

# thoughtworm

## 12



August 2005

Dear friends,

The last year has been one of the most tumultuous of my life to date. About one year ago, Malinda and I made the decision to separate for good...to end our almost ten-year partnership. This has been by far the biggest change I've ever dealt with. And although we've managed the transition into a wonderful friendship since the split, it's still been a very painful experience. Saying goodbye to her when I left Wichita Falls hurt in a way I had never felt before.

For the last six months of my time in the Falls, I lived a quiet life. I spent a lot of time outdoors: biking, running, walking, and exploring in my surroundings. I tried to heal, and I think I succeeded. It's an ongoing process, of course, but I feel different, and in a good way. During these months, I also wrote a lot about what I was doing and what I was feeling. Much of this writing ended up in my weblog. But I wanted to put it in print, too, because I needed the closure. I needed to hold these dusty Texas months in my hands one last time. Thank you so much to everyone who called, wrote, and spent time with me.

Take care,

Sean

Saturday, December 11, 2004

So I started the day with a run and ended it with a bike ride. When I was out running this morning I saw this giant hawk standing next to the trail, and as I got closer it flapped its wings and flew off, a dead squirrel dangling from its talons. Damn, nature is always knocking me over when I least expect it.

I went out to ride on my favorite part of the bike trail. There's rarely anyone on this part, and maybe that has something to do with the fact that it winds through what many people here consider the 'unsavory' part of town. What this means of course is that most of the people on this side of town have a different color skin than most of the people on the other side of town. And it's ridiculous that it's two thousand and fucking four and things are still this way, but I guess they always will be so that's that.

The trail parallels the river and even though the river is mud brown, if I don't look too closely I can only see the way the water shimmers and sparkles, and how the spindly tree branches cast their reflection across the surface. And as I ride through the twisty turns I feel good. It's winter now and there are dry brittle sticks scattered over the trail and as I ride over them they snap and crack, flying up to ring

against my spokes. And I like this sound 'cause it contrasts nicely with the smooth hum of my tires on the concrete path. Then I cross over a wooden bridge and I like this sound, too, of my tires hitting each slat, and a cluster of sparrows shoot up out of the bushes ahead of me soaring out over the river. And I keep riding, breathing sharp winter fire.

I pass across a couple of roads and then there's this little pull-off next to the trail that people have made from driving their cars up away from the road so they can do whatever it is they need to do in hiding. One time I rode by and there were some teenage girls parked there and I'm pretty sure they were up to no good based on the expressions on their faces when they saw me but it's no concern of mine so I just rode on. That's the beauty of riding your bike; you're always moving.

Today no one is parked at the pull-off, although there is evidence that it's been used recently for some sort of roadside raucousness. I ride on and pass some kids playing near the side of the river. Then I get to the part of the trail where it just mysteriously ends and I turn around. On the way back the wind is at my back and I'm thinking that there's nothing so wonderful as a late afternoon bike ride. And if life was just a bike ride on this here trail, that I think I

could hack it. I really do.

I approach the railroad bridge and the box-cars lined up on it have some cool graffiti on them that I stare up at as I ride underneath until the sun, on its way back down below the skeletal treeline, shoots beams into my eyes and I have to look away. And as I get close to where I leave the trail and hit the streets, I hear and see some kids messing around underneath the highway overpass and I think to myself that as long as there are overpasses and rivers and kids that they will gravitate toward each other because what's cooler than messing around under the overpass next to the river, right?

I ride away from the trail, content and reflective about the day, which has turned out to be a good one without much planning or anything, just making sure to balance being outside exercising and enjoying the nice weather with being indoors and getting some things done, some manuscript revision, some present wrapping. Yeah, it was a nice day and I feel pretty lucky right now.

**Friday, December 17, 2004**

When I run I feel invincible. Like I could keep running forever and that nothing can get in my way. I realize this is delusional but I still enjoy it. Be-



ing in constant motion appeals to me. Everything looks much more interesting when it's just a blur out of the corner of my eye. I like seeing Christmas lights like this. They are bright and warm and I see just enough of their bright colors off to the side as I run to make me happy. It's better to see things like this because when I look at any one thing longer I start thinking about it too much. When I run I reach a point where I'm not thinking about breathing anymore and it all comes so naturally. And I think then that I understand what Scott Carrier writes about in his essay "1963" when his brother is talking about figuring out how to run without getting tired and how it's all in how you breathe. Because at that point I know that I can run for a long time. All of my focus is on moving forward. And it's odd to me how I can run several miles and barely feel winded when I stop. And when I stop it's like I'm floating, like my body feels so light. Almost like I could be carried away in the wind.

