the quantity of drinks they have consumed and successfully boards the night train. The second group arrives late to the station, misses the last train, and lies down with their many intoxicated brothers for a night on the landing. I can say "brothers" because I never saw any Japanese women participate in this sleepover. The only way I know of it is because I

had missed the last train several times. I never slept on the landing with my pants down, opting instead to sit on a bench and watch the scene unfold for five to six hours before catching the morning train. A few times I paid for a taxi but that can be quite expensive with the language barrier. Once I tried to walk but it is easy to get lost in the city's density.

200. I recently realized that I've been hoping for miracles.
201. By all means, please feel free to cut my words and phrases to bits, reorder them however you see fit.
202. Dandelions never give up.
203. Surrender is not an option.
204. Jack used to say that as long as I was with him he would always be fine.
205. Richard and Sheila wrote me a letter. They said that they had heard about Jack and they didn't understand why I had felt the need to lie to them, because now they feel just terrible.
206. I'm rereading Raymond Carver's *Cathedral* and thinking books are the solace of the bereaved.
207. Freedom is so much more than a word that means "Nothing left to lose."
208. Shhh, figuratively is speaking.
209. One of my favorite memories of Jack is simple. We are lying on our backs in the sun, our feet are barely touching and the only sound is the sound of the sea.

Disassociating

One day I was riding a surprisingly empty night train and I saw a rare Japanese homeless person. There aren't many homeless people on the streets. Days or weeks might pass before you saw someone in such a helpless state. Eventually I would learn that if these individual's families were alive and cared they often tried to hide them because "homeless" typically means mentally ill or disabled in some severe way in Japan. This is similar to the United States but today who might become homeless covers includes a broader spectrum.

Most of the Japanese that I met then didn't like to discuss the homeless. The government puts them in jail or into mental wards while others die from various means of suicide, stepping off of train platforms or in front of cars. Others leap off of bridges into the canals and drown. They aren't typically confrontational or dangerous but I imagine a few are.

One time a man of about eighty or ninety years of age, was pretending to fire a machine gun at us as he made his way down the aisle of the night train. Some American guy I didn't know, seated across the aisle, became indignant. Mr. Indignant was clearly tipsy and he annoyingly mocked the gunner who seemed not to hear him. But then the elderly Japanese man got louder, "Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat!" He shouted over and over occasionally adding, "Pearl Harbor!" The other Japanese passengers either turned away or walked to another car to avoid being associated with what they considered to be shameful behavior. A couple of Japanese men told the mock gunner to "Shh" and looked very embarrassed in our direction and smiled nervously. The homeless man ignored everyone and kept on saying, "Rat-tat-tat!" Then the American man across from me stood up to exit the train; but, before he left, he turned to the homeless man and shouted, "Hiroshima, boom!" The old man hurried out of the train in a painful jerking motion

onto the platform and disappeared down the stairs. The American man had a self-congratulatory smile on his face as he left the train. He acted as though he had solved a problem.

I sat on the blue vinyl bench and looked at the floor. My friend Erin and I were the only Americans left on the train. The Japanese turned their backs or walked to the neighboring cars some looked at the ground. I said, “That American guy was rude.” Nobody appeared to understand my deflection. Our train was moving rapidly away from the scene and before the next stop all would be forgotten and, if not forgotten, placed somewhere behind the mask of Japanese neutrality.



210. I hope that wishing during a meteor shower will amplify my wishes power.
211. I watch a hundred shooting stars streak across the sky but wish for only one thing.
212. One day I just got up off the floor, slapped myself in the face, and flew away.
213. The day before I went to Japan I went back to the house that Jack and I used to live in and walked around the land. Not much time had passed since we'd lived there but everything already seemed foreign.
214. My perception shifts when I'm not looking.
215. There are "X's" through the days on my calander.
216. The mountains were black bodies lying across the land and their soft flowing silver hair, clouds backlit by the moon, made me see that they were also ancients at ease and timeless.
217. Somebody somewhere is laughing with someone they love.
218. The rocks at the bottom of the river are more round than rugged, all clustered together chaotically but somehow seeming to form a pattern, stones of rust, beige, green, grey and blue. Some with rings, others with black flecks, nestled beneath the flowing water.
219. All I've got left is desire, imagination and expectation and these are enough to set me in motion.

Literary Heroes

This book could not begin to contain a full detail of all the authors that have influenced my work but I can at least invite you to join me in a moment of gratitude for a few of the most influential such as, Sherman Alexie, Barbara Kingsolver and Raymond Carver. I have seen Sherman Alexie read several times at Elliott Bay Books, Northwest Bookfest and Bumbershoot (a Seattle festival). I met him briefly when he signed my books but, with him, it has always seemed best not to get too close. He was often ticked off, either by an event organizer or a fan, and he wasn't prone to hiding his emotions. I chose to not risk conversation but appreciated his emotional candor because so few let people know what they really think. One time at Benaroya Hall in Seattle, when he reached the microphone, he told the audience that the event organizers had irritated him so much that he had nearly reached the point of not coming out on stage. Apparently Benaroya staff had told Alexie what he could and could not say. He said that he refused to be censored.

My favorite of his books, *Reservation Blues*, is still reread periodically as are his short story collections, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fist Fight in Heaven* and *Ten Little Indians*. All of his work fascinates me, less because he is a Native American writer, even though his stories always discuss what that has been like for him, but more because he isn't afraid to discuss race and the difficult dance people have to learn to navigate a multi-cultural society, particularly when one's place in the matrix of society is uncertain.

His newer works, especially his children's book, *The Absolute True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* is pure genius. The main character, a teen named Arnold, is torn between a desire to succeed in the dominant society and a desire to feel as though he belongs among his family and friends. I have realized that I am tethered to the dominant society because of my chosen

appearance. It is a short journey back through time for me to have been considered more Native American than white culturally but I have fashioned myself to appear as someone from the dominant culture, kind of like former TV anchor Tom Brokaw or Sherman Alexie 2014.

I was born at the very end of 1964 so Alexie and I are similar in age, skin tone, real hair color but what makes him more Native American is that his family didn't try to assimilate, whereas mine did. Therefore, Alexie is more Native American than I am, even if only by one generational degree or by the way his parents saw themselves and their sustained tribal affiliation. Alexie will be like my grandparents and father, a man who didn't stay on the reservation, not because he doesn't love his heritage but because there was more opportunity living among those who had control of the country. I admire his courage to say this, his humor, his intensity and his courage. Me mentioning him in this will likely tick him off some how, sorry in advance Sherman Alexie.

Barbara Kingsolver is a literary hero because of the books she's produced. Each line of every novel is so rich and carefully honed. If I begin one of her books I rarely put it down until it is finished. Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* still resonates in me. I hope to craft a novel of such beauty and complexity.

Raymond Carver has been a literary hero since I was in high school. He considered himself "the poet of the working poor" and often referred to poor people as "his people." He drank and smoked too much; the latter eventually killed him at age fifty. He entered my consciousness fairly young, I loved that he lived in the Pacific Northwest because I felt his characters were real. Carver's ear for dialogue was so strong that at times I'd felt as though I had met some of his characters, or least people like them, in the local lumber mill, at parties and in bars.

At times I felt like I was in the one of Carver's stories as I sat on a riverbank or when I walked past a waterfall, or imagined myself in an armchair as the people in his stories laughed, drank, and fought their way to understanding or destruction around me.

Most people in the early 80's thought Carver would die from drinking but he quit in 1982. I didn't know then, and I still don't know now, if I believe in alcoholism as a disease for some it seems like more of a coping mechanism and one can't quit most diseases or dial them back to social acceptable standards, as I have done. I'm not sure Carver would be Carver if he hadn't lived his life the way he did. His life experience was the source of his material.

For most of Raymond Carver's adult life if he wasn't drinking he was writing about drinking or recovering from it. It was a part of who Carver was but it was hardly all he was. He was a masterful writer, dedicated to his craft no matter what happened to him. He died of lung cancer in 1988, an event that made me think he should have kept drinking because when Carver quit drinking he smoked more. The day I heard he died I remember being overcome with sadness. I had a copy of the New York Times in one hand and a cigarette in the other and I was furious that someone with his talent had died too soon. I recall thinking well this is bullshit.

Later, the same morning, I went for a walk in the woods. It was August and hot. I liked being alone in the woods with a book and had brought Carver's *Cathedral* and a handful of his magazine published works with me. I sat on a moss covered log and thought, I can't imagine what pain Carver's wife, Tess Gallagher, must be suffering right now.

Grief

by Raymond Carver

Woke up early this morning and from my bed
looked far across the Strait to see
a small boat moving through the choppy water,
a single running light on. Remembered
my friend who used to shout

his dead wife's name from hilltops
around Perugia. Who set a plate
for her at his simple table long after
she was gone. And opened the windows
so she could have fresh air. Such display
I found embarrassing. So did his other
friends. I couldn't see it.
Not until this morning.

The forest didn't applaud but birds and squirrels moved in the branches enough to rustle the leaves. It would be years before I met Jack but Carver had given me a sense of literary beauty, the eyes to see Jack's humor, his gifts and, even though my story with Jack ended in pain, like Tess Gallagher's, I'm grateful for the adventure.

220. I am taking one suitcase to Japan and Jack's ashes in an urn. Jack's mom dropped him by, said he was disrupting her ability to let go.
221. Jack used to say things like, "If Shakespeare were alive he would write for the movies."
222. I tell myself the real Jack is never coming back, never.
223. I'm at the airport counting the tiles in the ceiling before my flight.
224. It is hard when I get to the end of a book and I don't want lose the characters, but it is far worse to lose the book before I finish the story.
225. Life is never on hold even when it feels like it.
226. The best part of flying is all of the time one has to read.
227. Contemporary writing says it is the end of narrative but everybody I know has a story to tell.
228. I'm looking for a noun that means, pining that causes an emotional indent or depression, an affliction caused by tragic loss, pain that lingers, accompanied by obsessive thoughts and despair. There is no single word for that in the English language. I invent one, *everpine*.
Verb use, Kelle was everpining until she immersed herself in meditative practice.
229. Sometimes I wish I were born one hundred years ago and at other times one hundred years from now.

Shifting

In 2014, twenty-four years after my first visit to Japan, I considered what might have been the biggest impediments to the Japanese sewer renovation; such as The Great Hanshin Earthquake of 1995 and a few other quakes and floods that occurred both before and after the big one. But none of these slowed the Japanese sewer renovation as much as the Japanese financial collapse that began in 1991 and continued to 2001. They call 1991-2001, “The Lost Decade.” If one looks at the last seventy-five years of Japanese history one can see it is heavily marked by hardship but redeemed by triumphs.

It is with a sense of wonder that I watch the Japanese people move forward. They are proud of their resilience. I find myself sentimental at the thought of such fortitude, even if my idea of them is now over-simplified by time and my hunger for a cinematic happy ending.

I was wrapped in poetic malaise and thinking of Sylvia Plath, never a good idea when feeling down. I forced myself to be conscious. I wanted to gravitate toward poetry that shared my hope for happiness. Jack was, as always, on my mind because even coffee reminded me of him. He had plucked a stir stick from the counter, a couple of weeks before he died, stroked it across my lips, and then stirred his coffee, “The best sweetener.”

I thought if I could just roll around in hope and beauty long enough I would become happy. Writing, especially poetry, allowed me to shift my emotional states for better or worse quickly. When I wrote I dreamt of my future as a writer, one whose work was entwined with inspiration from great writers and my love of Jack.

poet dreams

I climb a color-board sky
 bounce upon a cloud
 trampoline to the stars

catch a point of light
 trick time
 its swirls of fire
 imagine it as
 filigree that fill me
 Awake but no less dreamy
 our fragments
 presence presents
 nothing more than
 absolute clarity
 love and beauty
 help me to wake
 in a poet's dream

A few weeks before Jack died I was up all night worried. Jack hadn't come home the night before. I asked him where he'd been. It wasn't like him and I was upset. He'd said, "I couldn't find the house." I could tell this wasn't a lie, it would have been for most people. He looked lost his face cold and clammy. He asked me to read EE Cummings to him. I picked *EE Cummings: Complete Poems 1904-1962* off the shelf and began to read.

[as Freedom is a breakfastfood]

as freedom is a breakfastfood
 or truth can live with right and wrong

worms are the words but joy's the voice
 down shall go which and up come who

deeds cannot dream what dreams can do
 —time is a tree(this life one leaf)
 but love is the sky and i am for you
 just so long and long enough

I wanted a world of redefined progress, one without disaster as its impetus. My external world was in a state of flux. I flung both of my arms around beauty and chose to believe in loyalty and love that isn't perfect but that might even be better than perfect because it was polished in a tumbler of mixed emotions. Jack and I were magic. We didn't have to be perfect for

us to work and when we didn't work I had to choose what was more important, righteousness or compassion and I preferred compassion.

Awake

I dream myself a giant to sleep between
the ridges of a mountain in the warmth
of a summer's sun. When I wake I walk
to the sea in a single step and swim until
the moon sinks into the horizon

When you wake you touch me with your
distant hands. Until you too tower and
tickle me with trees, brush them down my
back trickle snowcaps in my mouth

We grasp the rising sun with steady hands
revel in the heat of who we are and who
we will become, the shining ones of Sothis.

230. I was born between generations, a cusp. One who sees the best in more than one generation, divided attention, nostalgic, and forward thinking.

231. Melancholy is such a pretty word.

232. Sometimes it's like the world is filled with flying monkeys.

233. Visualize me holding up a blank card says, "Fill in the blank." I'm going to count to three and you're going to fill in the blank. One, two, three!

234. The end. No, not really.

235. The turtle's back is a map of the ages.

236. I wonder if the pelican by the Surf Shack likes sushi.

237. I sit upon the moon with my legs crossed sprinkling stardust into my own dreams.

238. I think of the phrase *my whole future is ahead of me*. People typically say this about the young but it is true for all of us.

239. My heart, please somebody, my heart.

Questioning

Denial as a tactic for survival seemed less sure-fire than it once had. My method lacked a cure for Jack. I could swimmy him up out of a glass and shimmy with him on the ice cubes all night in my dreams but I was...I was what? Distracted? Healing? Going to collapse? Going to be fine? Honoring Jack's life? Wasting time?

Swinging my feet off a balcony ledge, dew dripping down my glass and onto my bare legs in the Osaka heat, I felt comfort as I rested under a sun blanket. The kind that feels soft and dry and makes one think of childhood, lemonade stands, parents voices, laughing at everything, making funny faces and certainty. I'd been writing all morning and needed a break from the room. To me my writing and my meditations were beauty and the Divine entwined. I was feeling something, a solid happiness that my liquid cure could not match. The cocktail had become a habit, a default action and I wasn't feeling any need for it emotionally speaking it was just there, cooling me down and preparing me for the night ahead.

I looked down at the city, my arms resting on the metal bars that kept me from falling ten stories to the street. My hand rotating air circles to spin the fluid in the glass, the silky swirling whisky, ice nearly melted. I wrote to engage my imagination because I'm driven to it. I meditate to feel peace, to edit the shards of darkness from my memory, to smooth their edges so that I can carry them without injury. As my thoughts changed so did my feelings as if one were a boat the other a skier skimming along its surface. At sea I see and center me. At times my actions and thoughts didn't agree like a mismatched subject and verb, I drinking or I see. I drinking to see. Most won't agree that healing and change can possibly come from raucous adventure but they are wrong, possibly because they are righteous, foolish, limited in experience, arrogant, judgmental or because they are afraid of difference and individuality. Afraid of anyone and

anything that is outside of their idea of normal. I decided those types of people are the sheep and I am not a shepherd. I am the sea of possibility.

See [ing]

In a magical wood filled
with soft tangle hair moss
of mint, myrtle and cal poly green
soft dangles lilt from old trees
from cinereous gray branches dark eyes
unflinching nature spirits
that whisper the mysteries of eternity
that my ears cannot hear but the inner eye sees
lips pulsing like portals of internal need
so I listen for something and I see and I see and I see

My life is light and dark chaos but what does that mean? A mystery tucked in a seemingly sealed envelope labeled “inevitable” or “probable” or perhaps something else? Who could label it but the one holding the pen? What filter am I using? Why not consider the brighter possibilities? If I could feel totally happy for a minute I could build up to being happy for an hour. My goal in all this was not to forget Jack but rather to demote the feeling of pain from being the leader of my life to a lessor role; one akin to that of a former president, a trusted advisor, one that no longer had the last word but whose wisdom might prevent further damage.

