

A Miracle Mindset

What I
Discovered
Looking For
One Miracle
Every Day



Mark
Barger Elliott

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For inquiries: markbargerelliott@gmail.com

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Welcome

One day I had the idea to start a daily blog.

The goal would be to awaken every morning and to notice and write about one miracle, or as author Joan Didion put it, a “shimmer.” Didion added as encouragement, “Look hard enough, and you can’t miss the shimmer. It’s there.”

What was I looking for exactly? What is the definition of a miracle?

The Latin *miraculum*, from which the word comes, means “a wondrous occurrence.” Miracles have been also defined as an intervention, divine or otherwise. Another source is a 5,000 year old word, *smeiros*, which means “smile.”

Over 500 posts later it’s been gratifying to watch that simple idea grow to having these posts read thousands of times and for the idea to forever change how I walk through a day, namely, I’ve learned to trust the shimmer appears.

This small book is a collection of 125 of these posts where I wrote about an experience, a book or an article I encountered, or a sudden insight. Posts that reminded me, for example, anything is always possible, to opt for awe, and life loves on.

A special word of gratitude to those who have joined me on this journey. I am forever grateful for the time you set aside to read these posts and to write with comments and suggestions. For those of you who were given this book, or just came across it, welcome!

My hope is these pages might remind and even inspire us to open our eyes to the unique gifts each day offers. Because the shimmer is waiting for us to discover it.

With appreciation,

Mark Barger Elliott

1. Opt for Awe

We were sitting on the roof deck of a friend's house when he said "look up." In the sky above us was a string of pearls flying through space.

Before we could conclude we were witnessing perhaps an alien invasion he added, "those are Starlink satellites."

I later learned how a Starlink satellite weighs about 600 pounds, is the size of a table, flies at an altitude of about 340 miles, and there are approximately 4,000 above us providing internet to over 50 countries.

After discussing how remarkable the sight was, as well as the technology, our friend summed up the experience when he said, "I guess this just reminds us to opt for awe."

Life can be extraordinarily challenging sometimes.

But there are also extraordinary moments that unfold that invite us to step away from those challenges and to enjoy a spectacle, to savor the wonder, and to opt for awe.

2. Anything is Always Possible

Daniel Bard had the gift to throw a baseball 100 miles an hour.

One pitch he threw found an online audience because it had never really been seen before - it flew at 99 miles an hour and then curved like a slower pitch, which almost never happens.

From 2009-2011 Bard pitched for the Boston Red Sox and became famous for his talent, but then things suddenly went awry. Bard could no longer control where his pitches went. He missed the catcher's mitt by feet not inches. He hit batters. His pitches sailed over everyone's head.

Bard was sent to the minor leagues to regain his form, but it only got worse. After trying to make it back to the major leagues for five years, he ended up in the Florida Coast League pitching to teenagers and retired in 2017.

Bard eventually found work as a mentor to younger players in the Arizona Diamondbacks organization offering insights he had learned reading self-help books and meditating. He was a success. The younger players loved his stories of striking out Hall of Fame players. He found he was a great listener and could help other players along their journey.

Then one day Bard started to throw a baseball again and it unexpectedly felt great. He built a throwing net at his home to practice. He slowly regained his control. In a wonderful article in *The New Yorker*, Louisa Thomas describes how Bard began to see his story and life as the younger players saw it, and put into practice advice he was giving them: "The way you talk to yourself and the way you view yourself is who you become."

In 2020, at the age of 35, pitching for Colorado, Daniel Bard made it back to the Major Leagues and was named Comeback Player of the Year. He then returned to Boston where he last pitched for the Red Sox over a decade ago.

Daniel Bard reminds us it is never too late to try again or to realize a dream.

Anything is always possible.

3. Sisu Yourself

One way to feel better is to increase our repertoire of emotions.

A great way to do that is to learn the names of positive emotions in other cultures.

Let me give you an example, the word sisu. It's a Finnish word that literally means "guts" or "intestines."

For Finns the word captures the essence of their country, in particular as they remember how they defeated the Russian Army in World War 2 and remained independent as a nation.

To feel sisu, explains Emilia Lahti, a sisu researcher from Aalto University in Helsinki, is to recognize "we all have these moments when we all need to reach beyond what we think we are capable of. At the end of physical, emotional and psychological endurance. And then we have some kind of force that allows us to continue even when we thought we couldn't." That's sisu.

Life can test us and there are moments when we all want to give up.

But when we don't feel like pressing forward; when we're on the threshold where faith starts to become doubt, we can choose to sisu ourselves and within that emotion, to discover a second wind and step forward to face a challenge with vigor and hope.

4. Golconda Your Emotions

Ralph Waldo Emerson observed how the ultimate goal of a reader is to become a “Golconda” - someone “who runs everything through a sieve and keeps the nuggets.”

Emerson was referring to the famous Golconda mines in India where miners would dig until hitting ground water and then sieve out the dirt until identifying the diamonds. “To Golconda” is a helpful image and charge - to sieve out the dirt until all that is left is what is valuable and worth keeping.

This concept can be applied to reading, but also - if we think about it - to anything in our lives including our emotions.

Every day we experience all kinds of feelings and we can, if we choose, Golconda our emotions until all that remains is what is worth keeping.

We can, in other words, Golconda out of the muddy water of our lives joy and happiness, peace and contentment.

5. Shenlok, Not Shenpa

There is a word in Tibetan Buddhism that describes what we've all felt at one time. It's the word shenpa.

Shenpa can be translated as "attachment," but as author Pema Chödrön explains, it can also be thought of as feeling "hooked."

It's when we experience, as she observes, a "tightening, a tensing, a sense of closing down... withdrawing, not wanting to be where we are." Shenpa can also "hook" us into other emotions such as jealousy, anger, and not feeling at ease in one's life.

The remedy to shenpa, Chödrön suggests, is the Tibetan word shenlok, which means to "renounce," and to create space in our heart, soul and mind for the "hook" to slide out from inside us.

Shenlok, not shenpa, is a way to orient to live our lives, as shenlok creates space and shenpa closes it.

6. How Hard You Believe

We saw the new Indiana Jones film and in a scene with his goddaughter, Indiana says, "A few times in my life, I've seen things. Things I can't explain. And I've come to believe it's not so much what you believe, it's how hard you believe it."

When was the last time you believed in something - God, a faith tradition, a goal, an idea, a person - hard?

You believed with grit, determination, and a steady act of faith that took something out of you; it left you winded.

Sometimes, not always, our faith in something needs to be that hard.

7. Time to Sploot?

Do you know what it means to sploot?

You've likely heard of spelunking - exploring cool underground caves - and you know what it is to splatter something across a surface, like paint on the floor. Put the two together - spelunk and splatter - and you get the idea of what it means to sploot.

Those on Instagram will know that sploot is slang for the position squirrels take when their stomach hits the ground and their legs stretch out behind and in front of them.

Over this past week, as temperatures have soared all over the world, Instagram influencers have posted pictures of splooting squirrels. Why do squirrels sploot?

Simply, to cool down. To rest. To stop. Especially, when things get too hot.

In an NPR interview, Andrea Rummel, a bioscientist at Rice University, explains, "For every kind of thermal regulatory mechanism, there is a point at which it doesn't work anymore." Meaning, there comes a time when it's too hot and humid, and our bodies can no longer cool down on their own, so we have to find a place to "sploot."

So the next time you feel yourself overheating, physically, emotionally (we have language for this when we say someone is at a "boiling point"), find your cool place, stop moving, socializing, exercising, working and just sploot.

8. Sivers Principle

Never go down a road you recognize.

We call this the “Sivers Principle,” after author Derek Sivers, who suggests we do “nothing twice.”

Not eat the same food every week.

Or pursue the same thought or topic of conversation.

Or wear the same clothes.

Siver’s idea is that when we offer our mind, body and soul new experiences, we feel more alert, engaged, and alive.

When was the last time you did something for the first time?

The Sivers Principle has led us to take unique ways home from work, choose new inexpensive restaurants, select playlists with new music, and even to rearrange the apps on our phones.

What might happen if you ordered your eggs over easy instead of scrambled? You read a hardcover novel instead of listening to a news podcast. You signed up for a free online course on something you always wanted to learn like graphic design?

What if you embraced the Sivers Principle in your own life?

What is one new thing you could try today?

9. Pendulum the Sway

One of the strangest things about skyscrapers is they are designed to sway in high winds and storms. To keep a building from swaying too much and toppling, engineers design what's called a "pendulum" that sways in the opposite direction of the building to keep it steady.

In her wonderful book *Built*, Roma Agrawal notes how it is helpful to imagine a building as "a tuning fork and the pendulum acts like your finger, absorbing the energy created by the movement of the skyscraper."

As an example of a pendulum, Agrawal writes about the Taipei 101, the tallest building in the world in 2004, and known for "the huge ball of steel that hangs between the 92nd and 87th floors."

In 2015, this pendulum made all the difference when "Typhoon Soudelor swept across Taiwan, gusting to at least 170km/hr... [and] Taipei 101 escaped undamaged. Its saviour, the pendulum, recorded movement of up to 1m - its largest-ever."

Life sways us back and forth between our victories and defeats, hope and despair, calm and surges of anxiety. We all need to find a way to "pendulum the sway," to identify how to dampen the vibrations of our defeats, despair and anxiety.

One way to create a pendulum is to consider our senses.

For example, sound can pendulum the sway. We have found listening to Sunday morning jazz playlists helps. What we touch can pendulum the sway - like holding someone's hand or paying attention to the texture of a strawberry. What we choose to gaze upon can help absorb the energy, like a sequence of our favorite photos in an album on our phone.

The sway comes into all of our lives at one time or another. It helps to be ready with our pendulum.

10. Korean Tiger of Forgiveness

Erika Fatland decided to embark on an eight-month journey where she would travel around the border of Russia. In her amazing book, *The Border*, she describes going through Mongolia, Ukraine, Belarus, Finland and other countries.

I was particularly impressed with her adventure traveling through North Korea, a country that shares a 19 kilometer border with Russia.

In her journey she visited the 250 kilometer border between North and South Korea and described what is called the demilitarized zone, which is, of course, one of the most militarized places on our planet. And yet, as she related, in that two kilometer buffer between hostile countries, something remarkable has occurred. It has become an animal sanctuary.

As Fatland writes, "Several hundred species of birds live there, including the extremely rare Japanese crane. The amur leopard, Asian black bear and the almost extinct Siberian tiger have also taken sanctuary.... Some people say that the Korean tiger, one the rarest tigers on the planet, is to be found there."

Sometimes in that space created when we find ourselves in conflict with someone - in our demilitarized zone - good and precious things can overtime appear, like empathy, kindness, understanding, and even a Korean Tiger called, forgiveness.

11. It is Because It Got That Way

The biologist, Darcy Thompson, speaking about how things develop in nature once observed that, “everything is the way it is because it got that way.”