**Saturday, January 15, 2005**

Evening run. Cold but clear. Sky like polished stone. First, past the tree of many birds. They think I don't know they're in there when they get all quiet as I pass by, but I know...I know. Cross 5th

Street. Cross Scott Street. Past the Backdoor Theatre. Play that's showing I kinda want to see but don't want to pay the money. I am reverting to my cheap self. Up Indiana. Plastic bag caught in tree, not in sad yearning *American Beauty* way, but in desperate sign of downtown revitalization failure kind of way. Past more empty buildings, For Lease, For Lease, smashed up storefront. Across from the library, Matlock's Grill: scent of dead animal flesh. In the parking lot: a dead bird, possibly a vireo, its yellow and black feathers torn asunder to reveal white bones, red blood, the delicate vulnerable ingredients inside us all. Round the corner, back down Scott. Top of ANB building: 5:55 PM, 30° F, -1° C. Pass Plaza Hotel in the Petroleum Building. No need for vacancy sign. Fernando's Restaurant: a few tables full. Another plastic bag in tree. Sensing a trend. Pass Courthouse Annex where you register your car. Last week there was a g-string lying on the sidewalk out front. Around Christmas the staff hang bent-up old license plates in the pine trees sprouting from the cement. Pass Bank One. Two-month old empty pint of vodka still resting on curb of obviously underused sidewalk. Pass Courthouse. Down the alley, abandoned late-model Camaro on right, been there for months, driver's side window smashed out. Why has no one stolen it?

Why?? Pass burrito shop. Round building into parking lot. Stop. Find quarter on ground. Stretch. 35 push-ups. Inside.

## Tuesday, January 25, 2005

Do you ever find yourself hard to pin down? Like all your hopes, needs, and desires are constantly shifting and drifting? Life is a series of experiments, it seems. Testing out what works and what doesn't. And when you find the right combination, the best thing for everyone is if, as Joseph Campbell says, you "follow your bliss." It may take years and many failed experiments, but we have to trust that it's worth the wait and keep trying. Have you ever witnessed a bizarre combination of events or observed a strange series of sights and marveled at the unpredictability of the world? And if it truly is so wondrously random, then anything *must* be possible.

I cannot WAIT to run tonight! Two days off and my legs are screaming to hit the streets.

## Monday, January 31, 2005

This stasis, it has its merits. Still, it rattles at the hinges. I used to hurry through the day, looking forward to my dreams. Meaning what? That life is the dullness, but somehow your brain nightly jigsaws



it all back together into a more exotic pattern? Waking life was not threaded with the joy and hope I'd desperately wished for. And buried in your unconscious, the abandoned passion now lies musty under old responsibilities, stashed away behind past bad habits and the distractions of former lovers. To resurrect it would be to shatter the structure of your life now, however tenuous it may actually be. But from your crumbled life that passion will swell, a dried-out corpse suddenly sparked with life flailing and forcing itself upward through densely packed soil to the sweet fresh air above. And then...would the first step be the hardest, the most cataclysmic? Or would it be the lifetime of steps to follow? As I sift through the jumbled pictures in my head, I wonder just how it ever came to be the way it is now.

**Saturday, February 12, 2005**

A lonely squirrel lives downtown. I see it while I'm walking to work, as it gathers acorns from below the two sad spindly trees growing out of the sidewalk. As I approach, it slowly moves away, almost like it wants me to get closer. It jumps onto the wall, clinging to the bricks, and at eye-level I meet its gaze. Its longing look makes me half-expect it to leap onto my shoulder. There are no other squirrels

around; it has only the clannish pigeons as companions. And I doubt they think much of a lonely squirrel. Different species so rarely get along, unless there is some mutual benefit. But when you're the only one of your kind, barely eking out an existence, where do you find the joy in your life? This instinctual putting up of walls is so unhealthy, so contrary to nature, and there's no justification in the fact that it's been an old familiar practice for so long. Living at arm's length, casting a yearning look over your shoulder even as more walls go up around you, only reaching out tentatively at such erratic intervals as to assure the continuance of a solitary life. Meanwhile, it's raining again, and I wonder where that squirrel finds its shelter.