240. I was held under water as deep as the sea.

241. Sorrow comes in torrents of grief from an internal typhoon.

242. The end.

243. The end.

244. The end.

245. The end.

246. The end.

247. The end.

248. The end.

249. The end.

Unifying

In 1990's Japan, every Japanese person I asked about individuality said, "People in Japan don't value individualism." They were not in anyway embarrassed to say this. It was considered a normal way of being. But what struck me as ironic in Japan is that even though the Japanese I met knew the national party line about being anti-individualism, they often sited American individualism as something they admired and longed for. I didn't point out the incongruency but wondered why they didn't see the paradox of not valuing and simultaneously wanting individualism.

Jack and I were individuals to the bone. We liked the freedom of being outside of the corporate body. We wanted to go to the beach and surf or to sit in cafes drinking espresso, to talk about life, books and travel. I don't know many in the states these days that think of anything other than work and I wonder if anyone alive today can understand what freedom we knew. Japan, a much older culture than the United States, might give us an idea of what the United States will be like in the future. It is where I learned to be a workaholic. I found that if I was working I thought about the past less and I made it my goal to work nearly every waking hour. I found a teaching job with Hitachi in the English newspaper and I wanted to broaden my engagement with the Japanese people. I might not have managed the dance between corporate life and nightclub life in the U.S. but it was manageable in Japan because nearly everybody drinks.

In Japan the company men go out on the town nightly to bond. They strive to be "one mind" and "one body." They exercise together in the corporate courtyards. Sometimes they dress alike, which to me makes them look more like prisoners than employees; all, except the matching fitness attire, is already catching on in the US.

The Japanese corporate culture requires that their employees sing or chants during the daily exercise ritual together, all foreign employees were exempt from this activity. I didn't know what they said or sang exactly. Nobody I asked would translate it for me. I wondered if it was something anti-American since nobody wanted to tell me, until one businesswoman finally told me that the men sing a type of unity song that westerners might find odd because it was very nationalistic and sentimental. She added, "Distinctly Japanese." She wouldn't be more specific but the bit she shared conjured images of my time at summer camp in California where sentimental unity songs were the norm.



To me the interesting thing about corporate culture is how readily people accept their place in the machine. My attitude at work was positive but, even after a month of regular engagement my co-workers didn't look any less like prisoners, in fact I thought they looked more like cult members, this because the corporation was valued more than the individual. I haven't spent anytime in corporate culture in the United States so it might be the same.

Most of my Japanese co-workers spent more time with people from work than their families. They eat two or three meals together, exercise together, drink for hours together after work but their commitment to the corporation didn't stop there. There were company sporting events, BBQs and award ceremonies on the weekends. I wasn't able to participate in any the

weekend activities because of my other job but most employees seemed to be happily out-of-control of their lives and too adapted the system to change it. Maybe I'll try corporate life in the United States because as odd as it all looked to someone like me, who worked unconventional jobs and was often self-employed, they seemed to be enjoying themselves.

While in Japan I enjoyed the group dining at breakfast and lunch. I usually skipped out on dinner and weekends to be at my other job. My fondness for individualism didn't prevent me from being a worker bee at two hives. I just wasn't looking to worship my corporation or my bar more than my own goals.

I know what Jack would say, "Don't worry so much, work will be there tomorrow, come dance with me on the lawn." In those moments there was only us and I would trade every dollar I had ever earned to be dancing on the lawn again.

Dance

Beneath the stars in the middle of a forest
I sit at a good fire that crackles with possibility
I dream myself in it, to join your dance, to emanate
hot sparks of imagination, to hear the stories of our ancestors
to forge my present strong and to dance like there is no tomorrow

250. The end.

251. The end.

252. The end.

253. The end.

254. The end.

255. The end.

256. The end.

257. The end.

258. The end.

259. The end.

Moving

Gaby insisted that I move into the free penthouse apartment that her radio station had supplied for her. She wanted English-speaking friends close at hand. It was nice to have my own quiet room, especially because it was more like a hotel than a flat. Besides, we were often flying at the same altitude.



She was fun and an endless source of amusement because she was always stoned. Gaby was also comforting in a way because she was fond of hugging and, prior to my meeting her I was more likely to withdraw from affection than permit it. That said even Gaby's friendly affection wasn't entirely welcome, I didn't want anyone to wipe Jack's invisible arms away and, if one has been sad for too long, it can hurt to feel happy because you aren't prepared for it.

I hadn't been truly happy in over a year so to have someone enter my life who was so thoughtful was a surprise. This is not to imply that my other friends weren't supportive, they

were, but Americans who go to Japan often do so to escape problems of their own and they therefore aren't necessarily equipped to help anyone with issues not related to themselves.

Gaby's Ecuadorian relatives were mysterious. Like anyone could, they sent American food treasures like Kraft Macaroni and Cheese and packaged salmon from the Pacific Northwest, items purchased for me when I had mentioned how much I missed these things, but that isn't mysterious. What was is the high-risk contraband like marijuana and hash that arrived into drug-free Japan as though they were boxes of Kraft Macaroni and cheese or packaged salmon. These items weren't hidden in anything, simply wrapped up in a box and mailed. Customs officials who would have easily recognized their illegal content allowed them in. When I asked Gaby about them she mentioned her father had many government connections. He was in some high political office in her home country. I suspect they might also be connected with people in the drug industry of Ecuador. Gaby was generous and it was refreshing.

Her family members were even able to send her cat "Scandal" to live with us, bypassing the six-month animal quarantine laws. My life was getting easier with Gaby. I was grateful for the reprieve from stress. The apartment felt above the grit and the view from our balcony was spectacular. I spent a lot of time on the balcony looking off into the distance, fixated on the future and hoping to find one that appealed to me as much as the life I'd lost.

In a way I felt as though I had pushed a cosmic hold button in Japan. I imagined Jack waiting in Seattle or on another line and a little red light flashing at the end of a row of buttons. I didn't want to analyze my world too much because that made my chest hurt, facing reality can be risky business for the grieving. If thoughts began to take on the form of pain I would go back inside and make a blender of margaritas and remember the time Jack and I were in Mexico.

We met a local family who invited us to dinner. The husband Carlos played the guitar

and his wife cooked us a meal. We sat outside drinking tequila and singing songs. Around 5am Carlos, Jack and I were still up trying to catch chickens in the dusty courtyard. We were all laughing when Juanita, Carlos wife, had leaned out the window and shouted, “se despierta a todo el mundo!” Or, “You will wake up the whole world!” We all sat in the dusty yard sharing stories until we fell asleep in the morning light. The idea of “waking up the whole world” made my writer’s soul smile and my mind fell into a dream.

260. The end.

261. The end.

262. The end.

263. The end.

264. The end.

265. The end.

266. The end.

267. The end.

268. The end.

269. End.

Communicating

Sadly, after a while, I became a typical American in Japan, one that mainly spent time with other Americans or Brits, Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, anyone who spoke English fluently. Japan is where I learned why people from Mexico, Asia and other countries spend most of their time with people who are from their home country while living in the United States. I was tired of constantly repeating myself and explaining what words mean. Trying to represent a nation is too hard.

It was much more fun to speak English at a normal pace. To enjoy seeing people that saw themselves in you without preconceived ideas of who you are. Getting to know someone was easy again. There were no landmines of cultural insensitivity to navigate we were one. I could return to having a culturally diverse group of friends in the United States, where it was easier at least easier for me because English is the dominant language. Of course, as I write these words I am thinking that I need to practice my Spanish so I communicate in more than one language. I wish the schools in the US taught us more languages when we were young. Then it would be easy, second nature, normal.

If I could have learned how to speak Japanese fluently while in Japan things would have been different but my work schedule was so rigorous that I never seemed to have the time to learn. I can imagine Mexican Americans feeling equally frustrated, expected to learn English after working all day for little pay. I can't imagine how much more difficult my life in Japan might have been if the Japanese people were as harsh as some Americans are to Mexicans in the United States. Nobody told me to "Speak Japanese or get out." Living in other countries has allowed me to see that people are essentially the same but without language common ground can be very hard to find.

270. We all weep the same, sleep the same, cry and die the same, but we also all point at each other's differences the same.
271. In Thailand they say "Same same only different" and in the US we say what we think we are supposed to say but many forget and say it all wrong.
272. Get along, get along, get along little people, get along, get along, get along.
273. The brighter you are the harder you fall.
274. I'm eating Chinese food from a carton with wooden chopsticks and it is a new moment. It doesn't taste like regret or remorse or longing. It just tastes like Moo Goo Gai Pan.
275. Two hours after eating I am sobbing uncontrollably.
276. If I see someone in Japan understand something I've said I imagine a light going off in their head, a bulb covered by a red paper lantern.
277. Literal has gone on vacation.
278. With pen in hand I explicate all over the place and the rush of thoughts causes me to gasp and laugh with glee.
279. I love to type on old time typewriters, clackety-clack, clackety-clack, clack.

Striving

In Seattle I worked but not all of my work brought me closer to the life I wanted as a writer. Jack and I ran with a wild crowd of artists, painters, poets, street musicians, a modern day band of gypsies, people like myself brimming with potential in search of a place to express their creativity and with little idea of how to turn aspiration into a professional career.

I worked as an intuitive reader and auditioned and performed in plays at colleges as well as The New City Theater and a murder mystery dinner show. I've been a seminar host, dabbled in radio, TV and film, this type of work made my life better.

On a less glamorous note I bartended, sold cars for Honda and theater tickets for Bagley Wright Playhouse, this work was for a paycheck. I had a significant stint as a stage magician's assistant, complete with high heels, fishnet stockings and elbow length gloves. All fine for the time because I was young, considered attractive by the standards of the day, and foolish enough to think that beneficial chauvinism was nothing to worry about. I'm astounded at how many jobs I've had. It comes from beginning work at fourteen and being born at time when work was plentiful.

Real careers, ones that would be respected, still required degrees, nepotism, or at least some inroad such as someone recommending an individual for a position, "This is so-and-so, a friend of so-and-so, related to the so-and-so's" and such. What we non-connected, non-pedigreed people call the glass ceiling. To some extent real jobs weren't on my radar because I had not been taught what needs to be done to achieve success. I don't blame my family. I don't think they knew the game either.

I never thought of any previous job as my identity, except being an intuitive but even that is more like eye color or being a natural born athlete. It's a part of me, two eyes, two ears, one

head, a sixth sense, two legs, good at running, high IQ and so forth. I knew I was a writer in a similar way. I feel like it is a part of my core being.

People with privilege lean upon thousands of years of culture and they grow-up knowing, with certainty, that they will graduate from college and become whatever they want to be. I met one of these certain people recently. They had read on stage for Seattle Arts & Lectures at age seven and attended writer's conferences in high school. I wasn't surprised when they said that they had a book deal before their twentieth birthday.

I, on the other hand, heard advice like, "It'll just happen" and "If it is meant to be, it's meant to be." It's not so much that I believed that tripe but more that I didn't understand the other avenues. How do I get out of this box? I wondered. As soon as I realized how key it is to know people in the field that one hopes to enter I recognized the need for and got an education. A lot of the uneducated people I've known think they are smarter than educated people. This is both sad and bizarre but it is a mindset born in a box that doesn't know what exists beyond its walls. People look for short cuts that don't exist. They hope to be one the lucky few, the one who wins the lottery, the one who is discovered on a street corner and turned into a star, the winner of *American Idol* and so forth. Those who have been deprived believe that this is how one gets to be ahead in the world and it is a disadvantaged perspective that almost always leads to failure and disappointment.

I imagine I might have been better served by being groomed since childhood or born into wealth since I can look around and see how much better off the fortunate few have fared. But, since that didn't happen, I choose to honor my life and make it work. I've traveled more like a meandering river than a waterfall and because of it I have a lot of stories to tell. I can see things more clearly having been both in and out of the box.

280. Sometimes when I meditate everyone on Earth seems like one mega-consciousness.
281. I ask a Koi, "What is my future?" The koi says, "O, O, O" but he says it under water and all I get from our conversation are bubbles.
282. Forever passes from the time I land and the time I first consider leaving, give or take eternity.
283. Monocentris Japonicas or Pine Cone fish glow beneath my surfboard at Kobe Beach. The next time I visit Kobe it has fallen down.
284. At night the steam lifts from the streets of Tokyo and Osaka. It billows past neon lights. I think of the movie *Blade Runner* and there is no doubt where the writer got his inspiration.
285. I lie back in the Cherry Blossoms and let the pink petals stick to my clothes.
286. Buddha is here and there and there and there. I feel soothed by his serenity and I meditate upon his lap, on one of his knees. On one of the great stone statues in a village of air ferns, bamboo and grasses, of electric light green, arched bridges, differently colored rainbows and a fountain, three tiers, high up, and I take off almost all my clothes, strip to my underwear and go in.
287. I learn origami.
288. Shhh, figuratively is speaking.
289. The wind blows my hair across my face like the Japanese manga heroine Midori and I say," Genki desu.

Testing

I scored 157 on my IQ test in third grade. My unofficial score was actually higher than 157 but I will never know what it was because a teacher tampered with my exam before she submitted it. I remember Ms. Cooper, a math teacher and IQ test proctor, being overly vocal with her opinions. At a Thanksgiving play she said, “The Europeans civilized the natives.” Another time she told Letitia, a girl whose mother was white and whose father was black, that she might be able to sit out the IQ exam because, “Some of your people aren’t good at tests.”

Ms. Cooper didn’t like certain students. She was selective in the children she praised and who she ignored. I recall the day I hit her radar. My mother dropped my sister and I off in front of the school in a corvette. When we walked past Ms. Cooper she said, “Some people think they are better than they are.” I could tell that this wasn’t a positive development. I had been better off when she didn’t know who I was. I realize some modern people might share Ms. Cooper’s aversion for flash, because we live in minimalist times, but this was the 70’s. The majority considered the corvette a desirable possession. Yes it was decadent and a tad racy but whose business was that? It was a source of fun for my parents who deserved to have fun after having so little for so long.

Ms. Cooper reminded students that her ancestors came over on the Mayflower, which would have been fine if this were a simple declaration of fact but it wasn’t. She seemed to suggest her heritage made her better than those whose families did not make the journey. “My family,” she said, “were the first real Americans.” Ms. Cooper held up her ancestors with a strange type of mean spirited pride. She gloated. I understood being proud of family from Europe, some of my relatives were conquerors too, but I had mixed feelings about it. Whereas Ms. Cooper’s view of European and Native American relations was clear. One, to her, was better

than the other. Her personal identity was entirely filtered through a hierarchy. She put herself at the top and all minorities and mixed race people at the bottom.

I believe that everyone has the right to create an identity but one can only hope that people are wise enough to understand that one person's identity needn't diminish another's. Mrs. Cooper's inherited identity was strongly supported by the history of the day but not by anything she had done. Her entitlement was based on a faulty idea that states, "Some cultures are more advanced and superior to others." This was confusing to me at the time because I wasn't certain if I was "more advanced and superior" or if I was "the others." Since my ancestors weren't on the Mayflower and she didn't like my parents I decided I was not on Ms. Cooper's team.

Ms. Cooper had looked at me and then at my IQ test. She kept repeating, "This isn't possible." Then she picked up a number two pencil and erased several of my answers to make it look like I didn't finish the test. She said, "If you tell anyone about this I will tell them you are a liar." I told my mother anyway. My mother told me that IQ tests don't matter and not to worry about it. At the time I felt as though my mother had missed the point, Ms. Cooper was a cheat. But I let it go because I was eight. Ms. Cooper must not have been particularly good at math. She hadn't erased enough answers and I scored at the genius and "highly gifted" level. I had kept my satisfaction to myself, since it seemed unlikely Ms. Cooper would have been happy for me.

Keeping quiet about IQ scores is wise because if you tell someone with a low or average IQ score that you have a high IQ score they typically think you are bragging or putting them down in some way. Even wealthy, socially connected people get bent out of shape if they feel that someone has something that they cannot buy. This is ridiculous. To say that the delivery of accurate information is bragging is clearly a negative, emotional, reaction against someone that

scored high on the test. I am not a psychologist, but this seems to arise out of a fear of being perceived as inferior to the person with the higher IQ.

Many have said that people with high IQ scores give too much value to their score. Some do. Most don't. I don't because I don't think it is wise to forge one's identity out of a number, but there is a bit more to it than that.

I sometimes wish I had studied psychology because I might have written about the behavioral differences between those with high IQs and those with lower scores. This interests me because I have observed less jealousy, envy and rage among those that have high IQs compared to those with low or average IQs. There is nothing scientific behind my theory, but I have been at all sorts of gatherings and it seems to me that the people of Mensa are less afflicted by these darker emotions than the average person. It might be confidence, a byproduct of reason, I do not know. Mensa, for the uninitiated, is a high IQ society. The word "Mensa" means, "table" chosen because it is a round-table society. Race, color, creed, national origin, age, politics, educational or social background are irrelevant. It is a place to exchange views, to discuss ideas and to learn from one another. If our society valued education, and if the majority didn't feel threatened by intelligence, we would all be better off.