Sometimes we wonder how we got somewhere physically, spiritually, vocationally, or emotionally. The answer is Thompson’s observation - developmentally, it’s that way “because it got that way.”

If we find ourselves in good places it’s usually not an accident, it’s been slowly developing, and the reverse is often true as well.

The good news is it’s never too late to head in a new, positive direction and then to watch optimistically what will develop next.

12. Nesting the Void

We are big fans of the artist Sarah Sze who had an exhibit at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City. We heard her give a talk about the exhibit where she made a fascinating comment. Sze shared how a challenge of curating a show in the building Frank Lloyd Wright designed is its large circular airspace that is “empty” and creates a “void” in the middle of the museum.

She explained how her task was therefore to “nest the void” by strategically placing her art in “bays” embedded in rings that spiral up towards the Guggenheim ceiling.

Nesting the void is a fascinating idea.

At times we all might feel like there is a void in the center of our lives, like the center airspace of the Guggenheim.

But what if we perceived such an empty space like Sze does, as an opportunity to nest it with objects of beauty, inspiration, and art? Completely filling an empty space is likely impossible, but that doesn’t mean a void can’t be transformed.

13. The Most Worthwhile Thing

David Marchese wrote about Matthieu Ricard, a Buddhist monk, best-selling author, and the Dalai Lama's French interpreter and noted how, "Researchers at the University of Wisconsin found that Ricard's brain produced gamma waves - which have been linked to learning, attention and memory - at such pronounced levels that the media named him 'the world's happiest man.'"

Ricard describes how he was once asked what he thought were the three secrets of being happy. He answered, "First, there's no secret. Second, there's not just three points. Third, it takes a whole life, but it is the most worthwhile thing you can do."

14. Pick Your Problems

One of the 20th century's most influential philosophers of science, Karl Popper, observed how knowledge arises as we grapple with problems.

But more often than not, don't we fear problems? We avoid them. Delegate them. Get stressed about them.

Problems, however, if we think about it, usually teach us something. Even if it's something we didn't want to learn or discover at first.

As Seth Godin wrote, "pick your problems, pick your future."

15. The Pain of Precaution

“When insecurity reaches a certain point, the fear of losing prevents us from enjoying what we possess already,” observed 19th century philosopher Jeremy Bentham.
“The care of preserving condemns us to a thousand sad and painful precautions, which yet are always liable to fail at their end.”

Bentham was writing primarily about money and how a fear of losing wealth can lead to imagining and preparing for outcomes that will never occur. And it occurred to me how Bentham’s observation can be applied to many aspects of our lives - our relationships, work, creativity. The path of persistent insecurity and preservation, as Bentham believed, can lead to sadness and pain.

Which raises a great point. What is a path that leads away from insecurity, precaution, and preservation? The path of faith, gratitude, and generosity.

16. Brain Waste Management

I've been thinking about sleep. We know experts say that we're supposed to get 7-8 hours a night. We know it helps to rest when we're tired. But I learned this week that sleep is also when our brain's "garbage truck" appears.

What does that mean?

Harvard health explains it like this: "One of the most interesting discoveries in the past decade is that the brain has a 'waste management system.' Like people, in order to have the energy to do their work, brain cells need to eat (to absorb, primarily, sugar and oxygen). And, as in people, meals lead to wastes that need to be disposed of.

The waste management system (called the glymphatic system) is a series of tubes that carry fresh fluid into the brain, mix the fresh fluid with the waste-filled fluid that surrounds the brain cells, and then flush the mix out of the brain and into the blood. This occurs primarily during deep sleep."

Like most things in our world, as energy is expended waste is produced. Apparently, this occurs even in our brain.

Paying attention to when we sleep and how much we get is a great way to feel better, because miraculously that's when we not only rest, but we remove what our brain no longer needs.

17. Qualia and Quality of Life

I came across a wonderful word, qualia. It's used in philosophy to describe those moments when we experience something fully and are completely conscious of that moment.

For example, we taste licorice, run fingertips across sandpaper, smell sea air on the first day of a vacation. Qualia derives from the Latin word qualis which means "of what kind." Meaning, we are able to distinguish that experience from another.

Reflecting on the word qualia made me consider how it might help us to define what it means to feel alive.

Life offers us a sequence of experiences and the more we are to perceive, receive, and distinguish these moments, the more we are able to experience the breadth, depth and heights of life.

Our qualia, in other words, helps to expand and define the quality of our life.

18. Untie Your Knots

“Untie your knots,” observes Lao Tzu.

In life some things we might want to knot, like a boat to a dock. Knots can also be muscular and need to be released in order to work efficiently and smoothly. Knots can be emotional, spiritual, vocational, and relational.

Tzu’s point is some knots we’ve made along the way need to be untied for our lives to work efficiently, smoothly, and even joyfully.

19. You Learn to Be Alive

One of my favorite quotes from author Brianna Wiest is when she describes what she hopes her readers would come to experience in their lives.

Here is Wiest's answer: "I hope you learn to live in a way that makes you excited for the day ahead, for whatever it is you are meant to do with this period of time, with this corner of the world, with this one body and life that is yours. I hope you learn to experience living, instead of just imagining how your life is seen. I hope you learn to feel it, with everything inside you. I hope you learn to be alive."

20. Elephants: Trusting It is Safe

In a fascinating article, Olivia White notes how, “One year after the Brooklyn Bridge’s opening, New York City officials took P.T. Barnum up on his offer to put together a demonstration to show off the bridge’s inherent strength. On May 17, 1884, the world’s greatest showman herded up 21 elephants... from his circus and marched them across the bridge from Brooklyn to Manhattan.”

Why did this happen?

As White records, “When the bridge was first opened... on May 30, 1883, the city’s residents approached the bridge with a degree of skepticism that led to full-on hysteria. And the only thing that could assuage their fears came from an unlikely place: the circus.” The elephants weighed 10,000 pounds, and the public was convinced the bridge was safe.

Which got me to thinking how at times in our lives we all might need to be convinced a path forward is safe. Or, we might need to convince others to cross a “bridge.”

The New York Times called the 21 elephant parade a “spectacle.”

Our 21 elephants might be a long parade of research, testimony from those who have gone before us, YouTube videos, etc. The point is coming to a place where we trust the experience and view that what await us is worth taking a step onto the bridge.

21. An Hour Later

It is difficult to stick with a goal.

What usually gets in our way is the temptation to take a day off, find a shortcut, or even give up.

C.S. Lewis offers this idea when such a temptation appears. He writes, a person “who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later.”

22. 90% is Enough

Author and therapist Mary Pipher observed in her practice what she saw over and over again was most trouble in people's lives started when they went for the last 10%. They were more or less 90% happy with their work, relationships, or home, and yet something compelled them to pursue the last 10%, and in striving to acquire more than most could ever hope for, more was lost than found.

23. Your Real Resume

“Your real resume is just a catalog of all your suffering,” observes Naval Ravikant.

We often think a worthy goal in life is to seek to make it easier, simpler. But Ravikant points out what we are likely remembering at the end of our life are the moments where we discovered the true essence of who we are, and these are more often than not found in our sacrifices and the hard things we have done.

In other words, one kind of resume lists our jobs, awards, and accomplishments.

If we think about it, almost no one cares about that.

But we do lean in whenever a person tells us about a time they suffered, sacrificed, and what happened next.

24. A Gazillion Hows

Billie Eilish won an Oscar for the song “What I Was Made For,” which was a theme song in the movie *Barbie*.

This weekend I came across a video of Eilish explaining she recorded a “gazillion” takes of the word “how.” It appears in the line, “I don’t know how to feel.”

In other words, it took that many takes to get it exactly right so we would feel something when we heard her sing that line.

There are no shortcuts to extraordinary.

Either we do what it takes to get it right, or we don’t.

And sometimes to get it right takes a gazillion hows.

25. Amalgamate Disparate

I'm enjoying reading Katherine Rundell's book about John Donne, *Super-Infinite*, where she quotes T. S. Eliot who said, "When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience," whereas "the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary."

Life can often seem chaotic, irregular, and fragmentary. Yet, if we pause and place two of these fragments side by side something unexpectedly beautiful can come into focus.

A bouquet of flowers in the grocery store placed next to the details of a long, difficult day; laughter of a child we pass on the street beside the sadness of a memory of someone we loved has who died; a line of clouds floating slowly across a blue sky amalgamated with our longing for certainty and reassurance.

26. Mistake's Great Last Chapter

What do you do when you mess up? When something goes wrong and it's your fault. Restaurateur Danny Meyer offers this idea in his wonderful book *Setting the Table* - "write a great last chapter."

Meaning, a mistake is not the end of the story.

Meyer applies this idea whenever something goes wrong in his restaurants - an order goes terribly awry, cork lands inside the bottle, something is spilled on the floor or table. Meyer writes, "While we can't erase what happened, we do have the power to write one last episode so that at least the story ends the way we want. If we write a great one, we will earn a comeback victory with the guest. Also, the guest will have no choice but to focus on how well we responded to the mistake when telling anyone we made it. We can, then, turn a mistake into something positive."

27. Better in Two Years

What is the pace of change?

Sometimes change occurs in a single moment. A letter arrives. You meet someone. News is shared.

Change also unfolds in a segment of time, like a season. Spring is different from winter. And sometimes change can take years, as little as one or two.

Over the weekend I was able to study two paintings that Mark Rothko rendered. One was in 1948, the other in 1950.

In 1948 you could see that Rothko's style of rectangular color fields slowly began to emerge as there were a few smaller, blurry, rectangular shapes on the canvas. But by 1950, the idea he'd been exploring was fully formed in his mind and the Rothko style we know today was born.

Is there a Rothko idea in your life waiting to come forward?

How might your life completely change for the better in two years?

28. Believing is Loving

“Seeing is believing” is an oft repeated proverb or observation.

In his book *Photography and Belief*, David Levi Strauss relates how “the origin of the proverb... is lost in the mists of time... [But] the year this proverb was first printed in English is usually given as 1609, in an unpublished manuscript by S. Harward, where it emerges as “Seeing is leeving.”

Strauss explains how “Leeving is loving. The term comes from the indo-European root leubh, meaning ‘to love or desire’: the Anglo-Saxon leof, English lief, is ‘dear, ‘beloved!’”

In other words, “To believe is to hold dear. Believing is loving.”

29. Occluded Pasts

The Venice Biennale is one of the major art and cultural festivals held throughout the year. Alex Marshall reported how, “Archie Moore, an Indigenous Australian artist... created an installation including a monumental family tree, [that] won the top prize.” Artists from 85 countries competed for this coveted prize. Moore’s piece was called “kith and kin.”

Marshall writes how, “Moore [drew] a family tree in chalk on the walls and ceiling of the Australia Pavilion. The web of names encompasses 3,484 people and Moore says it stretches back 65,000 years... In the center of the room is a huge table covered with stacks of government documents relating to the deaths of Indigenous Australians in police custody.”

The chair of the selection committee praised Moore’s work for “its invocation of shared loss for occluded pasts.”