## Sunday, February 13, 2005

Silly me. What was I thinking. Knowing full well that the bike trail on a sunny warm Sunday is no place for someone on a bike wishing to travel in a straight line at speeds greater than five miles an hour, I still decided to throw caution to the wind and try it anyway. Having been cooped up in the house with a mild cold, I was going a bit stir-crazy and needed some fresh air. Not feeling well enough to go for a run, I figured a short bike ride on the lesser-used sec-

section of the trail would fit the bill. So I'm out there cruising along, feeling pretty good, when I encounter aberration number one. I hear far off in the distance behind me the vaguely menacing whine of motorcycle engines. They grow closer and my concern increases. Finally, the noise is upon me and at this point I'm just hoping that whoever is coming is skilled enough on whatever vehicle they're piloting to give me a wide berth. Then the first one passes me, and I wish I could say I wasn't so jaded as to be surprised at what I saw, but, alas, I live in Wichita Falls and if there is a new and idiotic trend on the market our citizens will joyfully and wholeheartedly embrace it! What I saw, as the procession continued, was a group of grown men riding those imbecilic miniature gas-powered motorcycles, their pitifully inadequate yet screechingly loud lawnmower engines whining at full throttle. Several of these men, who quite astonishingly showed no signs of embarrassment at their public display of asinine behavior, were riding the "chopper" style bikes while at least one other was riding the "cock rocket" type (this guy was crouched in the saddle in what looked like an extremely uncomfortable position, his long legs bent outward like wings, an obvious testament to the fact that his was not the age group intended as the target market for these toys). A

couple of more guys held up the rear, struggling to keep up on their lesser-equipped scooters.

Amazing how quickly a person's mood can diminish, decay, deflate...whatever. When I realized these guys were on the trail for the long haul, I dejectedly navigated a u-turn and headed back from whence I came, unfortunately choosing to ride downwind of the water treatment plant, which smelled even more mind-numbingly putrid than usual this afternoon. So, as I rode, I wondered how to salvage this outing. I wasn't quite ready to cash in my chips and head home. Well, the first improvement came when I saw a kid on a bike who looked strikingly like a younger version of Sam from the sadly short-lived TV show "Freaks and Geeks." That put a smile on my face. Then as I neared the coliseum, I spotted a few of my comrades, the squirrels. "Ride on, O Tall One, your journey is not yet complete," they chattered, holding their tiny paws up in salute. Well, shit, I thought, everyone knows that when the squirrels tell you to keep going, you keep going.

I head for Lucy Park, knowing this is risky, as it sends me by the stupid falls, a known high-traffic area, especially on nice days such as this one. I have to ride onto the grass in order to pass three people who insist on spreading out across the entire width of

the trail. When I get to the park, I leave the trail and get on the park road to avoid any further run-ins with pedestrians who are lacking in the knowledge and practice of proper trail etiquette (comprising at least 92 percent of the population that uses the trail).

On my circuit around the park, I notice several shirtless white males engaging in the inexplicably popular sport of Disc Golf. Now, I'm the first to admit that I am not a sports enthusiast and therefore know little of these so-called fringe sports, but does this sport even exist anywhere else? Really, I'm dying to know. I've never heard of it before coming here, and yet every park in town has a Disc Golf course. And for some reason, it seems to be wildly popular with the shirtless white male demographic. Frisbee Football played by hippies I've witnessed, but not this.

Then just as I'm about to pack it in and head home, I come upon an even more bizarre sight. A group of middle-aged men with beer bellies appear to be jousting or engaging in some sort of swordplay off to my left. I ride over for a closer look. What could this be? Is it some sort of reunion for washed-up ex-members of the Society for Creative Anachronism? One of the participants does seem to be wearing some perversion of a medieval outfit. I coast to a stop and meditate on the scene before me. There are about



eight of them, most wearing sweatsuits and protective pads on their limbs. They hold padded sticks with which they thrust and parry as their wives sit in folding chairs looking on. Apparently, this is yet another routine Sunday afternoon activity here in the Falls that I was previously unaware of. Then my eyes drift over to a nearby sign citing a city ordinance: Do Not Thrash Pecan Trees. Well, I hereby propose a new ordinance: Do Not Thrash Each Other With Padded Sticks. My feet hit the pedals again and I head out. A car passes me, and the guy inside waves. I have no idea who he is, but I wave anyway. Maybe I should leave the house more often.

## Monday, February 21, 2005

I'm typing this with one hand. Yesterday I was in a bike accident. Some seriously evil people had stretched a tripwire across the bike trail near my apartment, about a foot off the ground where no one was likely to see it. My front tire hit the wire and I wrecked, ending up in the emergency room. Nothing was broken, but I'm pretty banged up and home doped up on painkillers and muscle relaxants. I sprained my wrist and essentially have whiplash, in addition to some road rash in various places. I stupidly wasn't wearing my helmet. It was one of the

few times I've ever gone out without it. I guess I thought I'd be all right on this short lazy Sunday ride. Boy, was I wrong. That's the last time I *ever* get on a bike without a helmet.