Ms. Cooper wanted her daughter Debbie to be the best student in the class even if Debbie wasn't particularly intelligent, creative or up to the task. Some, like Ms. Cooper, are satisfied with the appearance of intelligence or creativity more than the actuality of it. Ms. Cooper was willing to harm me to make both her and her daughter look better.

A high IQ score doesn't mean as much as the opportunities one has. It is fortunate birth that matters. Look at former president George W. Bush for heaven's sake. He was average, maybe even below average, and he became president. I know people in poverty, without

connections, who had IQs far above average and many of them didn't even get to go to college. They lacked legacy admissions that place the rich and mediocre before the poor brilliant. This is not to say that the wealthy couldn't learn to be brilliant or that none of them were born brilliant, they are. But it is sad that too many of us have been held back, all of our lives, by the ill-thought out, shortsighted social structures of our times.

Another popular phenomena among people with low or average IQ scores is the habit of diminishing the IQ test itself. Some dismiss it saying it is biased (a fair judgment) without noting any of its beneficial traits (an illogical act). IQ tests have been biased in the past but modern research has proven that differences in IQ scores largely disappear when researchers control for social and economic factors, thereby leveling the playing field for what the test does measure correctly, cognitive ability. It also measures one's reasoning ability, problem-solving ability, ability to perceive relationships between things and one's ability to store and retrieve information. The test evinces one's spatial, mathematical, language and memory abilities and many psychologists hold that it also indicates general intellectual ability.

I did very well on the test when it was biased against me and I am hardly the only person that scenario is true of. That said I did score considerably higher when I took the modern test. But, I don't want to be accused of bragging so I will leave that alone.

Geniuses, people with high IQs, are far from perfect. They aren't fully accomplished in all areas but that they have a greater aptitude to develop and use these tools than the average person does. Most do quite well at most anything to which they apply themselves but sometimes they are more focused on the big picture and have to train themselves to see the little things. For example people with a genius level IQ might not have developed grammar or spelling to perfection, leading someone with a lower or average IQ to wrongly assume that this proves that

the higher IQ person lacks intelligence, but grammar and spelling are mundane skills that can be readily learned by a high IQ person when attention is applied. But the low or average IQ person might not be able to achieve creatively or intellectually what the creative genius or high IQ person can. One wonders if the edge isn't just all the energy saved from not worrying and competing with others but that would require research.

Any open approval of the IQ test can lead to an argument. This is why people with high IQ's typically don't engage in conversations about IQ with people with lower or average IQs. The people in the latter group become very heated if they feel they have been made to feel inferior. This, even if making another feel inferior, wasn't intended by the person with the higher IQ. People with high IQs don't think in those terms whereas people with low or average IQ scores cannot seem to stop thinking in those terms. I and others that I know are not interested in arguing the merits of IQ tests primarily because one does not feel inferior but also because one typically does not want the person who does feel inferior to feel inferior. In my mind they are not inferior, only wired differently.

I always want people to succeed and I'm not frightened by another's success. I see other's successes as a good thing, inspiring. What another does has nothing to do with my sense of self worth or my intelligence, people with low or average IQs wrongly make connections that to me sound like $2 + 2 = 5$. Mrs. Cooper wanted to be better than other people but, by acting on her desire, she made herself an unethical person who will not likely ever feel genuinely successful. This, in my mind, places her at a disadvantage.

I am not sure in which of the spiritual, psychological or sociological texts that I first read about the phenomena of people that try to behave "better than" but I do recall that it isn't what it seems. Those who try to portray themselves as better than secretly fear that they are less than

other people. This makes it a condition worthy of compassion even if it is unpleasant to observe.

Arguing over IQ has been known to drive people with lower or average IQs to behave in less than admirable ways. This in turn frustrates those with higher IQs who cannot assuage another's irrational fears with reason. In a broad sense it is easy to see in our world. Take almost any "news" story produced by FOX News. FOX isn't interested in real news but rather in firing up their audience with information that will produce an emotional response. The more vitriol used against reason, spoken by the intelligent people of society, the less rational those who view such programming become. The simplistic stance of it's either "us" or "them" appeals to the base, tribal, nature of humanity. It inspires illogical righteousness, hate and fear. Instead of turning off FOX, and exploring rational arguments they repeat the irrational. To me they appear as Henny Penny, from the children's book *Chicken Little*. Henny Penny was beamed on the head by an acorn that fell from a tree and then reports to all that will listen that "The sky is falling!" This causes hysteria without reason. Henny Penny doesn't check her facts and causes mayhem where none need exist.

This is not to say that only those on the right, the primary viewers of FOX, are the only ones to have this issue. I see plenty of people on the left who say that they want equity but, in action, behave inequitably, particularly in the form of a fear response to another's potential or actual success. The common denominator is a skewed cognitive response. Fear-based behavior is nonpartisan. It's rampant. It is frustrating to me because I long for a world that is more compassionate and understanding of one another and that can tackle problems intelligently rather than competitively. Not that there isn't a good type of competition, there is. But competition is only good when it brings out the best in everyone, not when it is designed to crush or destroy those who one is competing with.

I always hope that if someone discovers I have a high IQ that they will have a healthy response. To me this looks like a quick intake of information that does not cause them to judge themselves or me in any way, followed by a return to conversation about whatever we might have been discussing. If the person I am speaking with also has a high IQ the conversation often can be more relaxed, sometimes we exchange interests, since people with high IQs often are interested in many subjects.

Sometimes people will have an unhealthy response. They might become aggravated and attempt to trip up the high IQ person. This behavior tells me that the individual is feeling inferior and subsequently hopes to prove that the high IQ person isn't as intelligent as the IQ test has suggested. These impromptu tests amuse the high IQ person because another quality of having a high IQ is that you are less afraid of being wrong. Not knowing something simply means you haven't learned it yet. I have no problem with that because I don't assume someone is better than me because they learned something that I have not yet encountered. It must be horrible for people to have their identity collapse every time they have to say, "I don't know." When I say those three little words I am often enthusiastic because it means I am about to learn something new.

Another unhealthy response is tribal mentality. Tribes are led by a bully, strong personality, or someone imbued with power by a higher or former authority. This person might be the most intelligent in the group or an average person. Historically wealth, prestige or brutality is the more likely pathways to leadership than intelligence because the tribe wants someone that they can relate to or aspire to be.

The majority believes that they might someday be rich and rule the world but they do not believe that they will become more intelligent. People, essentially, want leaders that resemble

themselves and, of course, anyone with physical strength or a brutish nature can wield a club and take charge. Some people, thankfully, will vote for intelligence, recognizing the need to put their most intelligent in power for the sake of the tribe. When this happens I feel overwhelming hope for mankind.

Sake barrels for Hitachi's employee drinking contest.



I hope people will recognize that everyone is seeking goodness and greatness and that the key to it is to not worry so much about what someone else does or is. But, having glanced at the history of civilization, I am not expecting big changes overnight. I do however, hope that this entire conversation explains why drinking is a great gift to people with high IQs. It certainly has been at times for me. Life would be almost unbearable without the glorious moments of opacity that block out the obvious and reduce my need to discuss much of anything.

My IQ didn't matter in Japan because I let others set the tone of conversation and sometimes we didn't understand each other at all because of the language barrier. Jack, would have been great to be with in Japan. He was fluent in three languages, Japanese, German and Gaelic.

Jack was a professor but had become disillusioned by the competition he witnessed among the American and German staff where he taught English in Berlin. He thought that people

who had made it to the university level would have moved past petty infighting but this was not the case. He said his co-workers reminded him of kids fighting over toys and was mystified that they all seemed to want to be the department head's favorite more than the department head's friend. He said that the work many of them produced was excellent but that it wasn't meaningful to them if it wasn't ranked, labeled or awarded higher than their colleagues work. Jack admired his colleagues and he was grateful for the experience but he could see that he didn't share their collective worldview.

At the end of a year Jack declined Berlin University's offer to renew his contract. They wrote him a stellar recommendation that he would never use. He had flown to Mexico and surfed. Then he bought a motorcycle and jerry-rigged his bike so that he could carry a long board as he drove up the coast. He liked to say that he had surfed to Seattle.

We would eventually meet at a Mensa cocktail party at the Shilshole Bay Beach Club in Seattle. I can touch this moment. It is fixed in my mind's eye because it was connected to a vision I had right before Jack walked up to me. Looking across the bay I imagined rose petals dripping from the sun. I could see them filling the water and moving across the bay where they wrapped around my body, went through me and filled my heart with love and sadness until I closed my eyes.

When I reopened my eyes Jack was walking toward me. I was standing on a balcony, wearing a cocktail dress and heels. My long elbow-length summer satin gloves and black Cat-eye sunglasses made me feel like Audrey Hepburn in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. I was watching the earliest moments of a sunset on the bay, my cigarette holder extended from my glove like an orchestra conductor's baton as I considered the possible meanings of my daydream. There was music, from the string quartet playing inside. It reminded me of a wedding reception. Jack asked

if I would like to join him for a drink. I said, "Yes." He took my hand and we walked into the soft light of the early evening, past the dinner crowd at Anthony's restaurant, and into the bar.

290. The walls around the Osaka Castle at night are filled with the glowing eyes of hundreds of lucky black cats.
291. I write letters to Jack. I tell him about all the people I've met, the places I've seen. It feels like old times.
294. I fly pink paper airplanes with poems written upon them to the people below until someone picks one up and puts it in their pocket. This pleases the poet greatly. It pleases the poet.
295. I want to free the Japanese children's crickets from their little cages but am too embarrassed. This is an American thought. I say, "nice cricket."
296. My time in Japan was long before people thought of the phrase "Voluntourist" those unhandy helpers of the upper classes, I wasn't voluntouring though, I was an illegal.
297. Sky, I can see you are blue in every country but it is a happy blue more often than not, unfortunately, this is not necessarily so for the people below.
298. The poet knows she is breaking the contemporary guidebook by using narrative. Please feel free to cut up my words and reorder them however you see fit.
299. There are parasols made of paper and laughter made of being in the moment.
300. In Seattle I float a lantern on Hiroshima Day and then I do this in Japan and then in my mind.
301. There are thousands of sticks of incense burning from the temple's guardian lions.

War Heroes

My niece's boyfriend, Ajay, seems too young to have served in a war. He is twenty-four and already a second lieutenant. He's been home from fighting in Afghanistan since 2011. When I met him I was surprised how happy and, for a lack of a better word, normal he seemed. He doesn't seem to be suffering from PTSD or any other side effects of blunt life trauma. Maybe he wasn't in combat? I decided not to ask. I think if he mentions the war fine, if not fine. I keep my views to myself.

Ajay grew up in North Dakota near the Grand Forks air force base. Most of North Dakota is republican and religious. Many are finished with education after high school. There is an abundance of work in the state but many, interested in high tech, join the military and use its courses and rigors to complete their education.

My niece is getting an education at The University of North Dakota because she wants to be a veterinarian and has a full swimming scholarship. She could have gone to four other schools including Florida State and Penn State but she loves country music and chose North Dakota. She met Ajay at a dance.

Ajay still looks like a high school kid to me. Sure he has a military haircut, a solid but wiry build, but he also has a significant amount of silliness left over from his pre-military veteran days. He reads comic books and loves Superman. He actually got really worked up about something called *Gods Among Us*, this, apparently, is a Superman comic where Superman loses his shit and kills the joker in a fit of rage. Ajay didn't think it jived with the video game that he loves of the same name. To some extent he seemed down about the Joker but not excessively so. You'd think the military propagandists would know better than to mess with a classic.

Superman has been one of the US military's successful recruitment tools since WWII and Ajay is but one soldier in a long line of soldiers who wanted to be super. Alexa said that Ajay was trained to be a "PJ" or parachute jumper. And as the night advanced, Ajay explained that the air force calls their pararescue training center "the Pipeline" or "Superman School." Apparently Ajay has been trained to jump out of planes for humanitarian missions, combat and, if the need arises, to rescue astronauts that land in the ocean. My nephew Austin had a friend over whose father had fought in Desert Storm. This kid, Zeke, ended up asking Ajay if he had fought in Afghanistan and Ajay told him that pararescue squads were elite units that rescued soldiers wounded in combat. Their motto, he said, was "These things I do that Others May Live." This is how war is, I thought, a bunch of kids getting shot and other kids flying in to rescue them. I could tell Ajay loved his work and that he had saved people. He had a heroic ere about him.

Ajay told us that since 9/11 the Pararescuemen have performed over 12,000 life-saving combat rescue missions and 5000 humanitarian rescue missions. Most of these missions were extremely dangerous. Having participated in so many Ajay was now extremely decorated. He had advanced quickly and was moved from the field and placed in Intel.

Ajay is still serving, a soldier at war, in the "War on Terror" that ambiguous war that also started after 9/11 and renews automatically on some sort of deranged subscription.

I was amazed that the young man before me was responsible for all sorts of classified information but the more time I spent with him the less he seemed like a kid to me and the more he reminded me of the Japanese business men I had met in Japan. Ajay is 100% committed to the hierarchy, to the entire military way of life. I had misread the Japanese way back then, they weren't like cult members. They were like soldiers fighting to preserve a nation.

302. I find the perfect stone, a would-be gem, a white ring for good luck around its round.
303. I imagine the camera zooming in for a close-up. I smile as I jauntily as I hop from the curb, in case Jack is watching me from some after life movie house.
304. Nobody ever asked me what time it is when I was in Japan.
305. A Japanese clown with a red nose and painted face hands me a yellow balloon and says, "Flee."
306. The bonsai tree salesman is the embodiment of peace until a customer asks him a question and he becomes annoyed by her intrusion.
307. People are always asking me if I've ever been married.
308. I'm listening to the Rolling Stones "You Can't Always Get What You Want."
309. I'm given my fourth "Teacher of the month" award at Hitachi, even though lately I've mainly been showing American movies in class and telling my students to discuss them in English.
310. I recall a W.B. Yeats quote, "There are no strangers here; only friends you haven't yet met."
311. Re-run Dorothy will miss the Scarecrow but she knows she must leave Oz.

Depressing

Gaby gave me greater access to culture of all types. Geisha, the traditional Japanese female entertainers who historically acted as upscale hostesses, and whose skills include performing various Japanese arts such as classical music, dance and games, are not part of the world of the average gaijin living in Japan. Gaby seemed able to gain access to virtually anything in Japan and, since I was now in her world, these things became available to me as well. Gaby became interested in geisha and shortly after we found ourselves two women among an audience of men.

The geishas chalk white faces and dome hairdos, their sharply cut red fig-shaped lips, and their tiny bound feet made them seem otherworldly. I asked lots of Japanese men and women their opinion of the geisha and learned that most respected the tradition even if they didn't engage with the women in anyway. Some thought they were a good representation of Japan but none of the women I met wanted to be one. I can't say that the geisha lifestyle appealed to me either, except perhaps the theatricality of it but one always judges such things wrongly if they are not born into it.

My perception is that if one is born into wealth all you know is luxury and freedom. And, if one is born into poverty, all one knows is poverty and the want of freedom and luxury. If one is born into the world of the geisha one might be born into poverty, live in luxury, but never be truly free. In this way geisha are akin to the dolls displayed in glass cases but they are not dolls. The geisha are women, just like me, even if their costume had transformed them into something beyond the norm, a transformation that subjected them to admiration and social isolation.

I didn't know at the time I was seeing the end of an era for geisha but all these years later I can't help but be glad that I encountered them. I say this because one is grateful for having seen

any bit of iconography before it disappears into the curious mechanism of history where those in power will decide what part the geisha played and for whom they served. I can imagine a dot of pink, an artificial blush upon my cheek, that was not mine but might have been if I were born in Japan under a powder faced moon.

There is another type of geisha who is frequently encountered in Japan, the geisha boy. These men, dressed as geisha, are most frequently spotted on the arms of Armani clad businessmen who stroll with their geisha boys as another man might proudly stroll with a geisha girl. I loved that Japan didn't seem to be as hung-up on gender roles as Americans of the same era were known to be. Many of the geisha boys were also performers in cross-dressing musical



revues. I don't know why they call them "boys" instead of "men" but possibly because their female counterparts were often called "girls" not "women." I found it difficult to tell a male geisha boy from a geisha girl. On more than one occasion I saw intoxicated Japanese Businessmen grab the groin area of a geisha boy to verify that they were men and not women. I wondered if the businessmen apologized if they made a mistake. The unsolicited groping struck me as something that might be an unpleasant surprise but the geisha boys that I saw being so assaulted didn't even flinch. The geisha boys were always as courteous as the geisha girls to the men they engaged with. At most one might giggle or coyly put a hand up to their face to mask their expression of surprise.