Occluded is an interesting word. It means to “stop, close up, or obstruct.”

What Moore did was bring attention to how entire cultures, lives, and elements of our past can be occluded and that there is power in naming this truth and bringing that past into the present. If we think about it, we all have occluded pasts that perhaps deserve an invocation.

30. A Picasso Line

Peter Schjeldahl was *The New Yorker* art critic from 1998-2022. He observed that what separates extraordinary from ordinary people is “a minimum of moving parts.”

Writing about Picasso, Schjeldahl said, “People make the mistake of supposing that genius is complicated. It is the opposite. We regular folk are complicated—tied in knots of ambivalence and befogged with uncertainties. Genius has the economy of a machine with a minimum of moving parts. Everything about Picasso came to bear when he drew a line.”

When was the last time you did something with “a minimum of moving parts?”

When was the last time you metaphorically drew a Picasso line?

How did that feel? Extraordinary?

31. Hunt After the Fire

An aboriginal woman in her 80s explained on Michael Pollan's show *Cooked*, "You hunt after the fire."

She was describing how her community chooses first to set fire to an area of land before hunting for food to feed their families. Why? It gives a distinct advantage to the hunter as animals are flushed out into the open and therefore easier to locate. Some are even cooked in their dwelling, creating a natural oven.

The concept of "hunt after the fire" is fascinating.

It raises the question that perhaps at times we might need to set fire to something in our lives before what we are looking for emerges or can be caught.

That fire could be old, worn out ideas (like brush where the aboriginal woman's tribe hunts). Or it could be anxiety, doubt, fear, or memories that need to be expunged.

The normal sequence is to hunt and then build a fire, but sometimes a better approach might be the other way around.

32. Life Loves On

I had the privilege to interview Jennifer Senior, who wrote a Pulitzer Prize winning article for *The Atlantic* which was turned into a book, *On Grief*, praised by Oprah, Cheryl Strayed, and John Green.

Senior eloquently and movingly tells the story of a family who lost a son on 9/11 and the various paths they chose to grieve.

In her research she discovered the family also used this phrase as a means to both celebrate their son's life and mark his death - "life loves on."

Family members had those three words engraved on a bracelet they never took off and even had them tattooed on their arm.

Why? The phrase pointed to and reminded them of the truth in life and in death - love continues, abides, and does not falter in helping us to move forward.

33. The Story Knows When It's Time

I was talking with someone about how we evolve and grow in our lives and she made the fascinating observation, "You have to be ready for your next story."

What she was reflecting on is how everyone moves through a sequence of stories in their lives with relationships, careers, aspirations, dreams, but there are some new stories we can't rush.

They begin in our lives when we're truly ready, and somehow - and this is the mystery we need to trust - the "story" knows when it's time.

34. The Price of Opportunity

I recently came across an interview where actor Tom Selleck shared advice his father gave that had greatly influenced his career - "Risk is the price to pay for opportunity."

Some opportunities appear without a cost, but these are, as the saying goes, few and far between. Most ask that we do pay the price of risking something, whether that is emotional, relational, physical or financial.

35. Prologues to the Possible

Wallace Stevens is considered one of the finest poets of the 20th century. He wrote poetry while working for insurance companies. I have always appreciated the title of his poem “Prologues to What is Possible,” where Stevens writes this line: “The way the earliest single light in the evening sky, in spring, Creates a fresh universe out of nothingness by adding itself.”

It is interesting to consider all the prologues in our lives that in time create the “possible.”

A prologue that can be as simple as noticing how a single star changes our experience of a dark, evening sky.

It can be how words of encouragement alter someone’s mood. It can be discovering how writing a poem, going for a run, trying a new recipe, impacts how we feel about what comes next and what is possible.

36. Our Emotional Legacy

I was struck by a story I read about six people who died after a storm sank their superyacht off the coast of Sicily.

One of the passengers was an attorney who helped his client Mike Lynch, described as a “tech titan,” be recently acquitted of fraud charges after selling his firm to Hewlett-Packard in 2011.

The attorney wrote a message to his legal team on LinkedIn where he thanked them and added, “thank you to my patient and incredible wife... my two strong, brilliant, and beautiful daughters... None of this would have been possible without your love and support.... And they all lived happily ever after.”

The heartbreaking, and sometimes heart-binding, truth embedded in life is we never know what happens next.

Both storms and sunshine are elements we will experience both in their ferocity and wonder. And unfortunately, “ever after” is a category found only in fairy tales.

But we always have the choice to be grateful, or not, and for that sentiment to be our emotional legacy.

37. Permeable or Delineating?

“Study the long career of Pablo Picasso and you might notice something: The subjects of his paintings don’t run off the canvas. His figures and faces aren’t cut off, observes Jerry Saltz in his wonderful book, *How to Be an Artist*.

“Almost every shape, body, plane, line... or form he painted fits within the four sides of the canvas, crammed against the edges or dancing with them; everything is held under optical pressure by the four borders. This produces a distinctive visual tension.

His friend and rival Henri Matisse followed no such classicism. In his paintings, legs and feet go off canvases; heads are cropped willy-nilly... Patterns shoot right past the edges of his work... Every artist has his or her own relationship with these borders.”

After reading Saltz’s observation it occurred to me some of us live inside the borders we create in our lives, while others, less so.

What’s important is to decide how we will relate to them; are our borders permeable, or delineating?

38. A Domain of Wonders

There is an approach to existence called determinism where, as Benjamin Labatut writes in *When We Cease to Understand the World*, we can think “everything that occurred was the direct consequence of a prior state.”

It was Walter Heisenberg who discovered that we actually exist in a world with a “spectrum of probabilities.”

In particular, Heisenberg discovered that particles can exist in many places at once. This is a part of what is called quantum physics and Heisenberg is most known for what is called the “Uncertainty Principle.”

Why is this important?

Heisenberg’s insight offers both the truth and the metaphor events we experience in our lives are not always the result of consequences, but sometimes chance. This means in our universe, and perhaps in our lives, everything is both probable and possible. This means we live, as Labatut puts it, in a “domain of wonders.”

39. To Be Within Your Reach

One of the most important questions we can ask ourselves is, “Is it possible? Our answer to that question in many ways will define the content and course of our lives.

We might ask that question as we consider various schools and jobs we want to apply to; as we imagine a big dream or project; as we ponder a life change or face a challenge to overcome. Marcus Aurelius once observed that, “if it is humanly possible, consider it to be within your reach.”

In 1953, Wes Santee from Kansas, John Landy from Australia, and Roger Barrister, a medical student from England, wanted to break the four-minute-mile barrier. To the rest of the world it seemed impossible, but to these three it was within their reach.

Explaining both their belief and approach, Barrister said, “There comes a moment when you can’t go on waiting indefinitely. You just have to accept an all out effort.”

40. Choices, Not Comparisons

Basketball coach John Wooden, considered one of the greatest of all time, once made this observation, “the only person you’re competing against is yourself. The rest is out of your control.”

Whenever we compare ourselves to others, it inevitably leads to emotions that are not helpful or productive. Wooden’s insight is what we hope to accomplish always begins with our choices, not our comparisons.

41. Love is a Basketball

Daniel Jones has edited the Modern Love column in the *New York Times* for 20 years. This past year, he reflected on seven ways he's learned to love "better" from reading and engaging with over 200,000 submissions.

His first idea was, "Love is more like a basketball than a vase. Relationships involve conflicts that can lead either to intimacy or distance. How you negotiate conflict may prove to be the single most important indicator of your compatibility."

What I think Jones meant is when we find ourselves disagreeing with someone, even fighting, the question is do we bounce back to each other, or not so much?

Jones doesn't mention it, but in order for a basketball to bounce back to you, you have to exert some effort. And I was pondering how a basketball is different that a billiard ball that never returns once it's been stuck by a cue stick or ball.

So, perhaps, one way to love others "better" is to think of love as a basketball more than a billiard ball.

Because for love to work, you have to want to return to each other again and again.

42. Just Beyond the Expected

Yesterday I went to a museum with my daughters and in the gift shop there was a slot machine that offered in exchange for “4 quarters,” a “surprise print.”

Inside the machine were 10 beautifully rendered scenes of life in New York, including a park bench, hot dog stand, slice of pizza, bagel with lox, and a fire escape.

My daughters searched and found 4 quarters in the bottom of their purses, slid the quarters in the slots, pushed and pulled, and got in exchange a lovely print of the fire escape. And I thought, this transaction is a metaphor for life.

First, you never receive something for nothing. You have to put your “4 quarters” in the slots, push and pull, and then typically what you receive in return is a surprise. And this surprise is best to be embraced, rather than avoided.

Because if we always knew what we would receive in return for our “4 quarters” life would be a simple math equation. But life isn’t.

Usually our “4 quarters” result in something just beyond the expected - good or bad - and yes, we might experience disappointment, but this is also where delight and joy dwell, waiting for us to choose to put our quarters in the slots.

43. If We Were Gone

“Who would miss it if it were gone?” asks author Seth Godin.

Godin writes about business and marketing and in this observation was pointing to a restaurant, for example, or a company, a product, and making the point we only know how successful we are by the number of people that would miss “it” if it was gone.

Of course, this is an interesting question to ask about ourselves.

How many people would miss us if we were gone?

44. How the Right Action Rises

I read this insight from Lao Tzu over twenty years ago and it still guides me whenever I face a complicated situation.

“Do you have the patience to wait
till your mud settles and the water is clear?
Can you remain unmoving
till the right action arises by itself?

45. Believe In Believe

In our apartment, I came across one of those small gift books that was likely given as a Christmas present. This one was called *Believe: The Little Guide to Ted Lasso*. It offers a series of quotes by cast members about the making of the show, as well as quotes from the show.

In the book they quote Ted Lasso as saying: “I believe in hope. I believe in believe.”

We all know this to be true.

Nothing in our lives we care about unfolds the way we hope unless we believe in it. Belief is the catalyst that sets in motion the outcome we hope to realize in our lives and in the lives of others.

46. It Makes The Big Happen

Rich Roll is a podcaster, author, recovering addict, and a vegan endurance athlete. One insight he offers that I really appreciate is, “Until it happens big, it happens small.”

Sometimes it can feel like we aren’t making significant progress towards a goal we set in our life. And we wonder why it’s taking so long. We ask why there are so many challenges to overcome. To continue to move forward, Roll observes, pay attention to what he calls the “micro actions” that shape our days.

This is the “small” that eventually makes the “big” happen.

47. If We Give it Time

Near the end of the novel, *The Midnight Library*, author Matt Haig writes how Nora, the main character, “mused to herself, how life sometimes simply gave you a whole new perspective by waiting around long enough for you to see it.”

We never know what might happen in the next 30 minutes, 30 hours, or 30 days.

We never can anticipate every outcome or eventuality.

And we never know enough not to be hopeful.

Life is ever changing and evolving; a “whole new perspective” on a problem or situation that has vexed us, or appears seemingly insurmountable, is always a possibility, if we give it time.