## Sunday, March 06, 2005

So, today, on the two-week anniversary of the now infamous tripwire incident, I walked over to visit the scene of the crime. I decided that even if I never go down that section of the trail ever again, I should at least go back this one time. And it's unlikely that I will ever bike that section again. I won't ever be able to speed down it with the same carefree abandon that I used to. I'll be constantly looking down for damn tripwires all the time, and how much fun is that?

The sky was partly cloudy, and the temperature maybe around 60 degrees or so. I walked slow and steady, intent on the mission at hand. I wasn't sure what to expect. I knew what I wanted to happen. I saw myself recognizing the spot immediately where I had half-watched in a daze as the helpful roller-blader tossed the tripwire after dismantling it. I imagined kneeling down now and finding it lying there in the weeds, still coiled up defiantly waiting for my anxious fingers to discover it.

As I walked down the path, I felt a lot of conflicting emotions. My heart started beating faster and my palms began to sweat. The path was deserted, which was good because I felt a slow rage boiling in me at the person or persons who'd effectively robbed me of what had been become one of my favorite places to escape to in this city. The early spring greenery looked pretty, but it just made me angrier. Because it's all been spoiled now. I imagined that anyone I saw at this moment on the trail would come under my immediate suspicion, and I'd be highly tempted to run up and start throttling them, screaming, "you did it, didn't you, didn't you??" My anger, though, shifted to nervousness and a bit of fear as I continued walking. At one point, I heard footsteps behind me. I whirled around to see a guy carrying a water bottle who was obviously out exercising. He probably thought I was nuts as he hurried by.

When I got closer to the area where I thought the accident had occurred, I realized that I was going to have more trouble than I had anticipated in pinpointing the actual location. As I was loitering around on the side of the trail trying to gather my thoughts, I heard a familiar insidious whining engine noise. I'd encountered this on the same exact stretch of the trail the week before my accident. Sure

enough, as I stood there a line of six fully-grown adult men came whizzing by on those fucking ridiculous miniature motorcycles. Damn them, I thought, those bastards are ruining the trail.

It was then that it occurred to me that maybe the tripwire had been set for those jerks. Some cranky trail user, disgruntled by these fools destroying the area's peace and solitude, may have strung it up hoping to teach them a lesson. And if they'd hit it, they would've surely suffered worse than me. With the speed they were traveling at and the height of the wire, someone could've broken their neck. Then I started thinking about what I would've thought if I heard about that happening to one of those idiots. Would I have laughed and thought it served them right? I guess I can't really say no for sure.

I walked on a little further, somewhat in denial of my inability to find the place where I'd flown off my bike and collided with the hard cement. But everything kind of looked the same, and my hazy recollections of the minutes following the accident offered few helpful details. There was a picture of it in my mind, but it didn't match up with what I was seeing. I finally turned around somewhat dejectedly and headed back toward downtown. Those idiots on their undersized cock-rockets blew by again, and it sud-

denly struck me that I really had no idea what purpose my fantasy of finding the tripwire served. If anything it would only refresh the memory of the accident, making it seem all the more real and forcing me to re-experience all the emotions I've felt over the last couple of weeks. I mean, there's nothing else that can be done. I have no idea who did it, and so it's not like I can confront them. I've done all I could to prevent it from happening again. I filed a report with the police, and I've warned the people I know who use that part of the trail. Malinda relayed what happened to the local bike shop owner, who is a good person to tell as he probably knows every cyclist in town and can get the word out. In short, I've gotten all the closure that I think I'm gonna get.

So, really, I thought to myself as I left the trail, what I need to do is to just leave it all in the past and move on, which as soon as my injuries heal, I'll be happy to do. Returning to the precise spot where I fell and locating the stupid tripwire wouldn't have done much for me. If anything, it probably would've made me angrier and more upset, and I'm already tired of feeling that way. I just want to be able to get on my damn bike again.



Wednesday, March 09, 2005

The days bleed out beyond the scabrous bandage of time, their hours thin and watery, splashing one into the next. There is no coagulant here. I'm a bleeder, standing alone in my own deepening puddle of minutes and seconds that drip from the clocks and watches I've placed around me.

Still recovering and unable to run yet, I roam the streets after work. Downtown is deserted in the early evening, only the shadowy skaters showing life. Tonight the skaters are next to my building. They are coarse, grubby boys and I pass invisibly through their midst, an anonymous wraith, tall and aloof on an aimless mission. One of the boys falls off his board into the street. His friends laugh as a slow-moving pizza delivery van approaches. I move on.