Of course the most frequently found Geisha are not people at all but dolls. Geisha dolls are symbols of the ancient past, valued by tourists and locals alike and sold everywhere. These

vary in price, ranging from the Yen equivalent of ten US dollars into the high thousands, even tens of thousands if the doll is also an antiquity.

I, because of my American associations of the dolls as decorations in Chinese food restaurants in the United States, cannot help but think of most of these figurines as kitsch, especially the inexpensive variety that were popular with the ten-day tourists who needed something light and small to shove into a suitcase as proof that they had made it that far East. Kind of funny when one thinks about it because the cheap dolls can be bought at almost any Asian market in the United States. The upscale geisha dolls however can only be found in Japan and China. The most authentic of these are considered highly valued works of art, with porcelain faces and real human hair. The miniature silk Kimonos that the expensive dolls are adorned in are often made from the remnants of wedding Kimonos that cost tens of thousands of dollars. This type of geisha doll is highly sought after, especially by the affluent members of Japanese society who see them as status symbols.

As Gaby and I sat at our traditional geisha performance I became horribly sad for the main geisha performer. She seemed to perform her duties like an automaton that had been programmed to perform tasks. She was quite an exquisite sight but her excessive self-control seemed somehow unpleasant to me. The lingering notes of her lute, her sad nasal voice and her expressionless face that was more like a mask.

Her name was Fumiko, which translates to “Fortunate beauty child.” This alone isn’t depressing but her story was. She had come from Kyoto, at thirteen, and was touted as one of the last true geisha because she had been raised for only one purpose that of performing traditional geisha duties for male audiences. I suppose that is what depressed me more than anything.

In recent years the geisha have opened their doors to Japanese women's groups, mainly businesswomen, who are happy to have gained access to a world that had previously been denied. From what I understand Japanese businesswomen attend more geisha shows than men these days. I suspect this will be a passing fad and that the geisha will continue to decline to cultural extinction.

Gaby thought the geisha were fabulous. I thanked her for taking me to see the show. It was an experience. Gaby had been a beauty queen. I thought that perhaps her upbringing, lifestyle, and life experiences enabled her to see things differently than I did. Whatever the case, I'm glad she enjoyed the show even if I wished I hadn't gone at all.

After Gaby had gone to bed I'd written a letter to Jack telling him about the geisha's sad face. I said she looked so alone up there on stage. I told him that it didn't seem likely that anyone in the audience would ever know her. I feared she might not ever know love and told him the saddest part of the Fumiko's story. That she could not leave the Geisha House. If she didn't want to be a geisha any longer she would have no way to support herself. The skills of geisha do not translate into any other career and, even where they might they don't because nobody would hire her or so I was told. She wasn't likely to marry either because society and culture had her trapped like a bird in a cage.

312. I hold a double generator crystal in both hands and imagine myself sending Jack all the love in the universe.
313. Sometimes when I write I feel as though my fingers are moving faster than the speed of light across the keyboard.
314. I float out and above my body at the computer but the ideas are pouring out of me and I am excited for the body below.
315. Sitting on a concrete wall, the smell of the sea in the air, kelp and muscles tangled beneath my feet, I imagine all the poets and fiction writers, artists, painters, dancers and musicians who have looked upon this horizon.
316. I write in my journal to my inner child and it feels as though she is talking back.
317. My inner adolescent sends me texts in my dreams.
318. My future self asks, "Who is the writer of your personal dream?"
319. I am.
320. The late train is filled with revelers. We are all singing the U2 song "But I still haven't found what I'm looking for" in a cacophony of accents Japanese, German, French and American. Isn't it odd how that we all know it?
321. While folding clothes I suddenly sense Jack standing behind me. I stand, mid-fold of a towel, until I convince myself that it wasn't real.

Dangling

One of the things that I found fascinating about Japan is how frequently the honor system is in place and working. Construction workers do not always barricade the public from their work sites. They must have assumed that no one would want to walk onto such a potential hazard. Who, they must think, would walk through a building site not knowing what is nailed down and what is merely resting in place? Ridiculously I have the answer, one night after I drank ten or fifteen cocktails and missed the last train home in winter, the giant metal skeleton of the future building, barbwire coils, red and gold glow lights, piles of lumber, cement mixers and thick wooden planks looked like a short cut to me.

Gaby and I were swaying through the rainy streets, freezing and annoyed that our train had left early. Of course, it hadn't really left early. We had arrived at the train station a good 30 minutes after the last train departed in a gust of steam but intoxicated people rarely recognize such things in real time. We wanted a taxi but no taxis would pick us up because taxi drivers ignore drunken foreigners.

Gaby had to be at work, on the air, at the radio station she worked at by 11am. This might sound late to anyone who didn't drink ten to fifteen cocktails but it is early to anyone who did. The two of us hadn't even put Gaby's show together. We usually did this before we went out but we had left our place in a rush. A friend was going home to the states and we didn't want to miss his party. We had planned to come home early but time gotten away from us. I loved to program the radio shows but it took thought, and we had put thought to sleep hours ago. I always helped Gaby write her shows, picked out music, crafted segues and jokes. I figured it was the least I could do since I didn't pay rent.

I also had to be at work at Hitachi's language center by 9am and it was already 3am. I'd been down the missed train path a few times and my hope for myself was that I might still be intoxicated through the day to avoid the inconvenience of partial sobriety. I hoped my shortcut through the construction site would save a thirty-minute walk around.

I was maybe ten feet into the building site when the plank I was standing on shifted. I fell about 25 or 30 feet into a 10-foot tall, round, barbwire coil. This was surreal. I remember seeing the backlit rain turn red and gold as I fell, momentum blur as I flipped. Jack's voice was suddenly in my ears, so clear, it was as though he were falling next to me "I'll see you tonight" he said. This moment stands out for me because it was the first time I didn't want to see or hear Jack. Jack was dead and I wanted to live.

In the eternity of the fall everything was uncertain, was falling or flying? Is this how Jack felt when he had flown through the air after impact? I recall hearing Gaby screaming something. Then I thought of a song for the playlist for her show. The Squeeze began playing in my ears, "Take Me I'm Yours." Then I hit a coil of barbwire and there was no sound. Nothing, like an on-air mistake, when the DJ thinks something is playing but no sound is playing, dead air silent.

The pain of biting teeth brought me back to consciousness. I was grateful for my thick clothes but unable to spare my wrists, scalp and back from the little stabs. I was dangling about 10-feet off the ground, stuck like a fly in a spider's web. When I managed to lift my head I could see that a miracle had occurred. I'd landed on the only barbwire coil on the ground. If I had landed a few feet to the left or right I would have hit concrete.

Gaby's screaming from above had gotten clearer. She was calling for help in both English and Japanese. I recall thinking she was so much better at Japanese than I was and also that it was a relief to know she was up there. I tried to sit up but I could feel the barbs digging

into my skin. The barbs would win if I tried to move because the give didn't work in my favor. I shouted, "Gaby, I'm fine. I'm stuck in a barbwire coil." This is a ridiculous thing to say. She shouted back something equally ridiculous, "Stay there, I'm going to get help."

Due to her tear smeared make-up and sobbing Gaby would later tell me she had a difficult time getting people to believe that her friend had fallen off a building and into a barbwire coil. When she finally convinced them nearly an hour had passed.

My meditating skills were coming in handy. I didn't struggle but instead remained still, taking even shallow breaths so as not to move and cause myself more pain. I let the rain hit me in the face and I imagined how odd I must look. My arms and legs fixed in crooked positions, my clothes torn and blood trickling from my wounds. I was below ground, just to the left of the building, face up. There weren't any people around. So rare in Japan that I was awed by the intimacy I was experiencing with my new environment. I could hear rain bouncing in puddles, tires on pavement overhead, the churn of a generator that must have been the energy source for the floodlights around the building. It was beautiful in a way, the rain out of darkness, passing through the lights.

As my rescuers arrived the clouds parted to reveal a full moon that was so large and blue that it took my breath away. I was beginning to feel dizzy. People spoke to me in Japanese so I just listened, not understanding, watching the cobalt clouds with their ephemeral halos, drift back across the moon. The clouds had created another ring of dark blue, backlit now. It looked like something that NASA might have shot from the Hubble Space telescope, a swirl of billowing nebula, the dawn of time, the end of the night and the last thing I see before I lose consciousness.

322. Jack's urn has been moved from the dresser to the floor. I put it back on the dresser but the next morning it is back on the floor.
323. When I walk into the nightclub it is silent and then the music begins to play David Bowie's "...Ashes to ashes dust to dusty we know Major Tom's a junky..." I ask, "Is anybody there?"
324. I poured three hundred drinks between 1pm and 1am.
325. In one's twenties, if born physically strong and, if one is a natural athlete, drinking is just another sport.
326. All my pens are empty again.
327. I get letters that ask "Where have you disappeared to?"
328. I write, "It's a cry for help" in my notebook and then laugh so hard that I nearly spit my drink out at the bartender.
329. Re-run Glenda tells Dorothy, You've always had the power to go back to Kansas.
330. Jack would have loved surfing Japan.
331. My wetsuit makes me feel like a seal.

Forgiving

I went to work the next day without any sleep, covered in butterfly Band-Aids, stitches, and teaming with antibiotics and a tetanus shot. I felt quite radiant from prescription painkillers and thought I looked okay considering I had recently fallen off a building. But, when I walked into the foyer, the head of the Hanjin Language Center, Mr. Hamasaki, intercepted me. He told me that I looked terrible, tired, and his eyes kept wandering up to the bandage on my head. I was certain that I reeked of booze but he typically did too and therefore I felt no need to worry about that. He told me to stay home for a week and heal. I said I would be fine to work and that I looked worse than I felt. He said, “No, no, no, go home.” The three “no” combo in Japan meant I wasn’t likely to win the argument.

I was at the bar below Gaby’s radio station by 10:15am. We each drank a Bloody Mary before going to the bathroom to smoke a bowl of hash. I gave Gaby a Vicoden for her headache.

She said, “We didn’t write the show.”

“I know” I said, “ “But it’ll be fine. We can wing it.”

As our cocktails and chemicals kicked in our worries drifted away. We were laughing as we climbed the staircase to the studio and I was relieved that I would have only one job this week instead of two. To fill time Gaby asked me to be a guest on her show. I told her nobody would know who I was. She said, “They will after the show.” Besides, she said, “While I ask you questions, you can pull CD’s for the music segments. Then we can switch places and I’ll queue up the songs while you answer.”

I ended up reading some Bukowski and talking about what it was like teaching and bartending in Japan. I read a few of my own poems. The first one I had written on my way to the radio station, it was still forming, they all were.

Emotional Saturation

The clouds
cobalt blue
night clouds
cobalt blue
Sirius Star
rimmed red
and blue
the clouds
cobalt blue
cobalt blue
cobalt blue

cobalt blue cobalt blue
cobalt blue cobalt blue
cobalt blue cobalt blue
cobalt blue cobalt blue

Gaby put on “Charlie Don’t Surf” because she knows it’s one of my favorite songs. The Clash is anti-fascist, anti-war and anti-hate and loaded with angst but as I listened I realized I wasn’t angry with anyone anymore. Not Jack for leaving or even the man who killed Jack. This didn’t entirely surprise me because while I was being stitched up in the hospital the doctor kept blaming me for my accident. I didn’t disagree but as far as I can tell blame keeps people in the past, enraged, outraged, stagnant, hopeless, bitter, resentful, hostile, and hoping for revenge. I know that I had been feeling those things since Jack died even though I hadn’t wanted to.

Ted Nelson, drunk driver, wasn’t a murderer just some guy who, lost in his ego, hadn’t realized he wasn’t a perfect driver or invincible to disaster. He was intellectually toting the *Bad Things Happen To Other People Handbook* and, as anyone who has met someone in that space, there is nothing that will change such a mindset other than bad things.

Jack had been drunk at the time of the crash as well but witnesses said it was clearly Nelson’s fault. Jack never saw him coming. His head was in a helmet. His ears were filled with music from his new portable CD player tucked in his jacket. The last thing Jack heard was R.E.M.’s “Everybody Hurts.” This is something I found both beautiful and unbearably ironic. We both loved R.E.M.’s CD *Automatic for the People* but it’s still hard for me to listen to.

Gaby laughed and said that I looked like I'd just got back from a war. I said, "I'm no war hero, not even a war widow." Jack had died for nothing. Most people don't know how heavy nothing is. It is every bad decision, every momentary lapse of reason, forgetfulness, lack of caution, too long in the sun, out too late, drinking too much, in the wrong place at the wrong time and all that blah, blah, blah, nothing is never nothing when it comes to tragedy.

I had never been cynical. I didn't like how cynics give up and try to drag everyone else down with them. I was determined not to become one of those people but things had changed for me and I could see the futility of life. I made myself think of what I had and tried to focus on what I love. Life's saving graces like art, writing and music. Or what it feels like to close my eyes and listen to a song, riding the cords through an invisible wave of inspiration. I sat down in my chair in the little dark studio and let it wash over me.

"Charlie don't surf and we think he should
Charlie don't surf and you know that it aint no good
Charlie don't surf for his hamburger Momma"

The Clash always get my attention. I catch their wave and make it all the way to shore and I know how they feel, in my way its like writing a poem that makes somebody's eyes go wide with interest or better yet when somebody loves a story I've written and they lean forward to listen because they want to be closer to it. It's like they get you but it's probably more like they have found their story within yours and that works just fine.

"We've been told to keep the strangers out
We don't like them starting to hang around
We don't like them all over town
Across the world we are going to blow them down"

I like to share my adventures because some moments reverberate. I can hear the music and surf the sound.

"Charlie don't surf he'll never learn

Charlie don't surf though he's got a gun
 Charlie don't surf and we think that he should
 Charlie don't surf we really think he should
 Charlie don't surf..."

The second and third poems I would read were written on opposing pages at the front of my new notebook. They seemed almost lonely with all that white space ahead of them. My old notebook was filled from beginning to end with thoughts, ideas and poems. Some scrawled on coasters and napkins and tucked in among the pages. The old one was filled with many of my favorite moments with Jack. I jotted them down so that I could return to the gifts he'd given me whenever I needed them.

When the song wound down Gaby pointed at me and I jumped back to the mic to read my second poem. It was about meditation, another one of my saving graces.

I hadn't been meditating regularly since I moved to Osaka because I worked all the time and the moments between jobs were as quick as a Kamikaze strained into a martini glass. But, perhaps it wasn't a coincidence that a poem about the ecstasy that comes with being centered had come to me the day before I fell. I guess I didn't absorb the whisper fast enough. Now, of course, it seemed clear I needed to return to it in the future but not that day in the radio station. I needed sleep, music, painkillers.

joy

I meditate
 within the closed petals
 of a lotus flower
 when the flower blooms
 I will stand on its sunny core
 and laugh with joy.

Toward the end of the show Gaby closed the blinds on the studio windows so that passersby, in the hall, couldn't see in. I said, "No way are we going to smoke in here, you'll get

caught.” She put on “Pulling Mussels” by The Squeeze and locked the door. “No, she said, we’re not going to smoke in here.”

Gaby started dancing and laughing, “I’m glad you aren’t dead.”

“That makes two of us,” I’d said. She then pulled out her hash pipe and lit it, to avoid filling the room with smoke. She grabbed me and blew the hit into my mouth. I inhaled the smoke without choking and then pulled away. My thoughts felt fractured and uncertain because the last lips I’d kissed were Jack’s. “Pulling Muscles” ended and the next Squeeze track started because we weren’t paying attention to the controls. The next two tracks, “Take Me I’m Your’s” and “Tempted” played before someone knocked on the studio door. The station manager didn’t like albums to play through. He thought it was a sign of a lazy DJ.

I get back on the mic to read my last poem.

transformation

I’ve caught
 the eye
 of a hawk
 blink to be
 fly over
 points of Evergreen
 and thousands
 of old fingers of Birch
 upon a branch
 I watch
 the tired season’s sun
 set across the
 backs of leaves
 until all
 is dark and I
 think of
 human dreams.

When we leave the studio the pain is coming back in my back and head. I see a poster for Jack Daniel’s whisky and my chest suddenly feels like a cavern filled with sharp bones because

every Jack reminds me of my Jack and that fucking whisky's posters are everywhere. I tell Gaby I'll meet her back at the apartment but I know I won't be back for days.