48. Focus Frames Our Future

I've been pondering lately how science reveals what we focus on frames our future. Simply, if we want to accomplish a particular goal, or experience a certain emotion, such as joy or wonder, we need to focus our brain's attention in that direction.

In his book *Transcendent Brain*, neuroscientist and best-selling author Alan Lightman draws our attention to a study done in 2014 by neuroscientists Robert Desimone and Daniel Baldauf.

Lightman writes, "These researchers presented a series of two kinds of images - faces and houses - to their subjects in rapid succession, like passing frames of a movie, and asked them to concentrate on the faces but disregard the houses (or vice versa). The researchers then put a helmet-like device on the subjects' heads that could detect tiny local magnetic fields inside the brain and thus localized brain activity, a technique called magnetoencephalography (MEG).

Desimone and Baldauf found the brain cells (neurons) in the two regions behaved differently. When the subjects were told to concentrate on the faces but to disregard the houses, the neurons in the face location fired in synchrony, like a group of people singing in unison, while the neurons in the house location fired like a group of people singing out of synch, each beginning at a random part of the song. When the subjects concentrated on houses and disregarded the faces, the reverse happened."

What does this mean?

Lightman explains that "evidently, what we perceive as paying attention to something originates, at the cellular level, in the synchronized firing of a group of neurons, whose rhythmic electrical activity rises above the background chatter of the vast neuronal crowd."

One theory is a coalition of neurons, for example a coalition of face or house neurons, "compete with one another for our attention. We are usually not aware of these competitions. However, when one of the coalitions dominates the others, we become conscious of its message."

This means whatever we choose to focus our mind on - a face, house, happy or sad memory, gratitude or grievance, preferred or disappointing future - creates a coalition of neurons that will be in competition with other coalitions.

What we control is the strength of that coalition by the amount of attention we grant it.

And this is how our focus can frame our future.

49. What Makes Something Worth Something

I recently read a *New York Times* article about Jackson Browne and his song “These Days” that he wrote at the age of 16 and is often included in lists ranking the best songs ever written.

Browne is now 75 and in the article shared a helpful observation about this song and his songwriting approach, “If a song is worth anything, it’s about the life of the listener.”

Browne’s insight could be applied to most any endeavor.

If we want our work, ideas, projects, to be worth “anything,” we need to make sure it’s about the “life of the listener” with whom we are hoping to connect.

50. Too Far to Quit

Jennie Coughlin had a wonderful article in the *New York Times* where she described the last runners to cross the finish line at the New York Marathon. The difference between those who finish first, and those who finish last, Coughlin noted, can be more than 13 hours.

She also described Danielle Grimley, 41, from Colorado, who finished in 10 hours, 32 minutes, and 7 seconds on crutches.

As Coughlin writes, “Ms. Grimley has Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, which affects connective tissues around joints, and she sometimes has knee issues. On Sunday morning, she said, her knees felt fine and she hoped to finish the race in 5 hours. But in Mile 6, her hip started bothering her. When she reached Mile 17, she said, her hip ‘went out,’ and she ended up in a medical tent at East 80th Street and First Avenue. She asked the medic if he had crutches for her, and he said, ‘Hell, yeah.’ As she approached the finish line in Central Park, word had already reached the medics stationed there that someone was finishing on crutches. They met her with a wheelchair.”

Apparently, starting in 2016, a group of people wait for these final finishers with cowbells and glow sticks. And as Coughlin wrote, “As Ms. Grimley slowly hopped from Mile 17 through to the finish, she said, she thought about how it would feel if she went back to Colorado without the finisher medal. What would her co-workers say? She kept repeating to herself: ‘I came too far to quit.’”

51. The Splendor of Life

“What’s important is that air is generally transparent,” writes Mitsuyuki Shibata in his remarkable book of photographs, *Calling the Sea*.

Shibata continues: “Our space is generally transparent so we can see stars that are a hundred million light years away. But inside air there are tiny water molecules that slightly interfere with light. Water molecules become raindrops when a fair amount of them come together, but normally they are not that large. Mist, haze, fog, these are the things that enable us to see air.”

It’s fascinating to consider how one thing - in relationship to other things - enables us to see. Water molecules in the air, for example, enable us to see mist, haze, fog, and beautiful colors on the horizon. Sometimes that one thing gathers into a larger shape, but not all that often, as water molecules come together to form rain.

What is the one thing in your life that enables you to see and to focus on other things, and in particular on the splendor of life that is all around us.

52. Anxiety's Antidote

I've noticed how anxiety typically rises when we try to anticipate the future or how a sequence of events might unfold.

Marc-Antoine Croca notes in his article about the history of this emotion how, "The word... derives from the Latin substantive *angor* and the corresponding verb *angor* (to constrict)." That "to constrict" is the root word of "anxiety" is fascinating and perhaps provides an antidote to its effects.

When we feel anxious are we not "constricting" the height, depth, and span of the present moment in an attempt to imagine and navigate the future? As Mark Twain once said about the foolishness of such an endeavor, "I have spent most of my life worrying about things that have never happened."

So, perhaps, the next time we feel anxiety rising inside us rather than attempting to anticipate where a sequence of events might lead, could we choose to "expand" ourselves into the present moment and to notice all the colors, shapes, smells, and people around us? And perhaps, by living fully inside that moment we are more likely to shape a future we prefer.

53. Get It Out of Your Head

My son sent me a clip of a young Jack Dorsey giving a talk about starting Twitter and encouraging people to “get the idea out of their head.”

Dorsey shared how he’d have these ideas, but then would think they could only be realized, “if I had this person, or if this technology existed, or if this happened.” But such thoughts, he soon realized, were only excuses and the window would close on his idea.

Dorsey then said the thing he learned is to write the idea down, or the code, then show it to people, so it’s not just in your mind. And the sooner we do that, the sooner we get momentum, and can decide if we want to commit to that idea, or project, or not. But the first step is, “get it out of your head.”

54. How We End Up Living

Pedro Almodóvar is an Academy Award-winning filmmaker who recently published a book called, *The Last Dream*. In an article about the book Almodóvar made this observation - "I have a problem with death now, with mortality. I don't think 'I've just lived another day, but instead, 'I've got one less day to live!"

A phrase came to me recently, "while we're still alive."

It is fascinating to consider how we view the day to which we awaken; while we're still alive. We all know how tenuous life is as we read about and experience loss.

A helpful question to ask is, do we view a new day as Almodóvar frames it, as "one less." Or is it, "one more?" Or is it something else entirely.

Because how we choose to live this day is how we end up living our lives.

55. Everything to Do With Life

In a recent article author and professor Kelly McMasters shared how she wrote her obituary last week.

As she explains, “I often do so once a year; it has become a kind of ritual. I’ve met a few others who do the same or something similar. A teacher I know likes to start every new year by writing her obituary or what she hopes it will look like by year’s end. Another friend writes hers on Rosh Hashana. Recently a close friend wrote his life story as part of the process to get on the kidney transplant waiting list, and it occurred to me that’s exactly what their paragraphs resembled: a living obituary.”

An element of living is recognizing our time on this earth is limited. Considering, and writing, our obituary is a tool, as McMasters observes, to “offer clarity about your life and, mercifully, if you find something lacking, you still have time to revise.”

56. Effects of a Negativity Bias

I saw a fascinating interview with Arthur Brooks, who is known for his work on happiness and a book he wrote with Oprah Winfrey. In the interview Brooks made a distinction between cultivating a negativity bias, compared to a positivity bias.

A negativity bias means we pay more attention to the negative side of things rather than the positive.

The problem, observed Brooks, is we often shrug off positive aspects of our lives and think, “that’s nice.” And to keep us alive, our brains are wired to pay more attention to the negative. For example, a person might frown at us on the street and we think, “is that a threat? The problem is when we cultivate a negativity bias we can start to think that everything’s bad and that is, as Brooks phrases it, incredibly “unrealistic.”

Brooks went on to make the point that if we think about it, we have many more reasons to be optimistic than pessimistic; many more reasons to be grateful than resentful.

What we need to do in our lives is choose a positivity bias, rather than negative.

57. Long and Prepared

I've been slowly reading a few pages a night from Richard Powers' Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Overstory* where a common theme among the main characters is their love and fascination with trees.

In one chapter Powers writes about Dr. Pat Westerford, a scientist, who figures out trees are connected to one another through the soil and the air. Powers describes this insight as a "breakthrough" and it comes, "as breakthroughs often do: by long and prepared accident."

This is an intriguing observation.

Sometimes we think of "breakthroughs" as appearing suddenly, but more often than not they are the result of work that is "long and prepared;" effort that creates the possibility for insights that might be perceived as serendipitous. But such accidents are usually only accidental in relation to what is "long and prepared."

58. Will and Willingness

Stacey D'Erasmus has written a book called *The Long Run* on how to continue to create art as decades unfold in our lives.

In her conclusion she makes this helpful observation, "In the lives of the people I interviewed, and in my own life, will is certainly a factor... However, of equal if not greater importance is willingness. Forces arise, within and without, and it's that willingness to turn in their direction, to yield, that seems to foster resilience."

I love D'Erasmus's idea that to continue to be creative in one's life involves fostering both one's will and a willingness to adapt to changing circumstances. To be creative asks, in other words, that we are both resolute and flexible.

59. How to Make Something Happen

This morning I was reading Alan Lightman's book *Probabilities Impossibilities: Musings on Beginnings and Endings*, he made this fascinating observation, "In nature it is the difference in adjacent conditions that makes things happen. An airplane is kept aloft by the difference in air pressure below and above its wings. Make the pressures the same... and the plane cannot fly. Steam engines are driven by the difference in temperature between the boiler and surrounding material. Make the temperature the same everywhere, whatever the value, and the engine will come to a halt."

At times in our lives, we all long for balance.

Balance makes us feel grounded. Balance keeps us from falling down.

But it is worth considering Lightman's point that change, in particular forward movement, only occurs when there is a difference between "adjacent conditions."

Sometimes a "difference in adjacent conditions" occurs beyond our prompting. But we also have the potential to create these situations ourselves.

For example, if we feel stuck we can add a new project, class, or habit to our lives and step outside of patterns we use to navigate our day. To intentionally create an imbalance in order to "make," as Lightman phrases it, "something happen."

60. Grow You Go

We were watching the Hulu show *The Bear* last night and one of the characters was shopping at a Farmer's Market and said to a man selling vegetables, "Things that grow together go together."

She was making the observation if these vegetables grew together in the same part of the farm then they would likely "go together" on a plate in her restaurant that night.

Her phrase got me thinking how an essential part of being on a team is sharing a commitment to "grow together." If we have that in common, as the phrase describes, we will "go together."

61. The Standard of Stability

I came across in the *New Yorker* recently an article by Brooke Jarvis about how we attempt to measure the unmeasurable. She was reflecting on what we call sea level.