I discover that I can once again rotate my head back and forth freely, albeit slowly. After my accident, I'd grown accustomed to moving my entire body every time I had to look at something not directly in front of me, or when someone called my name. I'd begun to feel like a life-sized cardboard cut-out of myself. People would come in my office and start talking to me while I sat in front of my computer, and I'd say, "Wait, wait just a minute." Then

I'd turn and prop myself up squarely in front of them. "There," I'd say, "that's better. Now, what were you saying?" It's gonna be tough to break that habit.

I pass the Falls and mildly consider the prospect of riding down them in a barrel (which, for those few of you who have seen the Falls, should produce a comical image in your minds). I walk through clouds of gnats. Gnats? In early March? I wave my arms like windshield wipers and they scatter.

The weeping willows show off new greenery. I love the weeping willows. Their long tendril-like branches wave seductively in the wind, and I'm drawn to them as I am to so many trees. They're like gentle people who don't talk out loud, and their forced rooting in one unchangeable place is both their tragedy and their strength.

The shackles close in around my mind and I'll turn around when I reach the park, but not before one word and a smile from a stranger redeem me.

**Thursday, March 17, 2005**

This woman says to me on the sidewalk, "You are just the most punctual young man. We see you walk by our office at the same time every day."

Then she asks me if I go to First Baptist. Says her husband thought he'd seen me there. I struggle

not to look offended. First Baptist is the colossal church empire up the street from me. They just finished construction on this huge glass sanctuary that strikes me as Wichita Falls's answer to the Crystal Cathedral. This is the church led by the esteemed Robert Jeffress. He's the one who led the campaign against the library in the *Daddy's Roommate/ Heather Has Two Mommies* book controversy. His solution was to check the books out and not return them. Because it's okay to break the law in the name of protecting our children from reading picture books about the evil homosexuals. Oh, but he said he'd pay for them, which may have made him feel better but doesn't change the fact that he violated a city ordinance in the first place. As if we wouldn't just buy replacements anyway.

I am lauded for my punctuality and mistaken for a First Baptistite. This is my outside shell. This is what they see. The faceless people offering high-interest loans and sketchy tax services. But inside... inside I am the broken sidewalks of downtown. I am the weeds growing in the abandoned parking lots. I am two feet hitting the pavement at 5:30 PM to begin living again. The sun warms me, and I am suddenly five senses all struggling over who gets to lead.

There is a certain time of day when I feel I

should be napping so that I can stay up later reading into the early morning hours. My head nods as I sit in my chair at work, and I want to slide out of it, down onto the floor and surrender to my short-circuit dreams. Instead I fight to stay awake, only to find myself nodding off later while reading, ironically, about more fulfilling pathways in life.

I may be on time, but I'm also plotting against it. Because ever since I heard Gabriel Horn speak about the difference in concepts of time between primal people and civilized people, I've known that I don't belong in this "civilized" time configuration. This was reaffirmed when I read the book *Beyond Culture* by Edward T. Hall. In it, he talks about the difference between M-time (monochronic) and P-time (polychronic). Americans live within an M-time structure. It is the eight-hour day, the 5-day week; it is the process by which we force productivity to operate within an artificial linear framework of ultimately arbitrary design. P-time is essentially what Horn would call primal time, which is innate among native peoples, as well as being common in Mediterranean cultures. It has a much more natural cadence; it allows for creativity to happen and then run its course, instead of trying to make it conform to a schedule. P-time says finish writing that song or that story instead

of going back to work after lunch. Because ideas are not made to be staggered out between or during segmented work sessions; they should be connected fully within the context of which they were originally thought up.

It struck me that the most creative periods of my life were when I was living in more of a P-time frame of mind than an M-time one. These were times when I was not working full-time, but was taking classes and had pockets of time here and there to write or play music. My days were non-linear, and I was therefore able to accomplish a lot more. The years when I left the house before seven and was gone for ten or eleven hours were the ones when my creativity suffered most. Too tired at night, with no time to spare during the day. At one job I used to barricade myself in a bathroom stall and scribble furiously in my notebook. It was desperation; my mind was exploding with images and there was no other time for me to let them out. But that's what living in an M-time society will reduce you to.

So my mind yearns to shift out of this flawed time configuration again, but right now it's late on the fourth day of a six-day work week and I'm tired...so tired. But think about it. Do rigid, restrictive schedules really help you get done what you want to get



done? Or are those schedules holding you back, hacking away at your creative endeavors until they've lost all the context in which you initially began them?