I go out drinking. Call the bar and tell them about my fall so that I can stay away for a few days. I sleep in hotels and talk to strangers. I forget about everything under the influence of liquor magic until it suddenly stops working and there is a nagging sense of clarity telling me to get it together. I try another Vicoden but it barely works on my physical pain, the whisky is better. The two together are only good for about an hour of peace because I know I can't keep on going like this.

332. I find things all the time but never what I've lost.

333. I am slow dancing with my writer's notebook.

334. When creative people choose imitation and replication over innovation and originality the end is nigh unless they can imitate and replicate with innovation and originality. When creative people choose imitation and replication over innovation and originality the end is nigh unless...

335. Any strict adherence to a system is dogmatic and destructive.

336. I am writing the great American [p]oem,-%!

337. Lightning has singed the forest and set a noble fir on fire.

338. I think of the old Visine slogan "No more tears" after two weeks pass without my shedding any.

339. We are supposed to believe that Peggy on Mad Men is unhappy because she became a career women instead of a traditional wife. I hope Mad Men's writers change that tune.

340. I am counting stars.

341. There is a gull standing on a floating log, a passenger on a ferry. The bird has found a place to rest before the storm.

Incapacitating

I am constantly relieved that nobody talks about the past in Japan. No one appears to mourn for what was. Nobody obsesses about what can never be. There are things that the Japanese are unaware of, things that keep them linked to the past but these don't seem to be the majority's primary motivating forces. The modern Japanese culture appears to be forward thinking. I, on the other hand, periodically became frozen to incapacity. I would miss my train or forget where I was going. I would catch myself in the reflection of a store window when it was day and find myself still standing in the same spot at night.

One time I thought I saw Jack in a crosswalk. I had followed this, clearly American, man for several blocks. He was tall and took long strides, which enabled him to propel himself quickly through the crowd. I never caught up to him because I had been so focused on the Jack look alike that I didn't see the taxi before it hit me.

The taxi's driver had stood over me yelling that I had dented his taxi. His white gloved hands gestured indignantly first toward me, where I lay in the crosswalk, then to the hood of his taxi. He was unconcerned by the blood coming from my lip, elbow or knee. He didn't know or care about the lump on the back of my head. With the help of an unidentified Irishman I made it out of the street and into the closest place I could find, a pod hotel.



I knew that Gaby had planned a trip home to Ecuador for three weeks and that my three-day post fall wander meant that I had missed her before she left. My collective injuries from the fall and now this accident were overwhelming me. I couldn't make it back to our apartment. I likely had a severe concussion because I didn't know where I lived. I don't recall ever thinking I should try to take a taxi to the apartment even though that or the hospital would have been logical. My mind was on getting out of the street and lying down.

I had discovered a new level of pain and sound and movement confused me. There was a small single window with a deep sill that didn't make sense to me, a square portal. You couldn't see out of it but some architect had thought it necessary to the room's design, perhaps to stave off claustrophobia. It was an odd space. I could touch all four walls when standing in the center of the room. Aesthetic and beauty didn't seem to figure into the design of a Japanese pod hotel.

It is the type of hotel that a businessman might take a hooker or sleep off a hangover. In many ways Pod hotels resemble hospital rooms and, since I was unable to relocate, it became my ER and recovery room, where I would play both doctor and patient, because even though I had made it into the hotel I could not walk back out of it. I had stiffened and my disorientation was getting worse.

Touring a temple after two bottles of wine and a three kamikazes



342. When I woke it was as though Jack had been lying beside me.

343. My head is hurting so much that I can think of nothing else.

344. Work feels like work more than play today.

345. Two bright red birds with black crowns and black rings around their eyes land next to me in the park. The smaller of the two moves its head from side to side and I think of Richard and Sheila.

346. I want Jack to lasso the moon for me, like George Baily in *It's A Wonderful Life*.

347. A violin is playing down the hallway and I think of the tiniest violin in the world.

348. Three Electric Ice Teas and I'm dancing with Gaby on the balcony as though we were at Mardi Gras in the USA.

349. I don't think I've seen anyone in Japan run anywhere.

350. Jack, tell me a joke.

351. There is nothing but static on the radio.

Disorienting

I can hear liquor-fueled laughter in the hallway of the Pod Hotel. I want help, bandages, Jack more than I had ever wanted him at any moment since his death. I don't get any of these things, so I lay still going in and out of sleep and want. I didn't realize until it was too late that the average customer of a Pod Hotel has something of a dangerous way about them. The men I brushed past on my way to the shared toilet next to my pod didn't look likely to offer help. Some were wearing the gold jewelry and hairstyles of the Yakuza, others looked like sex slaves or foreign prostitutes in need of help themselves. A few men and women seemed high on things stronger than what I had been taking and, because I wouldn't have been able to run or walk away, I decided not to seek help from anyone.

I slept on the bulk cushion that was considered a bed and drank beer until the pain in my head became too much to bear. My mind was scattered but it kept returning to a beautiful, almost fluorescent green, caterpillar that I saw when strolling through Osaka's Castle. It was just a day ago or maybe a week or weeks ago I was no longer sure. The caterpillar was building his cocoon and I was excited for the little guy. He was going to become a butterfly. But then I had thought of a box of butterflies that Jack bought at an antique store in Snohomish Washington one sunny afternoon on a motorcycle ride. The box had Jack's first and last name on it. He assumed it was meant for him. It was strange and, I didn't know why but it made me uneasy. Jack Morgan, handwritten, as though it were my Jack's destiny to pick-up a box of enshrined beauty.

In spite of the clientele my cocoon, with its bulk cushion, towel rack, mini-bar, square portal, white sheets, and tiny TV monitor, weren't dirty or grungy. It was as though a tidy person had gathered these items together to help the pod customers relax at their dysfunctional moments in time.

The next morning I woke to the knocking of a hotel employee. I paid him for two more days. He had asked me, “Why are you here?” “What happened to your head?” “Do you want a boy or girl?” I told him I was fine, just tired, no prostitutes would be needed. I did ask for beer and a large bag of ice, which he delivered remarkably fast. The ice helped my head and the beer helped me sleep.



On the third day I found my way back to the apartment. It was nice to be among my things and, even though I wished I had been home to see Gaby off, I was glad to be alone.

I might have considered falling off of a building and getting hit by a taxi signs to leave Japan but I wasn't feeling superstitious, just cautious. My reality seemed harrowing and I had, for the first time, seriously considered the possibility of a determinist universe. This might have been a product of my injuries but it really had begun to feel as though someone was fucking with me. This idea washed away in the shower that soothed every ache and physical pain, at least momentarily. By the time I lay down on my bed I had shifted to compatibilism, the middle ground between fatalism and free will. Discomfort knows little rest and I was soon in the kitchen pouring vodka over ice. All of the ists and isms went away. I raised my glass and put up my feet up to watch the hot pink sun drip into the neon city. I would be out in it soon, having chosen babelism once again.

352. I'm on the bar singing the Talking Heads song, "Burning Down the House" and smoke is rising from a thousand lit cigarettes all around the room.

353. I want to remember and forget at the same time.

354. Believing is seeing.

355. I'm playing chess with old Japanese men in the park. Nobody speaks English and I don't speak Japanese but we all know the game.

356. My pens are all out of ink again.

357. Mr. Moto got burned when he fell asleep holding his cigarette.

358. I'm not going to assume the worst or worry about the other shoe falling.

359. I write, "I'm a butterfly in a cocoon" in my notebook.

360. I'm looking on the bright side but I'm wearing sunglasses.

361. I imagine myself plunging and sinking deep into the water. Bubbles stream up from my mouth, air pockets racing to the surface. But my body continues to descend into the deep, a strange comfort, cold, soothing, silent, simple, comfort.

Running

My American English teaching friend Erin, who worked with me at Hitachi, and I had discovered an English pub in Shinsaibashi called the Pig and Whistle. The pub was owned by an American and guarded by the Yakuza. I use the word “guarded” loosely here because the Yakuza’s protection was mainly against the threat they posed. They took money from Leo, the Pig and Whistle owner and all the other successful bar owners in the area. It reminded me of home because the U.S. Mob takes anti-harassment payoffs in Chicago, Louisiana’s French Quarter, New York, everywhere.

The account man for the Pig and Whistle was a former German soldier who liked to dress in American camouflage fatigues. He sometimes went by Yan and at other times Fred. I doubt either of these were his real names but I didn’t plan on socializing with him so I didn’t care. The owner of the bar, Leo, a relatively nice guy, told me to be careful around Yan-Fred. He told me he was dangerous and mentally unstable and backed this diagnosis up by adding that he saw Yan-Fred stab a man on one occasion and beat a woman unconscious outside the pub on another. Both times, when the police came, they let Yan-Fred go even though there were dozens, if not hundreds, of witnesses.

I was drunk, actually very drunk when Yan-Fred walked up to our table. And, I mean that “very,” a word I don’t use lightly because of writing advice from Mark Twain, “Substitute *damn* every time you're inclined to write *very*; your editor will delete it and the writing will be just as it should be.” I’d been in Japan for ages, I could handle a lot of liquor but even a drunken sailor occasionally over does it, lists too and fro and risks a night in the brig or a tumble over the railing. I wasn’t a sailor but I was adrift on a sea of shots.

Yan-Fred put his arm around Tina, a local Japanese girl who I had recently befriended. Tina tried to pull away so as not offend Yan-Fred. I didn't meet any Japanese women willing to offend a man no matter how offense the man, cultural training can really stink. I could tell that Tina was not interested in Yan-Fred touching her with his thick, rough, hands. Exasperated that he wasn't taking Tina's hint I said, "Why don't you go away."

Yan-Fred said, "You know who I am?"

"An annoying fucker?" I said and laughed because drunken people always laugh at their own jokes and I was drunk enough to think this would lighten the moment.

"Watch yourself, I don't care for Yanks." He added. He had released Tina while he assessed me.

"Right," I said, "We are waiting for a couple of guys."

"This one should come with me." He put his arm back around Tina.

"Not likely, we have plans," I said flatly. My friend Erin came back from the bar with our drinks. "Besides we have beer to drink," I pointed at the glasses, "Why don't you leave us alone. Should I ask for Leo to come out?" I added. I believe this last comment was my biggest mistake. Yan-Fred had turned sweaty the instant he felt challenged. His red forehead was covered with perspiration.

"Leo isn't here," said Yan-Fred, "Enjoy your drinks."

After he left Erin, Tina and I shook off the unpleasant chill that a psychopath brings to a table. We drank more, a lot more. When the three of us left we were swaying, singing and laughing. Tina dropped her purse a few times and Erin was half asleep and kept saying she wanted to sit down. Outside we let Erin take the only available taxi. A moment after she pulled away Yan-Fred stepped out of the alley. He was holding a knife in his right hand and he told

Tina, “Now you’ll come with me.” I looked for an American in the crowd because Americans are prone to ill thought out acts of heroism because we watch a lot of movies where we conquer bad guys with inordinate ease. There weren’t any foreigners around and I felt a stab of fear in the center of my chest because even though I was inebriated I knew this was serious.

I had smuggled my pint glass out of the bar underneath my jacket so that I could finish it on my walk to the train station. It was an inebriated, low ethics, moment that turned out to be the right thing to have done because a glass is a weapon. Yan-Fred stepped closer to me and said, “Should I tell Leo?” I threw the pint glass at his head, like I was pitching a baseball. It shattered on his forehead and he bent over in shock. In that instant Tina and I ran in different directions. Tina toward a crowd of Japanese men, she seemed to vanish into the crowd. I stood out too much to blend in so I ran toward the Dotonbori, hoping to see a taxi. Yan-Fred came after me. When I reached the Dotonbori Bridge I could see two large ships docked to my right. Below, at least forty feet, there were huge underwater lights that glowed upward like a series of stage spotlights. I couldn’t run anymore. I was out of breath, holding the rail and my depth perception was off from drinking too much. I decided to jump into the Dotonbori River and swim across. I figured Yan-Fred wouldn’t want to do that and I leapt over the edge.

The fall didn’t end as quickly as I’d thought it would. I realized that no matter how often one falls off of things one never thinks it is as far down as it is. A brand new fear surged through me as I fell, *what if this kills me?* My dress billowed up into the air as I fell and I heard some inner voice tell me to point my toes and pull in my arms before I hit the surface. Even with the help of this internal intelligence I still had to fight my way back to the surface in freezing, oil laden, water. It was a miracle that I didn’t break anything and I wasn’t safe yet. I felt shock, from the cold, hit my system and was worried I wouldn’t be able to swim.

Yan-Fred was above me shouting something in German from the railing. He didn't jump in and when I realized I had nothing to hold onto I started to swim, my face, legs and arms were all freezing and stinging from the polluted water. My back, still injured from the taxi, ached from the hit. By the time I reached the far side my eyes felt like they were bleeding.

It took me three tries to reach the rusty iron wall ladder that had looked much closer to the water line before I jumped in. Why, after three falls did I still believe I was a good judge of that sort of thing? The ladder would have been unreachable if the water had been a couple of inches lower and it is likely I would have drowned because there was nothing else to grab onto that didn't look like it might electrocute me or take me under. The rust from the ladder coated my hands as I struggled to pull myself up to the first rung. My feet had slid from the cement and algae covered wall at least a dozen times before I got a toehold but as soon as I had it I felt a surge of power, that inner voice was back screaming, "Pull!" Once up I looked back and saw Yan-Fred still watching me from the other side. I didn't yet know why but my skin was stinging and, when I finally got to a place where I could see myself, I was shocked to see that all of the white had turned red in my eyes.

Leo and Yan-Fred pose for a picture. Yan-Fred tried to kill me.



362. I have been waking up feeling like something big was about to happen.
363. One of the Buddhist monks who I pass by regularly nodded at me, for the first time, in approving and congenial way.
364. I try to walk a tightrope strung between two trees in the park and fall and fall and fall until I don't.
365. I am rolling sushi to take to a Japanese picnic.
366. Isolationism isn't wise.
367. My fingers roll across the piano keys, striking chords, making music altering the vibration of the room.
368. Being martyred and embittered with the universe is more difficult than forgiving and loving.
369. Before I fall asleep I chant, "I am letting the love in. I am letting the love in."
370. When I fall asleep on the night train the conductor doesn't notice. When I wake at the station at 4am I walk the empty train cars looking for a way out but can't find one. There's a Japanese homeless person beyond the windows of my cage laughing and pointing.
371. Sometimes I forget to eat.

Chancing

I had allowed my passport to lapse. Any foreigner residing in another country by virtue of extended tourist visas, made possible by visiting neighboring countries, would worry about this type of error. By crossing a border you are reinstated as a new tourist when you re-enter the country that you have been calling home. A tourist visa gave a traveler a three to six month extension on their visa allowing them to re-enter the country where their visa about to expire. The round-trip made it seem as though the traveler was at the beginning of a journey rather than extending an old one. By overstaying, by a single day, I was at risk being deported by the Japanese authorities.

My injuries, coupled with the difficulty in restoring my appearance after my dip in the Dotonbori had slowed me down. I had a minor chemical burn on my hands and legs that stung as if I'd been stung by a jellyfish. I had been grateful that my face hadn't been submerged long enough to take on the red hue that accompanied the burn. My hair had had globs of black muck that caused me to resemble a gull after an oil spill and my eyes had turned red from the chemical strain on the capillaries. I couldn't have shown up at the boat launch looking like that but by staying one day too long I had invited all sorts of new danger.

On top of all of that I couldn't seem to reach an acceptable level of sobriety to imagine myself gracefully dealing with the customs officials. I knew that without a tourist visa I would lose my English teaching job at Hitachi so I had to do something fast. Not that I had met anyone in Japan who minded English teachers working without proper visas. But governments are different than the people. They wouldn't want a foreigner who had no current documentation. I couldn't decide if they would be forgiving or furious but, I knew inaction wasn't going to work, I had to do something.

The morning I woke up and realized my error I also experienced the first hangover I could recall having since I had arrived in Tokyo over two years ago. My eyes were blurring and my breath reeked of stale liquor. I was sick for thirty minutes, going in and out of consciousness, regretting the volume of alcohol consumed at the Pig and Whistle. When I was able to crawl to the shower I slept in the shower stream until the water ran cold. I couldn't believe that I had missed my boat to Pusan. It was 11am and I wasn't going to any job that day but was expected at work within two days. I forced myself to get dressed.