Jarvis observes that mountains have paradoxically shaped our perception of sea level as a constant reference point - a steady baseline used to measure the heights of towering peaks.

We confidently state Mt. Rainier stands 14,411 feet above sea level, often without considering what “sea level” truly signifies: which sea, at what location, under what conditions? If we think about it, oceans are in perpetual motion, swayed by the moon’s pull. In the Bay of Fundy, for example, tides can cause a dramatic shift of over fifty-three feet. Over the millennia, oceans have risen and fallen by hundreds of feet. Given this fluctuating history, it seems almost absurd to treat sea level as a benchmark. As Australian geologist Rhodes W. Fairbridge noted in 1961, it is “as ephemeral as a fleeting ray of sunshine on a wintery afternoon.”

It is fascinating to consider what we might use as a standard of stability to measure our lives. And it is worth asking if such a standard, or a tool of measurement, even exists in the physical world, or is it rather found in the realm of ideas or spirit.

62. To Move Towards Inspiration

A friend of mine had a cancer screening recently to determine if he was continuing to be in remission. I was able to meet him the night before for dinner and we talked about how best to navigate life's ups and downs and he said something profound: "I think you should always move towards inspiration."

In the 1300s the word "inspire" was aligned with divine activity. The early Latin word means to "inhale, breathe in" and it later evolved into also meaning to "blow into, or upon." It's interesting to consider what direction we choose to orient our attention whenever we face challenges in our lives.

My friend's idea is that in such situations we choose to move towards a place where we can breathe in and out freely. And as breath sustains us, a place, a location, where life, even new life, dwells and can be found. A place where even the divine might appear, reminding us we are moving in the right direction.

63. Ten Minutes, Three Gestures

I continue to be inspired by Danny Meyer and his book, *Setting the Table: The Transforming Power of Hospitality in Business*.

Here is a fabulous idea I reread yesterday: “I encourage each manager to take ten minutes a day to make three gestures that exceed expectations and take a special interest in our guests. That translates into 1,000 such gestures every year, multiplied by over 100... managers throughout our restaurants. For any business owner, that will add up to a lot of repeat business.”

64. At Ease Within It

I read Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* yesterday and came across this thought -

“You can't know it, but you can be it, at ease in your own life.”

Likely we have all felt a longing to be “at ease in our own life.”

The insight is knowledge doesn't necessarily provide or reveal that path, rather it is simply the ability to choose to “be” in our life that will help us feel at ease within it.

65. Not Implicated in Ugliness

Marcus Aurelius was a Roman Emperor from 160-180 AD. He kept a journal of his reflections on life and leadership in a book called, *Meditations*.

In one section he offers this helpful insight on how to manage our emotions: “When you wake up in the morning, tell yourself: The people I deal with today will be meddling, ungrateful, arrogant, dishonest, jealous, and surly. They are like this because they can’t tell good from evil. But I have seen the beauty of good, and the ugliness of evil, and have recognized that the wrongdoer has a nature related to my own-not of the same blood or birth, but the same mind, and possessing a share of the divine. And so none of them can hurt me. No one can implicate me in ugliness.”

66. A Definition of Love

The New York Times recently published their top 100 books in the 21st Century, which is very subjective and also great fun.

One novel I had never heard of was *Outline*, by Rachel Cusk, which was described as “an English writer flies to Athens to teach at a workshop. Along the way, and once there, she falls into intense and resonant conversations about art, intimacy, life and love. Cusk deals, brilliantly, in uncomfortable truths.”

Yesterday in *Outline* I read this profound insight: “one definition of love, [is] the belief in something that only the two of you can see.”

67. Mutually Accommodating

In his book *Projections*, Karl Deisseroth describes how we owe our existence to “an ancient class of microbes called archaeobacteria — who brought the mysterious skill of using oxygen for energy when they traveled into, and dwelt within, our cellular forebears more than two billion years ago.”

Over time these “small oxygen burners became our mitochondria, the energy factories for each cell.” Our cells, in other words, host mitochondria and that is how the oxygen we breathe becomes energy we use to live.

What Deisseroth does is then frame this cellular relationship as a metaphor for all relationships. Because billions of years ago those initial archaeobacteria had to cross a cellular border and be allowed to survive and dwell within another entity, which is not typical. Over time, and now “living together, these two kinds of life had to coevolve... [and] mutually accommodate each other’s limitations and oddities.”

Deisseroth’s point is we can learn from how mitochondria and cells have crossed borders, maintained their individuality and unique strengths, and together produce what they could not separately, and that is something new and miraculous.

68. Before It is Necessary

Seneca was a philosopher, statesman, and author who wrote on stoicism and ethics. You can find his work today in books such as *Letters from a Stoic*. He died in 65 AD. Seneca made a helpful observation, “He suffers more than necessary, who suffers before it is necessary.”

69. A Definition of Identity

“Our lives are performances each of us starring in a play we come to know as our own,” observed choreographer and author Twyla Tharp. “[Therefore] essence isn’t just who you are. It’s who you are with other people.”

If we want to know who we are, don’t just look inside, but also “outside” and who we are with other people and who they, in turn, are with us. This will help define, if we are curious, our identity, and identify who we might still want to become.

70. A Suspended Coffee

I was watching Stanley Tucci's travel show and he was exploring the city of Naples. Along with investigating the origin of pizza, he also met with the police captain to ask about crime in the city. Where they had their conversation was near a street vendor brewing coffee and Tucci noticed how he bought two coffees and then a third called a "suspended coffee."

The idea of the "suspended coffee" is you buy a coffee for the next person as an act of generosity and kindness. The point was made despite some hard times, (Vesuvius is nearby and once caused great destruction in the city), and the presence of the mafia, people in Naples try to take care of each other.

Is there a "suspended coffee" you might buy for a stranger today?

An act of kindness and generosity that is a surprise and a reminder we are supposed to try to take care of each other.

71. Percentage of Potential

One day John Mayer asked himself, “What percentage of my potential would I like to realize? 60%? 80%? 100%?”

Why did he ask that question?

Due to his excessive drinking at the time, it was clear that the path he was on would negatively affect that percentage.

After that conversation with himself, he decided he wanted to reach 100% and made the changes he needed to move in that direction.

72. Into New Forms

You are not the person you were two days ago. A week from now you will be different as well. Every experience and event affects us, and changes us.

Ralph Waldo Emerson put it like this, “The world’s incessant plan, halteth never in one shape, but forever doth escape, like wave or flame, into new forms.”

These “new forms” appear in nature, but also within the places and people we encounter. We are a part of the process Emerson identifies and the “plan” that is perpetually unfolding.

This reality can be unsettling at times as we might want things to remain the same, or it can also be exciting in the way that a novel, film, or sporting event can surprise us with “a form” we didn’t expect.

Today, can you see a new “form” that is inviting you to notice and to embrace a change occurring inside yourself.

73. Go to the Chorus

Nile Rodgers has written, produced, and performed on songs that sold more than 500 million albums and 75 million singles. He was also the co-founder of the group Chic. I came across a fascinating insight Rodgers offered on songwriting and creativity.

He said, “Chic developed a philosophy. We said: ‘A song is an excuse to go to the chorus. And... if a song is an excuse to go to the chorus, why wait? Go ‘One, two, ah, Freak Out!’ Or go... ‘We are family,’ ‘I’m coming out,’ or ‘Let’s dance! That was just our formula. Because we felt that it brought a sense of intimacy into the recording.”

When creating a product or presentation, writing an article or song, we might wonder where to begin. Rodgers reminds us what people want emotionally is the “chorus.”

People want to connect and it is a privilege and our opportunity to begin with what we are trying to communicate - the chorus.

74. Commit to the Next Point

At a commencement address Roger Federer said, “In the 1,526 singles matches I played in my career, I won almost 80% of those matches... Now, what percentage of points do you think I won in those matches? Only 54%.

In other words, even top ranked tennis players win barely more than half of the points they play. So here’s why I’m telling you this. When you’re playing a point, it has to be the most important thing in the world and it is. But when it’s behind you, it’s behind you. This mindset is really crucial, because it frees you to fully commit to the next point and the next point after that with intensity, clarity, and focus.”

In all our lives we lose points. It could be a client, a job, a race, even a relationship.

But what is behind us is behind us.

Looking backwards is not where the next point is being played.

75. Stars Too Big

It's easy to think Vincent Van Gogh's primary friend might have been Paul Gauguin. But a better case can be made it was artist Emile Bernard. We have 22 letters Van Gogh wrote to Bernard and they offer helpful insights into Van Gogh's ideas and opinions about life and his art.

I recently picked up a book of Van Gogh's letters and in one to Bernard he pointedly criticizes his famous painting *Starry Night* and writes, "I'm allowing myself to do stars too big, etc., new setbacks, and I've had enough of that."

Today, of course, we know millions would eventually fall in love with and be moved by these "stars too big."

Which led me to reflect how sometimes it's wise to stay in our lane, to complete the assignment, and to follow directions. But not always. Because likely what people will remember of our work and lives are moments when we choose "stars too big."

76. We Direct Our Adoration

W.S. Merwin won two Pulitzer Prizes and is perhaps best known for his poem “For the Anniversary of My Death.” Merwin writes,

“Every year without knowing it I have passed the day
When the last fires will wave to me...
Then I will no longer
Find myself in life as in a strange garment
Surprised at the earth
And the love of one woman
And the shamelessness of men
As today writing after three days of rain
Hearing the wren sing and the falling cease
And bowing not knowing to what.”

I appreciate two ideas in this poem.

The first is it recognizes there is a day when we will all die, and being aware that such a future anniversary exists can prompt us to live our lives with increasing gratitude, awareness, and even verve.

Second, the concept of “bowing not knowing to what” invites us to reflect on the human instinct to praise and even worship, and that it’s worth considering towards what and whom we direct our adoration.

77. Perspective of an Octopus

Craig Foster, who won an Academy Award for his film *My Octopus Teacher* wrote a lovely op-ed about how an octopus stole his camera.

Foster writes, “I had been filming creatures living in the Great African Sea Forest off the coast of South Africa about a year ago when my camera was grabbed straight out of my hands by a young octopus thief. Wrapping her arms around her bounty, she zoomed backward across the ocean floor.”

Foster shares how octopus apparently like to steal shiny things and he has found in their “dens” things like “earrings, bracelets, spark plugs, sunglasses and a toy car with a revolving cylinder that the octopus spun round and round with its suckers.”

Then a remarkable thing happened, notes Foster, the octopus “turned around and began to film my diving partner and me.”

Foster shares how the photos the octopus took - he retrieved his camera - had a “profound” effect on him. How so? “After many years filming octopuses and hundreds of other animals that call the Sea Forest home, for the first time I was seeing the world - and myself — from her perspective.”

Foster wrote this article as a meditation for Earth Day and as an invitation for us to see the world from nature’s perspective.

In other words, how might a burst of daffodils, a hawk, a dolphin, see us? Can you imagine? Are you curious?

78. Unlock the Mysteries Ahead

I left my house keys in a friend's car that we had borrowed for the day.