Sunday, March 20, 2005

Strange sensation results when, after running three and a half miles, I jump in a car and start driving. Friday evening: ran across town to Malinda's to borrow her car. She'd left me the Hunter S. Thompson memorial issue of *Rolling Stone*, which is really, really good. This morning, drove car back over there and ran back here, passing hospital visitors and churchgoers along the way. Observed the sludgy green water in the bottom of the cement "river" bed. Nasty. The grackles are back, sleek and black, strutting across lawns and squawking majestically, expanding their wings in that pompous way they have. Good to see them. Saw mighty sycamores and wrote this:

Scar-white limbs bleached out

Against bitter blue sky

Thick trunks of bone

Mottled in greys and greens

Your craggy branches

Offering crowns of solace

Too far out of reach

For those of us who need it.

Yesterday was my birthday and I worked. We held the second meeting of the teen advisory board. I chaired it, since my boss Lesley was out of town (but she did send me a cool birthday card from California). The teens voted to call the group CATs (Council of Advisory Teens), we did some booktalking, and decided on furniture to order for the library's new YA area. It was a successful meeting, but the subsequent afternoon at the reference desk dragged on forever. Extremely slow for a Saturday.

Went shopping after work. Got a cup of good coffee at the grocery store. The cashier reminded me of a girl I knew in graduate school, and I was reminded of how much of a social turtle I was during that time: head tucked safely in my shell. I wonder if I've improved much since then. Hard to say.

Shortly after I got home the phone rang and it was my long-lost friend Andy. Hadn't talked to him in, I think, over two years. His calling on my birthday was a mere coincidence. Long rambling conversation followed. It was so nice to talk to him, but once again it made me feel so far away. We talked of one day owning a secluded compound somewhere in the middle of nowhere where we could all live. Pieced together some dinner after that, including a big plate of edamame. Then Malinda called to wish me a quick

happy birthday. Opened packages from my mom and my sister Anne, who called while I was opening hers. Talked to her for a little while, then ate my last black-and-white birthday cupcake from Malinda while watching Real Time with Bill Maher. My god, those cupcakes were so good. Nodded off shortly afterwards.

## Tuesday, March 22, 2005

I am groggy...late afternoon crash after a long day. Woke early so as to experience the fullness of a day off from work. The days, they mean so much more when those minutes and hours remain pliable, a palette of time with which to paint your experiences. I ate breakfast, drank coffee, engaged my mind in some writing. Took the trash out, and the weather was so nice that I sat down on the cement slab outside the door, my back against the brick wall. Allowed the sun to warm me as I wondered about where I belong, what I should be doing. I think about people raising families, experiencing love in romantic relationships, building strong friendships. All deeply fulfilling things, for sure, but are they what we were put on this earth to accomplish? Or are they merely distractions from our true callings?

Pondering this, I note the UPS driver pulling

into the parking lot. I know this man. He delivers to the library and I used to open the loading dock door for him every day. But since my promotion, that's not been part of my job description. This UPS man mildly fascinates me because he is one of the few adult men I've known who is both taller and skinnier than me. Maybe not for long on the skinnier part, I think, looking down at my arms, which have shrunk since I stopped lifting weights. I am wasting away again. It happens from time to time.

I ate some lunch and deliberated on what to do next. Again, the afternoon loomed before me, an untouched canvas, stretched and ready. It's a beautiful thing: staring at a block of time in which anything, anything can happen. And it's all yours.

I decide to go out on the road bike. Thirty miles. I knew I'd hit a nasty headwind on the way back, and so I tried to steel myself for it. Still, it was brutal at times and it wore me down. It was still a great ride: just me and the cows. I always greet them as I pass by and they always look up, pausing in their cud-chewing to stare me down with their big brown eyes. Caught up to four people on horseback riding down the middle of the road. They moved onto the shoulder so I could ride by. Saw dead turtles, dead skunks, dead birds. But then there was the sweetness

in the air of the new mesquite blossoms, the sudden green grass, the dried-out creek beds, red clay soil exposed on a hillside, farm ponds rippling in the gusty March wind. And above it all stretched the boundless Texas sky, bold and blue, scudded with cotton clouds.

Now, after returning weary but content, I gorge on food then shower. I lie down on the bed, pleasantly spent, mesmerized by the catkins swaying on the oak branches outside my window, the green pollen glowing in the indulgent late afternoon sun. It feels decadent to be leisurely at this time of day, full of a peace that never follows an eight-hour workday. This is luxury, to be here observing in the moment, rather than rushing out the door at work to hurry home. For what? It's too late then to organize your thoughts for the day. It's over. You cook, you eat, read a bit before sleep drips into your consciousness, an unwanted narcotic bridging the gap to another day of work. To truly live, then, is to allow the day to open up gradually before you, a rare orchid never before seen, breathtaking in both its mysterious rhythm and its hidden potential, as opposed to having the hours of that same day pounded inch by inch into your skull by the bloodsuckers, the dictators, the thieves of time. But they didn't get this one. This one was all mine.