For those who haven't ever experienced a detoxification from large quantities of alcohol, there are moments when the hangover leaves you alone, mine had drifted away after I had drunk a quart of water. A real hangover can do that because the water has pushed the alcohol waiting in line at your liver into your system, restoring some of alcohol's effects. The lift can reverse quite suddenly and descend like a hammer on a nail. At the time my rational mind was on deck I thought I should hurry to the ferry dock and explain that I'd made a mistake. I was, after all, only over by a day, I hoped they would let me book something for the following week when I felt better so I could go home and get some sleep and make the journey under more favorable conditions.

I remember thinking, "Everything will be fine," this is Japan after all, they like Americans. By the time I reached the terminal I had convinced myself it wasn't a big deal. I stepped up to the counter to buy a new ticket and within five minutes was arrested by three blue uniformed guards and taken to a concrete basement, the interrogation room. The space could have been plucked from a movie. It was dimly lit, empty except for one metal chair and a tin-hat lamp with an exposed bulb that illuminated the cracked gray cement floor. I was forced into the chair by one of the three, stern-faced Japanese guards while another asked the same three

questions for an hour, “Why did you overstay your visa? What is your business in Japan? And, “How long have you been here?” I could barely talk. My mouth was dry and my eyes were swollen. I told them I went out drinking and had overslept adding, “It was a mistake” but they were not moved. I should have thought of a better story than the truth because this was not the answer they wanted to hear. I asked to call the U.S. consulate and they declined to let me do this saying they were in their rights to deport me. Two men grabbed me by my arms and dragged me toward the boat. The third carried my purse until we reached the gangplank and then held it out and said, “Call the consulate from Korea.”

I had planned on buying a ticket, getting over my hangover, and leaving the next day. The Japanese Port Authority’s plan was being implemented instead. At the exit station my passport was stamped, “DEPORTED – NO RE-ENTRY.” Mr. suddenly-knows-English said “Go home.” My mind went to my job, my apartment, all the money I had saved in a Kracie DIY Panda Dango candy tin. I used to say that I banked with Panda Dango but it no longer seemed funny to me since the only branch was located on a shelf in my Osaka bedroom and I only had 35,000 Yen, the equivalent of \$400 in my purse, the unspent passage.

Once on the boat I realized I was going to be left alone by the officials, that was a relief. They hadn’t assigned a guard to verify my journey to Korea. I could have jumped off the ferry and swam back to shore, and I considered it, but it was getting stormy and I was worried that I might get sucked under the boat.

I had one credit card too, my passport, a little bit of make-up and a comb. All of my clothes and my phone book were back in the apartment. This was before everyone carried cell phones. There wasn’t a way to call anyone from the boat. The next phone I might encounter would be a Korean landline.

I had been assigned the lowest passage, the squalid bottom of the ship. In an effort to cheer myself up I thought *At least the trip is free* but that perk was dashed when I asked a steward if I could upgrade to a single room. He said, “You cannot upgrade because you didn’t pay for the trip.” The boat trip from Osaka to Busan takes thirty-hours, this trip was already hitting rough seas. and because I had the worst hangover I’d ever experienced I didn’t want to talk to people. The worst part was the open communal sleeping area because it was right next to all of the ships toilets and the smell of waste hung in the air and we had only just left shore, I couldn’t imagine that getting better over time.

Tape and a thin bamboo mat marked my four-foot plot on the floor. I didn’t have a pillow or blanket. I was surprised that they showed a movie on one wall, I guess that was something but there were no seats anywhere below deck. I sat on the hard, swaying floor and watched Sylvester Stallone in *First Blood* dubbed in Korean, because we were headed to Korea. I was told by a couple of students that one could see the same movie in Japanese if you travelled the other way. I nodded and smiled but knew that experience was not on my itinerary.

I remembered seeing the movie *First Blood* when it came out fourteen years prior to my sitting on a boat to Korea. This meant I could follow the plot without the language. In it Sylvester Stallone plays a former member of a United States Army Special Forces unit who had been awarded the Medal of Honor for his service in Vietnam. Stallone’s character, Rambo, looks for his friend Delmar Berry. Berry is dying from cancer caused by exposure to Agent Orange during the War.

As soon as Rambo learns that Berry has died of cancer the movie shifts to the small town of Hope, Washington where Rambo encounters the town’s bully, Sheriff Teasle. Teasle is an arrogant bastard who has it in for Rambo, who is arrested and abused by the police. While being

booked and processed at the police station for vagrancy, or some other trumped up charge, Rambo begins to experience a series of flashbacks that send him over the edge. He fights his way out of the police station, gathers his weapons from where they are hidden in an alley, and disappears into the forest. A huge manhunt ensues and one deputy is accidentally killed which elevates the situation to pandemonium.

At the end of the movie Rambo is in a one on one showdown with Sheriff Teasle. Gunfire is exchanged and both men are injured but it is clear that Rambo has gotten the better of Teasle, he could kill the sheriff if he chose to. But, a moment before Rambo finishes off his enemy a former United States Army Officer appears on the scene. This man talks Rambo out of committing murder, but not before Rambo waxes eloquently about the horrors of war and injustice. The movie is written so that the audience sees Rambo as having turned himself in.

As a viewer I am ok with Rambo not being free because he is shown with a Special Forces Officer who is respectful to him, he seems safe, compared to his time with the small town thugs who had exacerbated Rambo's situation in the first place. Teasle is taken to the hospital on a stretcher as Rambo exits the police station of his own accord, head held high, with a military escort and one feels hopeful about Rambo's future in spite of his current circumstances. This is all done with music, camera angles and tone because there is no proof of better days for Rambo on the screen.

372. I love writing.

373. Everybody seems to know their place, this annoys me greatly.

374. When there is a sudden rainstorm and the streets fill with puddles, and fat streaks of rain cascade from the sky, I am inspired to sing and dance like Gene Kelly in *Singing In the Rain*. Many of the locals smile but some look frightened. The frightened types annoy me. At home I call these people ruiners.

375. I see a fat cat that reminds me of my beloved cat Magic and I pick him up and hold him, sit down on the curb with him, rocking him back and forth saying, “Good kitty, good, good, kitty.”

376. Women don’t always want to be polite, unimposing, delicate flowers sometimes we want to be real.

377. The sky is purple today and the grass is lime green, the foliage, ebullient with pink and golden yellow flowers that drip like jewels, long strands of gems, from uplifted branches.

378. The flower, on the sand dollar, is drawn by the sea and every disk has a cache of little broken fragments inside.

379. An unemployed editor I know once told me I should always end my work on an upbeat note.

380. I’m holding up a blank card. On the count of three, 1, 2—of course some will say nothing at all.

381. I’m screaming “Daisies!”

Typhoon

The ferryboat to Busan rocked back and forth in the rising swells of the sea. As I looked out of a portal at the bubbles that churned in circular motions in the gray-green waters I realized I didn't know what to do. Would I get back into Japan? Part of me wanted to keep working in the nightclubs until I had the chance to formalize a plan of action but, even before today's events, I hadn't been planning on staying in Japan for another full year. Gaby had left a message on our answering machine saying she had gotten together with an old love of hers named Sebastian in Ecuador. She wanted to make sure I was safe but also indicated that she might only stay in Japan until the end of her contract in six months so she could spend more time with him.



I was happy for Gaby. I missed loving a living person. I knew that I didn't mind pouring beer and socializing, bartending was easier than moving but I wanted to be a writer and it made little sense to let more time go by in Japan. The water outside the window was more black than green now as the boat made its way into deep water. I thought of the bar. One wall had thirty TV screens, stacked from floor to ceiling that all silently played the movie *Spinal Tap*, everyday, year round. But then as the engine made a grinding noise a different thought came to me, "Why am I here?" This question was in my head so often it had begun to feel like a mantra.

It is hard to escape that awkward little word *why*. It inserts itself, confounded, frustrated, uncertain, unknowing and persistent. Why, why, why pushed its' way into every thought, like a child, a meddler or any other overly curious and insatiable being, tugging and nagging for attention. Why is annoying. It's a word that feels like it knows what it's doing in spite of its inquisitive nature. It isn't easily answered because it almost always is asked after someone has exhausted an explanation or delivered the facts. It is the irreconcilable thing one puts out there when one doesn't like or understand what is happening.

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Y

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A woman in an aqua blue factory jumpsuit with Korean lettering on it offered me some food and a drink of clear liquor from a plastic bottle. I accepted her offer because I was quickly moving into the unfamiliar territory of sobriety, and it is considered rude to turn down gifts. My ears were ringing, sweat poured off my forehead, and I could hear my heart beating inside my brain. I knew why people said these clichés of detoxing because they are precise and true. My temperature wasn't regulating. I was too hot, then too cold. My hands were clammy. I ached in such a way that I wondered if I had the flu. This didn't feel like a hangover. I felt like I was dying.

I tried to sit still but waves of nausea drove me into the communal toilets where I vomited until there was nothing left. My body continued to pantomime the act of vomiting in painful dry heaves until the room began to go black. This did not happen all at once but in that slow way that people often correlate to a Warner Brothers cartoon, going black around the edges, while the

room remains visible in a circle in the center, until the black consumes the scene and Porky Pig says, "That's all folks." Damn it, I thought, another brutally true cliché. My mind screamed *stop!* I wasn't going to die in a cluster of clichés on the stinking floor of a ship's toilet. I had to wonder if this shit ever happened to Hemingway or Kerouac but I didn't know the answer with certainty. They had alluded to such moments but put more spin on the hip of it all. I didn't feel hip. I kneeled on the floor on all fours and tried to will the room back into being. For some reason I thought of Bugs Bunny and imagined his grey and white face, his white teeth and carrot, his "What's up Doc?" Damn it! We are wired so strangely. My memory declared that being on all fours in delirium meant it was cartoon time. A woman appeared in front of me as the room swung back into view. She offered me more liquor but I waved her back.

I will never know the woman's name but she stayed with me until I could walk alternating between singing a song in Korean and laughing at me. I washed my face and gargled water from the tap, which tasted like diesel fuel and caused my mouth to sting. The small woman laughed and took a sip of her liquor, before holding it out once again. I realized the red squiggles above the sink probably said, "Do Not Drink" or maybe "Water For External Use Only," so I said, "Thank you" and had a drink.

After I struggled my way back into the hall and up the mint green metal staircase I slid open one of those excessively heavy, glossy, wooden doors that one finds on boats and made myself stand upright to pass by the upper deck passengers, not wanting them to realize the condition I was in.

Some of them were drinking tea while their children played at their feet. Some adults were reading or sleeping, their heads against small white pillows. Further forward there were lots of men and a few women laughing and drinking in booths. I found the liquor kiosk and bought a

pint of Scotch Blue Whisky and sat down and drank a glass of it. When I stood up again I was walking upright with relative ease. I went back down to the hull, to avoid an encounter with the ticket checker who was moving through the cabin. All I had was my passport with the word "Deported" stamped on it and I didn't want any more abuse. The captain said something first in Korean and then in Japanese. I assume he ordered people to return to their seats since that is what everyone was doing. I returned to my mat.

An hour later I was feeling considerably better. The woman who offered me alcohol before was nowhere to be found. At least my brain was working again. I wondered where that woman went. Maybe I imagined her. She couldn't have gone far if she were real.

Many of the men and women below deck held their children in the middle of their crossed legs or balanced them on their thighs, which served as cushions for their little heads. Some people seemed afraid. The boat was rising and falling hard, babies were crying and old men and women were rocking back and forth or standing like surfers on a board, their arms out to their sides for balance, as they stretched their legs. The only thing to hold onto in our section was a little knot of rope at the foot of each tatami mat. I held onto the knot and thought of a joke Jack used to like to tell,

"Two pieces of string walk into a bar and the bartender looks at them suspiciously. The barman then says, "Sorry, boys, we don't serve your kind here." So the pieces of string walk out again. Soon the two pieces of string are sitting outside in the gutter. They complain about being thirsty, until one piece of string jumps up and says, "Hey! I've got an idea to get into the bar." This piece of string starts twisting and turning, wriggling this way and that, pulling out a few threads here and there. His friend looks at him like he has gone completely mad. Then the scraggly piece of string walks back into the bar. The

bartender looks at him a little suspiciously and says, "You're not a piece of string, are you?" The piece of string replies "No, I'm a frayed knot."

The jarring of the hull against the waves caused the alcohol in my stomach to slosh around and for a moment I thought I might be sick again. I wish my liver processed certain fluids faster than it did. I hear something. A young boy has dropped a bag of marbles. Marbles bounce, scatter and roll in every direction, several people laugh as the round-faced little boy scurries on all fours gathering his marbles.

A couple of hours later I saw a woman mend a hole in a blouse. When she finished I offered her some Yen to use her needle and thread. I tore open the lining of my purse and sewed my passport inside it. I thanked her for the use and then crossed my legs and closed my eyes to meditate. In this state hours went by, first in the falling away of all that I had recently endured and then in the reforming of one of my favorite moments with Jack. Not because it was a perfect moment, it wasn't but because it reminds me that I never knew real pain when I was with him.

Jack and I had been talking about the future. I wanted him to work while I got my Master's degree in Creative Writing. I told him that I could work part-time if he got a job at a university. Jack rolled his eyes and said, "I've just come from academia."

I said, "You left Berlin two years ago."

He put his arms around my waist and pulled me to him, "You know what they say about time."

"That it waits for no man?" I asked squirming away and added, "I'm serious."

"Very funny but no, that it flies when you're having fun."

"Am I just fun? What about the future? I'm nearly twenty-six."

"Oh my God, are you that old? He laughed pulling me back to him again.

“Not funny.” I said but couldn’t help but smile.

“Wait here.” He said and went to our bedroom. A few minutes later he emerged with a small jewelry box. I said, “Is that for me?”

“It is indeed,” he said and got down on one knee, “Kelle, will you please open the box.”

I opened it and there was a jagged two point quartz gem stone stuffed into a slot that might have held a ring, “Ok,” I said “Thank you. It’s very pretty. What are its properties?”

It’s a quartz double generator. We can program our future together and this crystal will amplify what we visualize in meditation. He pointed to the twin peaked gem, and added, “One side each.” I kissed him and said, “I love it.”

Around 5pm we went for an early dinner at Anthony’s Homeport. It was the same restaurant where we had gone, after the Mensa meeting, the first night we’d met. I realized that Jack might not be cut out to be a professor. Not yet anyway. All of his dreams were of adventure and I couldn’t take that away from him even as he told me that he would be happy to wait for me to finish school.

I said, “It’s not like I’m over the hill or anything. I can travel with you for a couple more years. I suppose it’s better to work odd jobs now than when I’m fifty.”

After dinner we walked to Golden Garden’s Beach. Then walked the length of the beach all the way out to the point. We sat on the logs that rest high up on the beach and I noticed a big X drawn in the sand. Jack said, “Lets dig for treasure.”

I said, “Um Jack” and pointed to my dress, “There probably isn’t any treasure. I’m sure some kids drew it earlier. I don’t want to ruin my dress.”

Jack said, “You never know,” He dropped down to his knees and started digging with a flat piece of wood he had found nearby. After a couple of minutes he pulled a little treasure chest

from the sand and said, “Treasure!”

I said, “Oh my God, open it up.”

“Why don’t you open it?”

I lifted the lid and there was the tiny ring case again. This time it held an engagement ring.

“Jack?”

“Will you marry me?” He said from where he kneeled in the sand.

“Yes, yes, yes!”

Jack then said we could travel the world on our wits until I had so many stories to tell that I wouldn’t need an education. I said, “We’ll travel but I’m going to get my education sooner or later.” He said, “I know you will.” The next day we spent the morning in bed until the sheets were lost to the floor and we lay with our limbs entwined and messy hair making each other laugh.

I opened my eyes and looked around the vessel, most of the Japanese and Korean passengers were sleeping or holding each other the boat was pitching around even harder than before. Some had tied themselves to their floor knots so that they wouldn’t roll away from the rocking caused by the storm. I closed my eyes again. This time I meditated on an E.E.

Cummings poem I had memorized. I let the words roll through my mind.

maggie and milly and molly and may

maggie and milly and molly and may
went down to the beach(to play one day)

and maggie discovered a shell that sang
so sweetly she couldn't remember her troubles, and

milly befriended a stranded star
whose rays five languid fingers were;

and molly was chased by a horrible thing;
which raced sideways while blowing bubbles: and

may came home with a smooth round stone
as small as a world and as large as alone.

For whatever we lose (like a you or a me)
it's always ourselves we find in the sea.

I then lay down, took hold of my knot, and fell asleep. I dreamt of the time I was with my family at the beach with sparks flying from the fire and the chords of a guitar carrying notes into eternity. I dreamt that I was a gem being polished on the surface of the sea until a siren broke through my peace and danger was at the door.