He was kind enough to mail them back with a note that read, "Sending keys so that you may unlock the mysteries ahead."

It was a lovely sentiment that reminded me that often we do need a key to unlock the mysteries that wait for us as we seek to move forward in our lives.

That key could be resilience, a sense of humor, curiosity, faith, wisdom, or even the thoughtfulness that prompted my friend to mail my keys alongside an insight I will remember every time I slip my keys into my right pocket.

79. Ideas, Not Problems

The legendary Apple designer Jony Ive once made a distinction between “ideas” and “problems” and shared he had “come to learn you have to make an extraordinary effort not to focus on the problems, which are implicated with any new ideas. Problems are known. They’re quantifiable and understood. But you have to focus on the actual idea, which is partial, tentative, and unproven.”

It is tempting to shift our focus towards what is wrong with the project we are attempting to accomplish; to identify problems in the belief this will lead to better solutions.

But ideas seek that which is not known, and to pull them back too soon towards what we know - problems - deprives them of the opportunity to grow into something we never could have expected.

80. A Lover of What Is

“The more clearly you understand yourself and your emotions,” observed 17th century philosopher Baruch Spinoza, “the more you become a lover of what is.”

It is often exciting to imagine other possibilities for our lives. Spinoza reminds us to love what is occurring in our lives right now to understand who we are and not who we might become. What we love, in other words, is who we are.

81. Between Winning and Losing

Boston Celtics basketball coach Joe Mazzulla made an intriguing observation about a pursuit of a championship. He said, “The closer you are to winning, the closer you are to losing.”

What he meant was the closer we get to achieving a major goal, the closer we are to failure because the stakes rise as does the pressure.

Recognizing and managing that reality is an aspect of learning what it takes and means to hold a championship trophy.

82. Where to Begin?

“Where shall we begin?” asked the sculptor Rodin.

“There is no beginning,” he concluded. “Start where you arrive. Stop before what first entices you. And work!”

In many ways this insight sums up Rodin’s life. Known for *The Thinker*, *The Gates of Hell*, and *The Kiss*, in the Rodin museum are 6,000 of Rodin’s sculptures and 7,000 of his works on paper.

If there is something we want to do in our life - creatively, spiritually, emotionally, professionally, relationally - it’s helpful to consider Rodin’s counsel, “there is no beginning,” we simply start when we arrive and then begin to work.

83. Currents, There is Life

I was watching a Netflix series last night on nature called *Our Living World* which is narrated by Cate Blanchett. In the first episode, the series spotlighted how currents begin in the Arctic and from there move water around our planet. Then Blanchett said, “where there are currents, there is life.”

Her point was as water moves and flows the cycle of life can occur, namely there will be opportunities to find food and for new life to be born.

It’s a fascinating metaphor: if we want to fully experience life we need to find our current; if we want to grow and create new life, we need to find a place where there is movement around us.

84. Dazzled and Lightened

Seamus Heaney is considered one of the most significant poets of the 20th century. In his late 40s, after *Selected Poems, 1966-1987*, was published, his writing took a shift in tone and content. Heaney began to use words such as “spirit.” A few years later he published a book of poems called *The Spirit Level*.

The last few weeks I’ve been reading a Heaney poem from this period in his career every morning and in “Fostering” he writes,

Me waiting until I was nearly fifty
To credit marvels. Like the tree-clock of tin cans
The tinkers made. So long for air to brighten,
Time to be dazzled and the heart to lighten.

It’s never too late or too early in one’s life to embrace the “marvels” around us. It’s never too late or too early to choose to be “dazzled” and for our “heart to lighten.”

85. Constitute a Beginning

John Berryman was a Pulitzer Prize winning poet and in “Address to the Lord” offers the fascinating phrase, “Initiatory faith.”

Merriam-Webster defines the word “initiatory” as “constituting a beginning.”

Isn't that a wonderful definition; that when we feel, access, or muster faith in our lives, we constitute a beginning.

86. Hope Plays a Long Game

Last night I watched an inspiring 30 for 30 ESPN episode about the Baltimore Colts marching band that kept playing for 12 years after the Colts left town for Indianapolis.

As one website reports, “In 1984, the erratic... owner of the Baltimore Colts, Robert Irsay, made a... decision to move the team.. [and in the middle of the night] vans shipped the Colts’ possessions to Indianapolis. The next morning, fans awoke to the news in stunned disbelief. The team’s volunteer marching band was among the hardest hit. But the members dedicated themselves to bringing professional football back to Baltimore.”

The marching band decided to keep practicing and soon was invited to play during other halftime events around the country, even though they had no official team.

Eventually, after keeping hope alive for 12 years, a team from Cleveland moved to Baltimore and were re-named the Ravens.

Today the Baltimore Ravens are a successful team in the NFL.

Events unfold in our lives that are distressing and disorientating. Relationships fall apart, jobs unfold, we receive a negative test result, our beloved football team leaves town. After such events we have a choice - to keep playing or quit. To believe things will turn around, or they will keep heading in a negative direction. The Baltimore Colts marching band reminds us hope doesn’t keep track of time.

Hope plays the long game. Hope keeps playing its instrument.

87. A True Grand Adventure

In his book the *Art of Stillness*, travel writer Pico Iyer describes his journey to attempt to understand the attraction and power of choosing to be still.

One of the people who helped Iyer was Leonard Cohen, who at the time was a monk living on the top of Mt. Baldy in California.

A significant part of the day for Cohen was sitting still and quieting his mind. In talking with Cohen, Iyer learned how, “Going nowhere, as Cohen described it, was the grand adventure that makes sense of everywhere else.”

What Cohen explained was he faced the “emptiness of his own existence” by going inward instead of outside. For years Cohen had tried “outside,” touring as a famous musician, drinking, and leaving frayed relationships around the world.

But sitting still enabled him to listen to, observe, and engage with his thoughts, which were fascinating if viewed from a distance and objectively. These thoughts slowly provided insights into who he was as a person and what he needed to work on.

I have to confess I have never been fond of the word meditating. I’m not sure why. Perhaps because in an irrational way I hear the word medical or medicine in it. But I am drawn to the idea and image of being still.

I wonder if it would help to call it “stilling” instead of “meditating.” And during the day we find time to do some “stilling” - 1 minute, 5 minutes, 10 minutes - and in that time we pay attention to what’s inside instead of what is outside.

88. Accomplish What You Propose

“You have to accomplish what you propose,” taught actress Danai Gurira’s professor at N.Y.U. Tisch School of the Arts. Gurira brought up this maxim as a reason why she was returning for a new season of the show *Walking Dead*. Her point was that her character in the show was on a journey and she felt she should “accomplish” it.

Art historians bring up that a major difference between Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci was Michelangelo accomplished what he proposed while da Vinci rarely completed paintings or projects. In fact, there are only 20 known da Vinci paintings in existence, and two aren’t finished.

Is there an idea, project, or dream you might have proposed in your mind or to someone else?

How might you accomplish it? How might you become a Michelangelo?

89. Always Have Something

When we visited the Charles Schultz museum we were told how the characters Snoopy, Charlie Brown and Lucy evolved and came to be loved around the world.

We also learned how one of Schultz's early mantras was "always have something in the mail working for you." This proved helpful when his first cartoon - Lil Folks by Sparky - was canceled by the St. Paul Pioneer Press.

Fortunately, Schultz had been sending out additional cartoons to newspaper syndicates and magazines which led to receiving a letter from the Saturday Evening Post and a purchase of one of his cartoons, which eventually became Peanuts.

"All life is an experiment," observed Ralph Waldo Emerson. "The more experiments you make the better."

Is there a project, initiative, or "experiment" you have thought about implementing, or sharing, but haven't yet? Is this your Charles Schultz time where you take the risk of "mailing" it and finding out?

90. Life is a Guest House

Rumi is a beloved 13th century writer who suggested life is like a “guest house where every morning there is a new arrival.”

Some guests might be, as Rumi observed, “a joy, a depression, a meanness, [or] some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor.”

Our job in life is to welcome each guest with hospitality for they are sent, Rumi suggests, “as a guide from beyond” teaching us something about ourselves and preparing us to better welcome the next guest.

91. Walk Fully Through

Poet David Whyte offers the challenging observation that some of us walk through doors that life offers while others never fully choose to do so. Whyte observes how some of us are “always at the gates of existence, but never bravely and completely attempting to enter, never wanting to risk ourselves, never walking fully through the door.”

Is there a doorway you want to walk through and haven't done so yet?

The doorway of a project, an idea, a career change, pilgrimage, a new relationship? An emotional doorway such as happiness, joy, contentment, forgiveness?

What might be waiting on the other side of that threshold?

Wouldn't it be interesting to take the risk, as Whyte suggests, to go and find out?

92. Trust the Timing

Yesterday I saw a clip where a couple was on a large square tilted at an angle that was rotating. Sometimes this couple would see each other on the large moving square, other times they would bump into each other awkwardly.

But as time passed they eventually found each other, made a connection, became a couple, and created a dance together on the moving square.

The phrase attached to this clip was “trust the timing.”

At times it can feel life is haphazard and the ground is moving beneath our feet in ways we don't understand or can anticipate. But if we can trust in the midst of that uncertainty an idea, opportunity, a person, will appear when the timing is right, it invites us to wait and to watch as to what will appear next not with trepidation, but with expectation.

93. It is Necessary

There is a distinction between viewing an obstacle as impossible or necessary.

This distinction is made in one of my favorite science fiction films, *Interstellar*, where Matthew McConaughey attempts to dock his ship into a space station that has had an explosion and the AI robot says, “it’s not possible.” McConaughey responds, “No, it is necessary.”

When we re-categorize what seems impossible as necessary, something changes inside us, we begin to see it as possible.

94. Be Not Afraid

“Be not afraid of life. Believe that life is worth living, and your belief will help create the fact,” said William James, considered the “father of American psychology.”

These words form a central theme in a book I’ve been re-reading by author and philosopher John Kaag on how James’ writing and this concept helped to save his life.

James’ point was when we choose to believe in something - for James this was the potential and beauty of life - the decision to believe helps to create and even launch a life worth living. Kaag then takes James’ insight and applies it to biology. He writes, “If you think about a cell, the only time it reaches perfect stasis or equilibrium- ‘perfect balance’ as the gurus might say — is when it is dead. Life happens on the move.”

In other words, while fear paralyzes us, belief moves us towards all the potential and promise that await on the other side of faith.

95. 40-100

When my son was in elementary school I was fortunate to coach his basketball team. For our team's identity I came up with the idea of 40-100 and created a logo and had it printed on t-shirts. The idea and the challenge was as a team we were going to play 40 minutes of every game with 100% effort.

We all know it's impossible to give 100% for a sustained period of time. We all need breaks. We all feel lazy now and then. But there is power in determining for a certain amount of time we will give everything we have. Not 88%. Not 93%. But 100%.

Perhaps try your own version of 40-100?