Monday, March 28, 2005

Monday is the week's whipping boy. I bring my Monday stick with me to work and bash away at this brick wall of a day. But then...I'm home and out the door for a run in the glorious dwindling sunlight. And as the days have lengthened, the sights and smells of spring have decorated the bleakness of downtown. I pass the pine trees behind the library and almost collapse in the staggering presence of their sweet scent. Oh, I'd forgotten about these trees, the ones that carried me through many a dark day when I had my old job and worked in the windowless back room of the library. I'd sneak outside and breathe in the pines to help me remember why life matters so much. But it's strange now to see all this greenery and to smell new flowers and buds. Spring feels foreign. A couple of weeks ago, the birds cruised back into town and freaked the hell out of me. I was out running and heard all this unfamiliar chatter disturbing the dead silence of downtown's winter. Oh, I finally figured out, the birds are back.

I run because I don't know what else to do. I run because it is an action that makes me feel sensations, and I know that when I stop I won't have those sensations anymore. In their place I will have new

ones. And so I can feel transformed within a very short time. Running for me is a microcosm of a familiar pattern in life. The pattern goes like this: a person or an activity is introduced into your life and you experience life with that person or while doing that activity. You learn about yourself, about others, and about life through knowing this person or doing this activity. And then that person is gone or you stop doing that activity. It may be sudden or gradual, but at the end you are in a new part of your life. You may miss the old part, and you may feel a bit lost. But as time passes, you then learn even more about yourself, about others, and about life. This pattern repeats over and over, the knowledge continuing to build on itself and further your growth. Except, of course, for those who choose to be with the same people and do the same things for their entire adult life. But I don't know any of these people. They are becoming an endangered species.

After my run tonight I sit outside next to the side door of my building. It's my new favorite place for reflection. I watch the few cars pass; I stare at the monolithic federal building; I let my eyes follow the pigeons as they crisscross the sky. Across the street in the parking lot of the First United Methodist Church, a boy practices ollies on his skateboard as his parents

blather away to another couple. For some reason, the scene gets to me. I guess I remember being that kid, perpetually waiting around for the adults. But I still practice my ollies, and I'm still waiting around... except I'm the adult now.

As I'm sitting there thinking about all this, I see one of my upstairs neighbors walking along the sidewalk. He is one of the few people in my building who I've actually had some sort of conversation with. He's an elderly retired military man, and one day many months back we crossed paths as I was coming in and he was going out. He introduced himself and began babbling about this and that in an almost manic way, and it occurred to me afterwards that those might have been the most words he'd spoken out loud in weeks. Around this same time at work, I received a patron book purchase request form from someone with an address in my building. Turns out it was this same guy. He wanted the library to subscribe to the *Air Force Times* and the *Army Times*. I wrote him a letter telling him that we'd subscribe to the *Air Force Times* now (this being an Air Force town), but that we'd have to wait until the new fiscal year to subscribe to the *Army Times*. Since I sent the letter, in sharp contrast to our initial encounter, his greetings to me have been either terse or nonexistent. I'm sure he

knows that I work at the library, because we've seen each other there many times. However, I doubt that he knows I'm the one who wrote the letter. Still, I can't help thinking now whenever I see him that he's pissed at me, as a representative of the library, for not ordering him the damn *Army Times*, too. However, one of the reference librarians told me that this guy was very excited when the *Air Force Times* appeared, so much so that he then suggested that we also get the *Navy Times*. Yeesh. You give these people an inch...

So, this guy passes me as I'm sitting there reflecting and we greet each other in a superficial way. And once again I'm struck by how lifeless my building is. There are only 12 apartments in it, and I haven't even seen most of my neighbors. The place is like a mausoleum. When I pick up my mail upstairs, I listen and look for signs of life but find none. We are like spiders, scuttling inside and hiding in our holes. There are people who live right next to me on my floor who I don't see for weeks. I don't even hear them. The only people I hear are the ones who live above me, and that's only because they have kids and some sort of small animal prone to galloping around the apartment.

No friendship or romance for me in my building then. But it's okay. I look at all the people

I've formed some sort of lasting bond with over the years and I realize that most of us are socially retarded in some way. It's like we are drawn to each other because on a primal level we know that there is no one else for us. We can only connect with people on a certain wavelength, and it's like matching blood types trying to find others who share this wavelength. But it's always so worth it when you find a match. In fact, it's really the most amazing thing in the world.