I wanted more sleep but everyone was awake and concerned. The captain's voice was echoing over the loud speaker. His second announcement prompted a collective gasp followed by lots of fast-talking. I asked what the Captain said and the man closest to me said, "Tsunami."

I thanked him and then continued to try to recall another E.E. Cummings poem. I was calmer than anyone around me, not because I knew everything would be fine but because I knew what Jack would have said, "Worry doesn't put a dollar in the bank, solve any problems or make anyone feel better. There is no point in it." I had, of course, worried plenty recently but I didn't feel it now. Even though now seemed a very reasonable time to worry. In my mind's eye I imagined the cover of *EE Cummings Complete Poems 1904-1962*, then I imagined myself reading a poem to Jack.

I Will Wade Out

i will wade out
 till my thighs are steeped in burning flowers
I will take the sun in my mouth
and leap into the ripe air
 Alive
 with closed eyes

to dash against darkness
 in the sleeping curves of my body
 Shall enter fingers of smooth mastery
 with chasteness of sea-girls
 Will i complete the mystery
 of my flesh
 I will rise
 After a thousand years
 lipping
 flowers
 And set my teeth in the silver of the moon

The ferry horn blew twice and everyone stood up. Then the Captain made another announcement and everyone one sat down again. Those who weren't already doing so took hold of their children with one hand and held onto their floor knot with the other. I sat, knot in hand, and began to practice my story for the Korean border officials,

“I am an American tourist. I have lost my passport. I would like to contact the American consulate.”

Our boat arrived in heavy rain and wind. The worst of tsunami was still behind us but coming fast. Busan is at sea level and the customs officers seemed eager to get people out of the terminal. I delivered my lost passport speech, knowing that the Japanese might have called ahead, to urge them to complete my deportation. My Korean border guard said, “The consulate is in the middle of the city. They will be closed because of the storm. Go!” An overwhelming sense of relief filled me. I was free to forge a plan. Entering Korea had been easy, except for the fact that I was in Busan, without a valid passport, in a city about to be hit by a deadly typhoon.

The Japanese border guards who had hurled me onto the ferry had assumed that I would do as I was told but, doing what one is told is the current Japanese way, not the American way, at least not the American way of the early nineties. This is not anti-Japan. You see, Japan is an old civilization and their culture has gone through its unabashed individuality phase like all early civilizations. It was, however, so long ago that nobody thinks of the Japanese people in those terms anymore.

In my mind the Japanese culture, like all cultures throughout history, who have lasted enough millenniums, has crashed and burned, risen and fallen, risen and fallen, and fallen and



fallen, only to exhibit little bursts of success, followed by a modest level of security, and an acceptance of hardship. Most old nations, the world over are the same. They muddle through with caution like old people walking on the ice.

They gradually abandon revolutions because revolutions seem like a lot of work. This is true even if daily life in a given society isn't going that well for the average citizen. This because people fear things could get worse, of course, inaction guarantees that things always get worse but at such a rate that few complain. They are defeated by apathy.

Social systems learn to rely on exhaustion as a form of social control, working people until all they do is live to work. This causes stress and the social system hands people vice or self-image idolatry to fill the void, insuring that nobody feels good enough to exist as they are

because they are too busy either trying to destroy themselves or, conversely, in creating the illusion that they are something more than the rest.

The nations that don't advance down this path are consumed by corruption. Their people do not know security but instead live in a world of cautious reduction and forced mediocrity, mixed with terror. At which point, for a society to transcend mediocrity, it needs to maintain creativity and imagination as well as both a sense of unity and individuality. Hope can counter the pain of change.

I wanted to get back to Japan and I was going to find a way to do it. I wasn't going to live in Japan indefinitely, things were changing, but I wanted to leave on my own terms. Not like this. It was time to make some decisions since complacency wasn't working for me.

A man mopping water off the floor of the Busan Terminal told me to hurry because the tsunami was going to hit the coast within the hour. He set down his mop and held the door open for me with both hands because the wind was pushing from the other side. A flood of water that poured in as he let me out replaced all the water he had mopped up.

I found a taxi driver outside the loading dock and I said, "Take me to the closest hotel." In perfect English he said, "Are you sure?" A wave of relief hit me. His taxi had thatched cushions, pomegranate colored prayer beads and a little Buddha figure glued to the dash. It felt so good to be understood. He didn't overcharge me either, like so many taxi drivers do around the world when they know you are new to town. He told me I should go directly to the consulate because of the storm.

I said, "I just need to take a shower after being on that ferry for the last 36 hours."

He said, "You won't need a shower."

I said, “Seriously?” and pointed at my sweaty hair and smeared mascara. I didn’t mention I’d been violently ill too, “I’m a mess. I’ll be quick.”

The driver reluctantly drove three blocks to a two-story hotel that I will never know the name of because its sign was written in Hangunmal or Hangugeo or Gugeo. I couldn’t tell which of the three variances of the Korean national language I was trying to decipher but it didn’t matter because I wouldn’t be there long. On other trips I had flown to Seoul or to Busan Regional. The ferry was supposed to be a fun change of pace but timing is everything and none of this journey had timed out favorably.

People were streaming out of the main entrance of the hotel. Inside the remaining staff was huddled around someone talking on the phone. They let me into a room and said, “Leave as quickly as possible.” Before I had finished drying my hair and redressing in my sweat soaked clothes the power went out. When I went downstairs everyone was gone.

There were no taxis to take me to the consulate and it probably wouldn’t be open anyway because Busan’s citizens had left. I went back inside the hotel and looked behind the front desk for a flashlight and a telephone. I dialed zero before I realized there was no dial tone. Even if there had been a dial tone “zero” might not have been the right number to try. Everything in Korea was, of course, different than the USA or Japan.

I was very unequipped for the disaster at hand and the hotel’s gift shop was unattended for obvious reasons. Its wares dangled from hooks and hangers, more expensive items were in cases. I was not inclined to steal, so I wrote a note that detailed the three items I took and promised to pay for them after the disaster. I considered leaving the money right then and there but it seemed like the wrong person might find the note. I tore the tags off of a backpack and put a pair of light pink Hello Kitty socks and a white sweatshirt that said “Busan” in dark blue script

inside. These, ironically, were the least embarrassing articles of clothing available in the gift shop.

The tsunami was ahead of schedule. Debris flew through the air to the rhythm of the rain. The water was ankle deep in the streets, buildings were shuttered and a few people had chained their cars to lampposts. I initially took this as people not wanting their cars stolen but later realized that this precaution was to prevent the cars from being washed down the street and out to sea.

A few people appeared in the street running their umbrella's out-turned. A Korean couple, carrying large suitcases, appeared at one end of the block but quickly disappeared around a corner. Far away, on the hills at the edge of the city, I could see swarms of people or rather I assumed they were people because I had never seen land move upward, in an array of color as the distant hill seemed to be moving. There was one lit building, high on a hill that seemed to be the universal goal. It wasn't dark yet but I knew with the electricity out it would not be long before it was impossible to know where one was. I checked the flashlight and its batteries were strong. I stuffed it into my new backpack and began to walk toward the light on the hill.

The water was rose fast. Cars crashed into buildings and shattered storefront glass. The air felt electric. The wind was too strong for me to walk against without my being bent over to reduce resistance. I kept hold of things, the side of a building, a lamppost, a bicycle rack, another lamppost, a pile of cars. Then the water began to rise higher. I found two teenage girls clinging to one of the lampposts in my path. The girls tourists from Japan, separated from their parents since the storm hit. One carried a Prada purse, the other a Hello Kitty backpack. The thick grey-brown water was almost up to the youngest one's waist. She was lifting out of the mess each

time she tried to climb the lamppost with her sister's help, only to be knocked back down by the wind. It was beginning to get dark.

I saw the body of a young man. The back of his head looked crushed and blood streamed into the water around him. I took the two girls with me. Water came from every direction in torrents, accompanied by a sound that reminded me of a production of King Lear I had been in. I pointed to the lighted building on the hill and the girls nodded. The sound of rushing water was all around us, dripping, gushing and pushing us back. It tugged at me and seemed to demand that everything get out of its way. I saw a man about twenty feet from me slip from the building he was holding onto, he was swept away like a child at a water park, down the street and out of sight.

The girls, Yuki and Umi, said that their father had told them to wait for him at their hotel while he looked for their mother. They would have done as they were told if the owner of the hotel had not forced them to leave so that he could lock the doors. The girls cried and clung to each other and me as we pushed our way uphill, a slow moving train. The streets were now raging rivers and with every surge of wind we lost ground. At times the waves were waist high or higher. Korea still had an open sewer system, similar to Japan's in the nineties. This meant each wave was mixed with sewage. There was no power at sea level. It either shorted out or was intentionally cut to prevent electrocution. More waves came, this time they were filled with rats some swimming others drowned. Two more human bodies floated by. One was a small woman with a pink and white checked skirt. The other also small framed with white hair, most likely someone's halmeoni or grandmother.

Every foot of ground we gained was exhausting. I had to keep the girls in front of me to keep them from being washed away. We moved, a mass of clinging arms and legs. Umi quickly

discarded her Hello Kitty backpack and Yuki reluctantly let go of her Prada bag to reduce drag and to free her hands. I kept my backpack because even though it was wet, it wasn't saturated and I thought we might need it if we found food. I was grateful to be tall enough for it to still be out of the water.

The youngest girl was knocked from our cluster by a plank of wood that seemed to come out of nowhere. She vanished under the muck. Her sister started screaming and tried to break away from me but I grabbed her and demanded that she hang onto the backpack and a lamppost while I looked for Umi.

Miraculously Umi reappeared on top of a chained car but she wouldn't be able to hold on for long because the car was thrashing back and forth in the water like a giant angry fish. I carefully made my way to the girl. A dead dog caught up to my back before I reached Umi and I reflexively shoved it away and lost my balance. The water hurtled me forward and I soon collided with Umi's car, where I had to fight my way to my feet, terrified that I had nearly been pulled underneath it. Even though we were heavily weighted with sewage water I let Umi climb onto my back. I was afraid she would slip away from me again but she held on tight. It took the two of us at least thirty minutes for me to walk the sixty feet back to Yuki because the water intensity was exacerbated by the street's incline. The water continued to get higher and I was still hungover and horribly thirsty, taunted by the undrinkable water that engulfed us.

Yuki had begun fighting up stream with my backpack but the water quickly forced her off her feet and sent her hurtling back to us. We all clung to a lamppost to catch our breath. I managed to put the now soaked pack on before we set off again but, before I did, I took off the long shirt I was wearing and tied the three of us together by our belt loops. I don't know if binding myself to the girls was wise or not but it worked and we weren't separated again.

I worried we wouldn't find food once out of town. An hour and a half after our struggle began we reached a high point in the city that the water hadn't engulfed. It was a relief to catch our breath and to sit down on pavement that only ran with water instead of rushed with it. My arms and back ached. Here, once again in ankle deep water, felt a bit like being put back at the beginning of a challenge. It seemed we might have to do it all again if we didn't hurry.

There was more standing water inside of the shop and it was clear to me from where we had come that the water was still rising around us. I told the girls to wait out front while I went into a small empty grocery store. I grabbed a bag of cookies, cigarettes, a lighter and two liters of whisky. I put these into a plastic bag and crammed it all into my wet backpack. After that I took a loaf of bread, cheese, apples and two Coca Colas and put the lot in a plastic bag, and then put the plastic bag into a second mesh bag that I found behind the counter. The mesh bag could be worn like a sling. The bags were heavy but everything seemed lighter without thousands of gallons of water rushing at me. I wrote the address of the store down on a pad in my purse but the ink blurred on the wet paper and I wondered if I would be able to read it later. I hoped so. I wanted to repay them for all that I took. Outside I could see that the water was catching up to us. The three steps that led down into the store now looked like a fountain flowing water onto the floor.

Once I made it outside again I panicked because the girls weren't where I had left them. Then I heard, "Kerry, Kerry!" My name pronounced with a Japanese accent. They had wisely moved further up the hill to avoid the rising water. The rest of our journey was difficult but not unbearable. The flashlight was filled with water but strangely still worked. We tripped over unseen rocks, stepped in holes, but we kept going. We were almost happy, because we were only walking in rain instead of fighting a flood. At that uplifted moment my flashlight stopped

working and I learned how afraid of the dark Umi was. She started crying and sat down with her arms around my legs. I told her we had to keep going but only Yuki could get her to take one of each of our hands and continue up the hill between us. This came in handy when we came across a large hole in the ground. One of my feet caught the edge of a hole. Umi would have fallen all the way into it if her sister and I hadn't had hold of her.

When we finally cleared the trees we could see our goal less than a quarter of a mile away. The light I could see from town was a huge beacon up close. It cast a cone of light that made the last part of our journey easy.

It looked like a nice hotel, not that anything would have seemed nice compared to the soak, stench and blindness, from which we emerged but by "nice" I mean that this place was actually way of upscale from anything I saw in town. I was both relieved and worried because I didn't have much money left after I had paid for the taxi my Busan hotel. When I checked in the manager had insisted on payment upfront. Before we went in I gave the girls their Cokes and a few cookies each because I didn't know what the food situation would be like inside.

As we rounded the corner of the hotel I saw about a thousands of people. I had imagined more from the moving hill I saw earlier. There was also an impromptu gate with dozens of people outside of it. I took the girls by the hand and we pushed our way to the front to ask what the emergency plan was. The Korean guard spoke English and said, "You can go in." I hadn't expected that but was thrilled. The girls and I started past the gate but the guard stopped us.

"No, not them. You can go in" he said.

I said, "I can't leave them out here alone."

"Are they your children?" He asked.

"No," I said

“Then leave them.”

“I’m not going to leave them. We came here together. I told their parents I would watch them” I lied. He considered the situation and then said, “Fine, go to the front desk.”

Inside the lobby there were dozens of local people, covered in sewage water, sitting about the lobby and a few staff in perfectly clean uniforms. I didn’t touch the desk because it was dry and I was dripping with wastewater. I said, “I am an American citizen and I am responsible for finding these two girls until they are reunited with their parents.” The clerk looked at as and frowned. I continued, “Is there somewhere we can shower or dry off for the night?” He gestured for bellman and said something to him in Korean before he turned back to me and said, “You can stay in the German room.” You are the only American here.

“What is the German room?” I asked.

“A room filled with Germans.” He replied.

“Of course,” I said.

We followed the bellman to a room on the second floor and just as the front desk clerk had said it was a room filled with people from Germany. He hadn’t mentioned that the dozen Germans were in a single room with one queen sized bed or that everyone would be sitting about in their underwear. The latter point, since my shirt had been sacrificed to earlier in the day, made the fact that I was only wearing a bra and pants less embarrassing. After everyone, including us, had showered and washed their clothes with hand soap and shampoo Yuki and Umi were given the bed, both girls were asleep almost instantly from exhaustion. I hoped I had been right to tell them we would find their parents in the morning.

Many of the men and women were smoking so the room was thick with smoke even though one of the windows was open, allowing the drapes to billow in and out, churning the

smoke like an old-time fireplace bellows. I introduced myself and pointed to the sleeping girls as I gave their names. They gave their names in return, Karl, Alex, Anton, Otto, Lars, Carston, Arno and Marcel were the men aged eighteen to eighty. Lara, Astrid, Effi, Paula were the women, all in their forties. Many of them were related or friends, they were a tour group. I thought they were all so kind to not complain because the twelve of them were a crowd and Yuki and Umi had taken their only bed.

Astrid said that she was sorry they didn't have anything to eat. I said, "We can have cheese sandwiches and cookies." Everyone's mood changed quickly from weary to cheery at the thought of a meal. I gave all the food to Astrid who dispensed it. Astrid told people to consider saving some food for tomorrow and, a couple did, but most of us, myself included, were starving and ate the dry bread and cheese preferring to be happy today than to worry about tomorrow. Astrid also carefully set aside two sandwiches for Yuki and Umi for when they woke up. The oldest gentlemen, Otto, said he had some coffee if anyone wanted any, enough for tonight and tomorrow morning for everyone. There was a small kettle in the room and we soon had coffees all around. Before everyone began to drink their coffee I tentatively said, "I have two bottle so whisky too, if anyone wants a bit for their coffee." One never knows if one is among non-drinkers or drinkers, it is best to be cautious since many non-drinkers could be quite judgmental. Astrid's face lit up, "I'd love some whisky!" Then Alex and Anton said, "Me too" simultaneously which made us laugh. Soon the whole room was merrier. Karl had a deck of cards and he held them up and said, "I'd suggest strip poker but it looks like it would be a short game." Everybody laughed then Karl showed us a few card tricks instead.