Decide that for a certain amount of time you are going to give daily, weekly, 100% towards a goal you set in your life. Your version could be 15-100. Or 55-100. Make a logo. Print a t-shirt.

In our family we still talk about that team because fortunately everyone bought into the idea and by doing so discovered one of life's greatest joys, feeling that you held nothing back in the pursuit of a common goal.

96. Tomorrow Will Be Better

“I found early on that every single day was different. That helped a lot. There are whole days that sucked really bad, but I quickly understood that one bad day had no correlation to the next whatsoever,” shared Robbie Balenger on a podcast.

Robbie was reflecting on a 3,175-mile transcontinental run he started in Huntington Beach, CA and completed in Central Park, NYC. Robbie crossed 14 states moving an average of 43 miles a day for 75 days on a plant-based diet.

“I could be on top of the world one day and the next crash down, and vice versa,” said Robbie. “So in those hard days it was a matter of thinking just get through today and tomorrow will be different. It will be better.”

The Balenger Principle is a helpful way to navigate tough days in our lives; believing and trusting tomorrow will always be different and... better.

97. Live Life in the All

The writer Goethe observed that, “you must live life in the all. Then you will be happy.”

One of the challenges of life is deciding if we will truly open ourselves to all of life’s experiences - the heart-wrenching and the joyful, the unexpected setbacks and the blessings, the grotesque and the stunning beauty.

Goethe’s insight was every experience offers insights that we can carry into the next experience. If we try to parse life into slices of our own choosing, Goethe believed, we’ll only end up feeling frustrated, anxious and fearful. On the other hand, happiness accompanies us if we choose to “live life in the all.”

98. Even a Grasshopper?

Paul Ceohlo, the Brazilian writer, once said, “I believe in signs... What we need to learn is always there before us. We just have to look around with respect and attention to discover where God is leading us and which steps we should take.”

We were visiting my mother-in-law over the weekend, and while making breakfast, we saw a spot of bright green perched on a jar.

Walking closer, we discovered it was a grasshopper! Not every day do you find a grasshopper in your kitchen, so we decided to lift the jar carefully and to walk it to the patio door. Once the grasshopper was safely outside, we asked ourselves, why was there a grasshopper in our kitchen? Was it a sign?

We pulled out our phones and started searching for what a grasshopper symbolizes.

Did you know grasshoppers can only hop forward? They can't move backwards or sideways. Some believe when a grasshopper shows up, it's a sign you are moving in the right direction. Still others believe it's a sign you should have faith and take the next step in your journey.

Of course, none of that could be true. It could just be that a grasshopper. But then again, maybe not.

99. Looking Into Ourselves

“The crowds were lining up outside the Museum of Modern Art from the very first day of the performance,” writes artist Marina Abramovic in her memoir *Walking Through Walls*. “The rules were simple: Each person could sit across from me for as short or as long a time as he or she wished. We would maintain eye contact. The public was not to touch me or speak to me. And so we began.”

Abramovic is describing an event she created called *The Artist Is Present*. It lasted for 75 days and over 1,500 people waited hours in line - often sleeping outside the museum - to sit across from her.

Some sat for a minute; some for an hour or more. One person sat twenty-one times. All 86 museum guards sat in front of her as well as celebrities like Lou Reed, Björk, Sharon Stone, and Isabella Rossellini.

What was the experience like emotionally for Abramovic?

She writes, “From the beginning, people were in tears and so was I. Was I a mirror? It felt like more than that. I could see and feel people’s pain. I think people were surprised by the pain that welled up in them. For one thing, I don’t think people ever really look into themselves.”

Have you ever really looked into yourself? Is there pain inside you that needs to be released? How might you facilitate that process?

100. Asking DaVinci Questions

In her book *The Creative Habit*, choreographer Twyla Tharp points her readers to Leonard DaVinci's notebooks and how he would fastidiously observe nature and write down questions he wanted to explore.

He was fascinated with water, for example, and wrote down these questions:

“Where the water is swift at the bottom and not above.
Where the water is slow at the bottom and swift above.
Where it is slow below and above and swift in the middle.
Where the water in the rivers stretches itself out and where it contracts.
Where it bends and where it straightens itself.
Where it penetrates evenly in the expanses of rivers and where unevenly.
Where it is low in the middle and high at the sides.
Where the current goes straight in the middle of the stream.”

Tharp observes how asking “the question assigned him the task of finding the answer.”

What “where” questions might you ask yourself? Or maybe call them DaVinci questions.

Questions you might ask regarding nature, your relationships, work, a hobby, your spiritual and emotional life?

Asking a “where” question, a DaVinci question, points you towards unexplored territory and expands what you know about the world and the life you inhabit.

101. Perhaps, of an Angel

We visited the Cloisters, a museum that looks exactly like its name, at the very northern part of Manhattan. As I walked by a sculpture of a woman's head with the title, "Head, Perhaps of an Angel," I thought, that's interesting.

The entire description read, "a key Parisian sculpture from the thirteenth century. Several stylistic and technical features link it with sculpture made for Notre-Dame Cathedral, but its exact origin and function are unknown." It was dated around 1250.

Studying the piece further, I began to appreciate and even enjoy how we know something about it, but much eludes us.

Calling it "Perhaps, of an Angel" is also so evocative, as that wonderful title invites us to consider if what we know about that piece, and by extension even our life, the world, and God - and all that yet remains elusive - is "Perhaps, of an Angel."

Meaning, perhaps in our midst is a presence of holy dimensions, perhaps help is beside us, perhaps there is more to all of this than we can fathom and calculate.

And - if we think about it - one can interpret the word "perhaps" either cynically or optimistically. A choice and decision that in many ways defines how we engage with the unknown and all that remains elusive in our lives.

102. The Identity of Happiness

“When you’re happy,” noted musician, songwriter, and author Patti Smith during a commencement address at the Pratt Institute, “you ignite that little flame that tells you and reminds you who you are.”

It’s fascinating to consider the idea that happiness reveals and reminds us of our true selves and identity.

What kind of person are you when you’re happy?

What kind of things do you think about, say, or do?

Is that your true self?

103. Close to Heaven

Amanda Petrusich wrote a lovely article about Paul Simon in *The New Yorker* describing his latest album *Seven Psalms*, which is an exploration of life and faith as an “expansive, open-ended notion of God.”

What intrigued me was a letter to the editor about the article from a childhood neighbor of Simon who described growing up Jewish, like Simon, and wrote, “Now that we’re in our eighties, we’re getting nervous about mortality... Even if we are still in good health, we know it can’t last forever. Death is always on our minds. Whatever sustains us is good, and may be as close to Heaven as we’re likely to get.”

The idea that what sustains us grants us awareness, a glimpse, or even access to heaven is interesting.

What sustains you in your own life? Love? Family? Beauty? Creativity? Music? Laughter? Exercise? Tranquility?

Do you think what sustains you might provide a pathway and a window into heaven?

104. Go First

Gabrielle Reece was a successful volleyball player and named one of the “20 Most Influential Women in Sports” by Women’s Sports & Fitness.

Podcaster and author Tim Ferriss asked about her secrets to being successful and Reece shared how one of the things that has made her life more fulfilling is she tries to “go first.” But not in the way you might think. As Reece explains, “If I’m checking out at the store, I’ll say hello first. If I come across somebody and make eye contact, I’ll smile first.”

It sounds simple, but if we want people to smile at us, we likely need to smile first. If we want to start a conversation, we might need to introduce ourselves first.

Try this experiment: today, “go first.” The entire day. A smile. A hello. An outreached hand. It might end up being a really great day.

105. A Faith Experimental

Rick Rubin, noted music producer and author of *The Creative Act*, believes both art and life invite us to apply this wonderful phrase to it, an “experimental faith.”

Rubin describes how he’s learned when we attempt to create art, or embark on a new project or endeavor, what is happening is, “We are required to believe in something that doesn’t exist in order to allow it to come into being.”

That sounds obvious, but is actually profound. Nothing we want to create or bring into our lives arrives fully formed. That’s where experimenting plays its role.

Rubin adds how an essential part of this “experimental faith” is believing the project, opportunity, or problem, is in its essence already solved, “we just haven’t come across it yet.” That’s why faith is the first step.

As Rubin encourages, “Trust the mysterious unfolding before you. With the understanding that the process will get you where you’re going. Wherever that reveals itself to be. And the magical nature of the unfolding never ceases to take our breath away.”

106. No Repeatable Days

I went on a walk yesterday and it occurred to me how there are no repeatable days. When this day ends, it is gone.

When it occurs to us something is finite - this moment, a day, even a life - it opens something inside of us to see, for example, sunlight on a sidewalk, a bowl of apples on a kitchen counter, or a person, with gratitude and wonder.

107. Where Opportunity Waits

When Lynn and I were on a trip through Europe we became fascinated by doors. We took photo after photo of all the different shapes and colors.

Jhumpa Lahiri is a lovely writer and in her book *Translating Myself and Others*, she makes this observation about the reality and metaphor of what a door represents: “Each door has a dual nature, a contradictory role. It functions as a barrier on the one hand; as a point of entry on the other.”

In her forties Lahiri decided to move to Italy and to write in Italian rather than English, and in that decision she noted how her perception of doors changed. She writes this, “Doors keep urging me forward. Each leads me to a new discovery, a new challenge, a new possibility.”

Which made me realize that where opportunity waits is always on the other side of a door we need to choose to open.

108. Running Mile 3 Not 17

My wife and I are working on a fun project. But yesterday, we were feeling a bit overwhelmed with some of the details involved and I said, “Well, if we think of this project as a marathon then we have to realize we can’t skip to mile 17, when we’re running mile 3.”

Everything takes time and there is a sequence involved in accomplishing any project, remembering that can help when we are feeling overwhelmed.

109. Risk Discomfort for Understanding

One of my favorite books, *Explorers' Sketchbooks: The Art of Discovery and Adventure*, is curated by Huw Lewis-Jones and Kari Herbert.

The book shares the inspiring diaries and notebooks of famous explorers. I reread a section by Wade Davis and he related how a principle that guided his explorations and work was, “risk discomfort for understanding.” That idea, he said, made all the difference in his life.

Is there anything in your life where you are risking discomfort to gain a new insight, perspective or opportunity?

110. The Water You're Fishing In

David Lynch is the director of movies like *Blue Velvet* and the TV series *Twin Peaks*. In his book *Catching the Big Fish* he reflects on the artistic process: "If you want to catch little fish, you can stay in the shallow water. But if you want to catch the big fish, you've got to go deeper."

Do you have a big fish project or dream in your life?

If so, how deep is the water you're fishing in?

111. To See Ahead

I've been reading *And There Was Light, Abraham Lincoln, and the American Struggle* by Jon Meacham where he shares this fascinating detail about his life, "Lincoln once said. 'I have had so many evidences of his direction, so many instances when I have been controlled by some other power than my own will, that I cannot doubt that this power comes from above! The common term for the divine governance of the world was "providence," which literally means "seeing ahead."