The next day a man from the American Consulate appeared and took the girls and I back to the disaster area of Busan. Yuki and Umi were dropped off to their parents at the Japanese

Consulate never to be seen by me again. All the water had subsided over night but the gnarl of debris of filth remained. Forty-one people were killed, thirty more were missing and it was time for me to get back into Japan.

I told the man at the consulate that I had lost my passport in the disaster and that I was supposed to be travelling on to Japan to meet up with some friends. Mr. Gordy Johnson let me call my parents just because I wanted to hear their voices free of charge and also allowed me to contact Gaby. I told her I was safe but that I needed her to send me some of my money via Western Union so that I could fly back into the country. She said, "Didn't you take the ferry? I was terrified because of the news reports of the typhoon." I told her, "The monkey is in the watchtower." She said, "I'm glad you aren't dead again."

I said, "Me too."

The first night after the disaster I slept at a hotel in town provided by the consulate. The day after that my money arrived from Western Union and I went to see a Korean monastery, one more day after that and my passport was ready. It was time to find a flight. I decided the only way to get back in to Korea would be to fly to a different city. I thought I might be on the Osaka Port Authorities radar but it was possible that the rest of Japan didn't know anything about me. I didn't want to chance Osaka's airport so I flew to Nagano with my new passport. I was passed through the gates of Nagano Airport customs with the same ease I had experienced in Busan, Korea before the typhoon. I quickly made my way to the Shinkasen train and was in Osaka four hours later. When I arrived at the apartment Gaby was at work and I was alone for the first time in a week. I showered and, before I'd dressed, looked in the mirror and suddenly saw the person that I was, an amalgam of events both tragic and surreal, the woman who had lost her fiancé, who had fled to Japan, who had acted as though nothing mattered, that thought she hadn't

mattered until now. The woman who had been deported into a disaster, who had fought her way through a typhoon, who cared about people and loved them enough to risk her life for them. I closed my eyes and said, “Jack.” He appeared instantly behind my eyelids, “Yes?” But I didn’t answer because Jack always knows what I am thinking. He hugged me in my mind’s eye and we said goodbye without words. I felt alive with love and power. It had been in me all the while.

Later, Gaby asked if I wanted to go out for a drink but I said I “No, I’m going to move to Korea.” I surprised myself when I said it. I added, “In spite of the disaster, it seemed like a nice place.” There was a Buddhist monastery I had learned of the day I left Busan, a place high in the hills that allowed men and women to live, for extended periods of time. It was a meditation retreat, ancient because the temple had existed in its location for millennia, modern in its admittance of women. I stayed for six months.



I had to laugh at myself because even though I felt someone who had found their way home my temple clothes made me look like I was in a cult. The monastery was magical place of contemplation, art and healing. Before I left I could meditate for an entire day and the day would feel like an instant but the experience felt eternal in its emotional depth and serenity. My senses had come alive again. The scent of white and purple magnolias, always rich in aroma, seemed even more acute. A sort of pleasant synesthesia or, union of my senses, had come to be where I could smell purple and touch scent. There was so much beauty. It filled my being until my grief collapsed under its strength. I was reconnected, more connected.

Now I can craft my dreams both by day and by lucid nights, ride a beam of light across space or sense the leaf rustling love of the wind. Jack's kisses were transformed to sun-touched delights, not of pain but of new certainty that I am able to love again. And so I did again fall with other senses that a writer can cherish; after the friction of the surface, into the depths, like a stone, one of Earth's gems, skipping across the surface of the sea, that appears to be lost, as it sinks into darkness but that has really only entered a new world.

The Poetics of *Polishing a Gem on the Surface of the Sea*

When I set out to write *Polishing a Gem on the Surface of the Sea* I expected to write about the challenges and joys people face when they live in a culture other than their own. Eventually, however, I realized that I was writing about finding myself after grief. I focused on a period in the 90's when I had moved to Japan, shortly after my fiancé's fatal motorcycle crash. During my two and a half year odyssey in Japan, I worked 60+ hours a week, in nightclubs and as an English teacher for Hitachi and I explored excess in the hopes of alleviating the pain of loss. In the end, my book is about the process of grief and its ability to obscure reality and transform a person over time but it is also about understanding the privileges one is given or denied based on race and about becoming a writer. The book began as non-fiction, advanced to creative non-fiction and now is decidedly a fiction and poetry hybrid. I will first look at the different genres used in *Polishing a Gem on the Surface of the Sea* before detailing the major themes and ideas.

The non-fiction elements of my book are quite concrete. I did travel to Japan after a painful loss and the majority of events such as teaching English, bartending, falling off a building, getting hit by a taxi, nearly being killed by a member of the Yakuza, jumping into the Dotonbori River, and being deported into a typhoon in Korea, before returning to Japan by circuitous means all happened. As did many of the other events described, including my stateside encounter with Allen Ginsberg and my eventual move to Korea. However, it is important to remember that a lot of time has passed and that I am presenting events as they seem to me now. I consider Fanny Howe's *Bewilderment* and W.G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn* influential. Howe

because she seems to think out loud in her work and often does not resolve her bewildered state and Sebald because he deviates from straight narrative by disappearing into different channels of thought or research that, although seemingly not directly aligned with the primary narrative, are aligned by the reader who is able to make connections intended or not. Sebald wrote how people think and I deployed his technique of willful distraction. Since people are not always on course and, the primary character Kelle was off course in the narrative for most of the book, it seemed a good method to reflect my character's habit of avoiding a direct confrontation with loss.

Many of the moments between the major events of the book and my expression of these events are softened by time and nostalgia. Fiction to me is a memory left alone in one's mind for too long or an idea that sprouts from experience that requires buffering or embellishment for the author to convey what they want to convey. Besides, few can recall every detail of every conversation they have had with absolute clarity and I wanted the freedom to embellish and to deviate from reality. I allowed myself to imagine communications that might have happened based on my knowledge of the real people I had spent time with. And, I gave myself permission to read people's expressions, as though a look were a language of its own, and put those physical moments into words. Additionally, I made my inner thoughts concrete and amplified the physicality of my distress. I wanted to capture the essence of the experience and felt that in some instances it would be more interesting to, for example, have the character literally be frozen in place by her emotions rather than figuratively.

Events are also out of sequence in the book and some characters names are made up, including the character Jack who is a composite character created from my partner who died (Chris Sorten) and my current love Martin O'Malley. Yoshi, Trevor, Ian and Kelle are all based on real people but what they say and do is a mixture of fact and fiction. Gabriella Rios is a real

person. She was in the Miss Universe pageant and on the radio in Japan. Ms. Rios hasn't approved anything in this work so I choose to call her drug use fiction. She wouldn't appreciate my rendition of her family in this story either and I do not wish to disparage them in anyway, therefore these activities have also been declared fiction, improvable departures from reality. Her family was involved in the Ecuadoran government but they were not likely part of a collusive arrangement with the Japanese authorities. And, even if they were, I wouldn't be comfortable calling it fact, since I am barely comfortable calling it fiction. In fact, if anyone became determined to investigate my story they might not even be able to prove I worked at Hitachi because I worked, as we say in the USA, "under the table" because of my illegal status.

The creative non-fiction elements are also out of sequence and some of the moments are altered to suit the story. For example, in the enumerated poem I describe a vacation to California with Jack, this instance and a few others, happened with other people. In some cases years after my return from Japan. I merely ascribed certain moments or sayings to the character "Jack" for the sake of the narrative. I did this selectively, only choosing moments that captured the essence of the person I had lost. If a memory caused me to think of them, then it became reasonable material for this story. Throughout *Polishing a Gem on the Surface of the Sea* there are many moments where I could easily have told the truth verbatim but there was too much ground to cover in a short period of time and I wanted to condense events and found that creative editing worked better than clinging to the facts. I also chose to go beyond the scope of any lived event by attributing future emotional gains to my younger self. But, even with all of that said, I am not entirely certain that creative non-fiction isn't the best category for my work.

I chose to call it fiction because beyond the inaccurate sequencing, hybrid characters and personal deviations from fact, I also explored Heidegger, Quantum Physics and psychology. At

times pushing the boundaries out a bit further than even creative non-fiction might allow, so as exploring what, I believe, will be considered fact in the future. Everything I discuss in the book is possible but not all of it is proven. Some professionals in these fields might challenge the ideas because there are theorists who believe in a different essential construction of the universe. Science has been moving in the direction expressed in my thesis therefore it is also likely that I will find plenty of support in academia for every word written in the theory sections.

Two other points of fiction, my friend Yoshi's story doesn't end in real life as happily as it does for the character in *Polishing a Gem on the Surface of the Sea*. The person who I link her with in Ireland lives in America, and Yoshi is still teaching in Japan. A similar fiction is written for the character Gaby. She doesn't fall in love but instead has a religious epiphany that entices her into a new life as a born again Christian. We have long since lost touch. I made these transgressions because I felt something positive needed to occur to cut through the drumbeat of despair. By giving Yoshi and Gaby happy romantic endings I thought I might suggest one for the author in the future as well. Additionally, with regard to the character of Gaby Rios, I considered sharing her real story, or at least what I know of it, but I decided that I wanted the reader to know the character Gaby Rios as I remember her, when we were friends in Japan, even if her version of herself at this time would likely be different than the one I describe in my book. I should note that I would not dream of saying that my version of anyone in *Polishing A Gem On The Surface Of The Sea* is absolute. My own characterization, of the character Kelle, is somewhat removed from reality, primarily in the constant drinking that I describe. Nobody could be as fit as I was and drink that much but I did drink to excess and often and found myself in considerable danger because of it.

My ultimate decree of “fiction,” however, came because in addition to writing about travel, meditation, drinking, growing and changing, I also decided to have a conversation on race and culture. I had little to no thoughts of race and racial issues during the journey that this story is based upon. But, when it came time to write about the experience, I asked myself *what was a travel story without some recognition of one’s place in the cultural exchange?* The further down this rabbit hole I travelled the more I realized that I had been changing during all of my travels and not always for the greater good. I discuss the strain of not speaking a language for an extended period of time and how it can create division, even from the host country. I didn’t like that and, in hindsight, I could see that I had behaved like a country crasher, my own term for a person who behaves differently abroad than they would at home. I also wanted to explore entitlement, white privilege and national identity after realizing one could acquire abroad what you didn’t have at home even if it did make one feel like they were in a masquerade.

To clarify the aspects of this part of the narrative I must first look to Houston A. Baker Jr.’s book *Critical Memory: Public Spheres, African American Writing, and Black Fathers and Sons in America*. In this book Baker Jr. discussed the concepts of “likability” and “clearance” (*Critical Memory: Public Spheres, African American Writing, and Black Fathers and Sons in America*, Baker Jr., 2001). These are applicable to my circumstance in a near opposite way to what Baker Jr. describes as the black experience in America. Baker Jr. suggests that a black person has to give up culture and imitate the dominant culture so as to be viewed as credible by the dominant culture, whereas I only had to be from the United States to experience privilege in Japan. Baker Jr.’s concept of “clearance” also applies. In this instance Baker Jr. suggests, a disguise of “likability” is adopted for black people in the USA to gain clearance to the privileges of the dominant (white) society, privileges typically taken for granted by those who possess them

and I was given work privileges over the people of Japan. This is something I took for granted and thought acceptable because all of my white counterparts were given the same privileges that I was being granted. In Japan I was perceived as the dominant culture even though I was in Japan. I should have been viewed as a minority. This was not absolute. In the book I discuss the instances of racism that I experienced in Japan but these were relatively few compared to the “clearance” I was given as an American (Baker Jr., 2001). The Japanese people seemed to imagine me as someone who lived a life that is opulent, star-studded, and somehow better than the lives that they themselves were leading based on their ideas of my home country. Basically my credibility was born of propaganda. I was automatically accepted and likeable in spite of periodic outrageous behavior because of the Japanese peoples’ preconceived, and widely accepted, idea that Americans are kooky but the winners of the world and therefore exempt from scrutiny. I did not correct anyone’s misperception of American exceptionalism because, at the time, I didn’t realize that this put anyone else at a disadvantage but, in hindsight, I can see that it did. I was able to acquire work without credentials based on my nation of origin and appearance. I hope that *Polishing a Gem on the Surface of the Sea* reveals the illogic of appearance privilege. There are plenty of people in Japan who were qualified to do the jobs that I was doing. Currently, all over the world, racial identity and appearance is used for marketing purposes and this is what I was a part of, even if though I did not recognize the problem of it at the time.

The primary role of the enumerated poem is to express the poetry that existed between the characters Jack and Kelle but it also blurs time and seeds information into the larger work. The poem begins with the character of Kelle and quickly moves into her relationship with Jack. The further into the poem we advance the more we move into the present but even at the end of

the poem we don't feel as though we are entirely at the end of the grief. The final story "Typhoon" reveals the emotional resolution for the primary character.

In the long poem I also repeat two phrases "Contemporary writing is so monotonous" and "The End." These two lines are both meant to convey the relentlessness of grief and the seemingly unending emotional difficulty one experiences after a tragic loss. I originally had started the enumerated line "The End" in the middle and continued with it to the end of the book but later felt that the line was diminished by too much repetition. In the interest of recapturing its impact I reduced the number of repetitions to a handful of pages and returned to the unique lines until the poem's conclusion just before the final story.

Numerous themes are engaged across the seemingly discordant sections of the book. A closer examination of the passages or chapters, however, will reveal many connections. The sections are also broad enough to allow the reader to imagine connections that might only be conceivable through each reader's unique measuring devices, filters and subjective interpretation.

Some of the themes are loss, love, my identity as a woman, being a writer, being born with specific gifts, communication, acceptance, change, and postulations on the nature of reality both real and imagined, including some that fall between or in the as yet unknown. To this end I enter additional micro themes of heritage, difference and similarity, superstition, reflections on the shifting roles of women and conceptions of intelligence and spirituality.

In the section "Contemplating" my somewhat radical ideas about inclusivity and the carte blanche sharing of culture is included because I am not certain that division is working toward humanity's collective advantage. Over my lifetime I've observed the absorption of my Native

American culture into the dominant culture after my family gave up tribal rights. There was nothing to tether us to the tribe and we drifted into the dominant culture even though we were still as related by our heritage as much as any affiliated tribal member. I find that absorption, for me ended up feeling less damaging, than division. Living on a reservation is stigmatized and reservation life is often tied to poverty. The dominant society doesn't want to work with tribal members and the tribal members don't want to work with the dominant society. What happens is a culture clash where neither group entirely respects or values the other. Arguments over taxes and spiritual iconography and so forth ensue and the "us" and "them" mindset becomes firm on both sides. This might be preferable to many but I think we all might benefit from sharing wealth and spirituality but I respect people who believe differently.

Contemplating" isn't meant to answer questions or suggest a single solution but instead it asks people to consider what might be gained by less cultural division.

The sections or chapters span time, from early childhood and teen years, to adulthood in the 1990's, with brief forays into 2014. There are two primary reasons for the span of time. I wanted to use different tones of voice to convey change, to indicate patterns and similarities across time. The second reason is to elucidate the complexity of any individual. We are, in many ways, all our ages at one time, a totality of child, adolescent and adult. The sections titled "Literary Heroes" and "War Heroes" I look at the influences of heroes of all kinds. Some of my literary heroes were fond of excess and it is likely that part of my decision to write and live certain levels of excess in my earlier life was because of the literary greats who did the same. Some are mentioned to provide early spiritual influence and all provide the beginnings of patterns that we see playing out across time in the book.

The section headings were changed many times but I finally settled on the following concepts. First there are many gerund titles. These were chosen because a gerund is derived from a verb or action word and also can function as a noun. The concept is a person, place or thing in motion. Other sections are titled “War Heroes” and “Literary Heroes.” All of the “Heroes” sections indicate influences that alter the character Kelle at some point in her life. There are headings that indicate a specific place “Tokyo” for Tokyo and “Osaka” for Osaka and then there are two unique subheadings. The first of the unique headings, “Jack Daniels.” I wanted to give extra importance to the product and its name links to characters throughout the book. The second “Typhoon” is the final section and therefore worthy of a unique title that points to a significant event.

At books end *Polishing a Gem on the Surface of the Sea* has suggested many things. It suggests that we are all gems in need of polishing and that change is inevitable. It also explores chaos as a catalyst of change and the need for us to understand that change can often come unexpectedly. I hope it also peaks an interest in meditation, reality creation, and recognition of Heidegger’s suggestion that we will do what we must to make order out of chaos.