Do you believe, as Lincoln did, something is "seeing ahead" and providing guidance and direction within your life?

If so, that is one way to live a life, trusting we are somehow integrated into a sequence of events that are purposeful and connected.

112. Two Kinds of Journeys

I grew up in a time when people used paper maps. Today, of course, everyone uses GPS. I can't remember when I started to notice that it wasn't just directions you were given when you used an app on your smartphone, but also pictures of a destination. You could see, for example, the front of the house you were visiting or a restaurant.

David Ogilvy is known as one of the great marketers of all time. He wrote this, "When you advertise products for use in cooking, you attract more readers if you show a photograph of the finished dish than the ingredients."

With every project there are aspects that need to be arranged, assembled, and fitted together for it to be completed. It helps to have a clear image of what the finished product will look like, but there is also something to be said for using ingredients without a photograph of what it should look like when it is all done.

When we used a paper map we would arrive and ask, "is that it?"

Now, we arrive, we say, "that's it."

Arriving at a destination with either a question or a statement are two different ways of embarking on a journey.

113. Previously No Path

We were walking through Hyde Park and noticed along with paved paths there were also paths where people had made their own route between where they were and where they wanted to go. These paths were often flattened grass that cut across a field or even grass worn down to dirt.

Our daughter said, "It's fascinating how people figure out their own preferred path."

Sometimes our destination takes us down well-traveled roads, other times our preferred path will involve making a path where there was previously none.

114. Backward to Go Forward

A few days ago there was an obituary for Yoshihiro Uchida who helped establish judo as one of the most popular martial arts in America. He died at 104. They quoted Mr. Uchida as saying this about both judo and life, "Sometimes, you get kicked around. But if you believe in it, just keep pushing ahead. You might have to find out how to get there by going backward and then coming back again."

115. Learn to Trust It

Roger Angell wrote wonderful books about baseball and was an essayist and editor at *The New Yorker*. His father in law was E.B. White, author of *Charlotte's Web*.

I recently finished *Let Me Finish* where he wrote this, "The only piece of advice I ever got from William Shawn was something he said to me in 1956, in my very first week as an editor at the magazine. 'It's no great trick, he said, 'to edit a piece of fiction and turn it into the greatest story ever written. Anyone can do that. It's much harder to take a story and help that writer turn it into the best thing he is capable of this week or this month! What you hope for is that the writer will sense how this process works, and will learn to trust it."

I love Angell's insight that the role of an editor is to help a writer understand the process of how to take the next step forward in her or his development, and not simply demonstrate the final result. An insight to be applied to any role we might be fortunate to hold: supervisor, teacher, coach, parent, grandparent.

116. Worlds, Not Shoulders

We watched a documentary about Ralph Lauren and I was reminded how a story can change the world, or at least for the people who encounter it.

The story Ralph Lauren wanted to tell was of timelessness over trendiness, the style of Fred Astaire and Audrey Hepburn, and the American west. As one writer described Lauren's work, he offered his buyers the "visual aspiration" of a well-made polo, a worn jean jacket, beautiful fabrics in plaid patterns, all grounded subtly in the patriotic collars of white, blue and red.

In reading about Lauren's life I came across a quote where he said, "I don't do shoulders, I do worlds." Lauren doesn't fixate on the cut of shoulders on a suit, but the world that suit inhabits.

Which raises an intriguing question, what world do you inhabit? Is it a world you have chosen, or that has been chosen for you? And if you had the opportunity to create your world - it's style, feeling, aspirations, colors, and most importantly story, what would that world look like?

117. A Wabi Sabi Life

I'm enjoying reading Adam Grant's new book *Hidden Potential* where he reflects on finding the sweet spot between "flawed and flawless." Meaning, it's important to recognize that human beings and our world are neither broken nor perfect.

As an illustration he shares a legend about a young man who wanted to learn the Japanese tea ceremony. To begin, he was given a test to clean up the garden. The young man set to the task and picked up sticks, raked the leaves, and pulled up the weeds until everything looked perfect.

But then looking upon his work, the young man felt something was missing. So he walked over to a cherry tree and shook it so flower petals fell to the ground.

Grant writes, "By finding the beauty in imperfection [the young man] showed he was ready to become a master. This legend traces back to the sixteenth century, when the Japanese tea ceremony underwent a seismic shift. Immaculate dishes were replaced with chipped bowls. People drank from pottery that was worn and weathered. They called this practice wabi sabi. Wabi sabi is the art of honoring the beauty in imperfection."

118. Do Make You Wonder

I take the subway to work and wear Apple AirPods to listen to music. The AirPods come in a case and I have a routine of putting them back in the case when I get off the subway and onto the platform. Every night I put them on a table near our kitchen, along with my watch and keys, to charge them.

About a week ago I noticed these AirPods weren't on the table and went looking and eventually found them in a pair of pants. But as I lifted them out of my pant pocket, the case slipped out of my hand and bounced on the floor. The case opened and one AirPods fell out.

I lifted up the case, and the single AirPods, and then noticed there was an empty slot for the second AirPods. I began to look for the other one, but couldn't find it anywhere; which made no sense. I always keep them together, in my ears or in the case. For a week I kept looking for the AirPods, but it never appeared. Reluctantly, I purchased a new pair.

Last night I returned home after a four day business trip. As I usually do, I emptied the suitcase in our bedroom and there in the bottom was the missing AirPods.

Is there a reasonable explanation for why the single AirPods was in my suitcase and I didn't notice it there for 4 days? Is there a reasonable explanation for how it got there at all? Perhaps. But these types of situations do make you wonder.

119. The Soul's Interior

Do you think our soul has an “interior?”

I came across the idea in a book about Orlando Diaz-Azcuy, considered the “dean of interior design” and founder of the design firm ODADA. The book about Diaz-Azcuy was called *Soul: Interiors*.

The poet Walt Whitman said what satisfies the soul is truth.

Thomas Moore said the soul is partly in time and in eternity.

Jesus taught that we could lose our soul.

If you believe that you have a soul, it's fascinating to reflect on what defines and shapes its interior. Is that interior a place of truth and beauty, or not? Is it a place of simplicity, or clutter? Is that space a bit neglected and in need of renovations? Do you like to spend time there, or are you drawn to other spaces? Would it help to have an interior designer for your soul?

120. Strength of Weakness

Did you know there are four “forces” in the universe?

Frank Wilczek, a Nobel Prize winner in physics, explains: “Gravity keeps Earth in orbit around the Sun... The electromagnetic force... weaves atoms into molecules. The strong force supplies the attractions that make nuclear burning [in the sun] possible. The weak force enables... transformations [to occur]... but only slowly.”

The life we live and experience requires not only the strength of gravity to keep planets aligned, or the force that binds particles together, but we also depend on a force that slowly transforms one particle into another.

Wilczek writes, “The weak force neither binds things together nor moves things around. Its importance lies in its power to transform. Its transformative power, leveraged by its very weakness, gives it a unique, central role in the evolution of the universe.”

That a “weak force” is essential to our existence is fascinating.

We typically value strength and power in people, organizations, and even countries, but the universe is constructed to value a force in physics that is not, and it is its very “weakness” that enables it to transform particles into other particles.

Which is a reminder “weakness” can be helpful when we are engaged in the process of grafting a new habit into our lives, or facilitating change at work, or in an aspect of our lives. Weakness that creates a steady and encouraging space for transformation to unfold.

121. Grace Ariel

Art That Changed the World is a lovely coffee table book from DK publishing and I enjoyed reading how Leonardo DaVinci is known by art historians for introducing a style of painting called sfumato (“in the manner of smoke”) where he blurred edges and offered viewers “grace,” as one commentator put it. This is in contrast to painters before him who rendered “lucid” lines and intent.

DaVinci also painted with “ariel,” which means “atmospheric,” or seeking to create a pleasant experience. In other words, DaVinci created paintings that invited his viewers into a topography that engaged rather than disengaged his audience.

“Grace Ariel” is a lovely idea and a worthy goal if we are a painter, friend, parent, sibling, colleague, neighbor, or simply a human navigating all the challenges and blessings of living our lives outside of a painter’s frame.

122. Suffering's Yield

"The question isn't whether or not you will suffer. You will suffer. At issue is the meaning of suffering, or the yield."

Louise Glück said those words during a baccalaureate address at Williams College. She died at the age of 80. She was a Nobel Prize winning poet and a favorite of mine whose collected poems I once read steadily for three months.

Explaining her point further Glück added, "To teach myself hope, I began, thirty years ago, to chart periods of silence in the same way that I dated poems. And I have repeatedly seen long silence end in speech. Moreover, the speech, the writing that begins after such a siege, differs always from what went before, and in ways I couldn't through the act of will accomplish."

Although it is nearly impossible to conceive of when you are inside a season of suffering in your life, I can attest that suffering does always produce a "yield."

For Glück that meant a long silence in her life always ended in speech. And that speech - the eyes through which she observed life, her new poems - was wiser, more empathetic, and insightful. This was her "yield."

In the suffering you have experienced, or with those you love, have you seen a version of such a yield?

As Glück points out, we all will suffer at one time in our life, the question is will we notice what this season brings forth when that time ends?

123. To Love Your Life

Gerard Manley Hopkins, a poet and a priest, died of typhoid at the age of forty-five. His last words were reportedly: "I am so happy. I am so happy. I loved my life."

Although celebrated today for poems such as "Pied Beauty." and "God's Grandeur," in his lifetime, Hopkins is thought to have been perhaps bi-polar. He struggled to find employment and his work was not published until 30 years after his death. And yet, at the time of his death, he could say "I loved my life."

Is there perhaps no better goal? No better aim with the days we are given than to love our life?

Do you love your life? If not, what might need to change, be added, or re-focused?

124. Still and Astonished

Thirst is the book Pulitzer Prize winning poet Mary Oliver wrote after losing her partner of over 40 years.

In one poem she circles around “what matters” in this time of loss and reminds herself where and how she has found meaning and purpose in the past is by “standing still and learning to be astonished.”

125. One You in All Time

I remember my father once reflecting on how when someone dies all those thoughts, insights, and experiences are lost.

His point was recognizing the finite aspect of one's life.

I came across the same thought from Martha Graham recently who added we should not to waste our time or be timid with our lives.

Graham said, "There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening, that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and will be lost."

Is there something you are blocking in your life that you might share with the world?

How would it look and what would you do next to express and to trust there is "only one of you in all time."

About Mark Barger Elliott

I'm a writer, coach, consultant, slow marathon runner, and award-winning documentary filmmaker. For 30 years as a pastor I taught about faith, purpose, emotions, miracles, and finding joy and gratitude within the gift that is our life. For 34 years I've been married to an amazing woman and our three grown children inspire us every day. I graduated from Cornell University with a love of poetry, Princeton Theological Seminary with a Master of Divinity, and San Francisco Theological Seminary with a Doctorate in communication. For more information visit my website at markbargerelliott.com.