So I'm sitting on this pile of dusty cinders, this Monday I smashed to bits, and I'm feeling pretty good. I've come to a decision about something, and I may soon be taking some steps out where the footing is a little slippery, but that's okay. It's getting to be time to end this string of predictability. Life awaits.

## Monday, April 04, 2005

Each day the oak leaves hanging outside my window grow just a little bigger. I sit and watch them wave in the wind as the evening sun fades away to the glow of the sodium streetlights. This otherworldly orange hue passes through my windows without asking, causing me to look around the room in wonder; watching my head bobbing in shadowplay to the music; the blinds still open, their slats bisecting the glow as it projects guitar necks, TV antenna, jagged aloe

leaves in shadows spread flat across the walls.

Light is so amazing, the way it appears and disappears; its power to illuminate or obscure; how it plays across the face of someone you love, putting that catch in your throat just in the right place to make you cry. Since I've lived here in the Falls, I've always liked it more at night. I like the streetlights, how their dreamy light softens the rough spots and warms the coldness I too often feel. So much more possibility, so much more hope is hidden in what I can't see out beyond the circle of their safety.

I don't remember seeing a shooting star until I came to Texas. But here...here it's hard not to see them. We used to drive to Dallas at night to see bands play and I'd crane my neck out the window, my eyes widening at the hugeness of the night sky. So many stars to take in; it was staggering. And the utter blackness of night overwhelms, too, when you reach just the right spot between here and Dallas, where there are so few artificial lights. It truly feels like the end of the Earth, so far, far away from anyone or anything that matters. It's a darkness and wildness that's infinitely larger than your insignificant self, so far beyond your comprehension, and knowing that brings the gripping fear. But it passes...it passes, and the brutal redemption of morning comes in its place. Light,



like time, cycles on, the two of them tightly entwined in a struggle over what they can give and what they can take away. And all we can do is either look helplessly on, wringing our hands in indecision, or jump in the fray, unafraid to take a few hits.

## Monday, April 11, 2005

This morning I am assured that my head will not fall off. Thank goodness. With that out of the way, I go home and do some boring computer work. When I come out into the living room I find Scratchy lying smugly in the windowsill surrounded by leaves. The windows don't have screens but I keep them open slightly anyway for the benefit of the cats and for my own sanity. If I don't receive a steady flow of fresh air I'm liable to atrophy to the point of lapsing into a drooling state of torpor. Anyway, it seems that Scratchy had been sticking his paw out the window and catching the leaves blowing by in the brisk wind. He'd only caught three. So I walk up and throw them back outside. Was that wrong? I mean, frankly, I couldn't see where he was going with this. He'd been working on the project for several hours and hadn't come up with any specific plans for these leaves. Eh, he'll get over it. There are plenty more leaves where those came from.

This afternoon I blast out of the city on my magic bike, eager to see what there is to see. And there is a lot to see. A white horse and a donkey interact in a green field. A man carries a sack of mulch on his shoulder as his dog jumps around his feet, barking. A group of mockingbirds rises out of a field, swooping left then right, their white bands flashing against the blue sky. Endless blades of long grass next to the road shimmer seductively, hypnotizing me in their optical illusionary way. I love optical illusions, in the same way that I love dreams. They offer dazzling snapshots of alternate realities I'd like to visit. But today I shake off the spell of the grass and ride on. Because today there are also things to hear and smell. A white mailbox door squeaks in the wind. Scent of burning charcoal briquettes wafts by, throwing a wrench in the machinery of my brain. Good times of summer cookouts while growing up. That's right; in New Jersey we called 'em cookouts, not barbecues.

The wind today is a northern beast, giving me crosswinds both out and back. It's strange to ride in such a strong crosswind. I maintain my speed but struggle to keep the bike on the road at times. It's like trying to stand in the middle of a river with a fast-moving current. When I get to Friberg Church Road, I'm confronted straight on by the brutal force of this

northern beast. Even though I ride standing up most of the way up, I still barely crack 10 mph. I pass the horses; a small cluster of them gathers to watch my pitiful progress while several others lie flat on the ground. They look dead. I'm tempted to join them, but I press on.

I hit FM 890 and I'm in the crosswind again. I cruise up and down the hills without too much effort. Fighter jets threaten to scalp me as they cut in close overhead for a landing at the base. Members of the 363<sup>rd</sup> Training Squadron pick up trash on their adopted section of 890. Nice day for that sort of work. I reach 240 and then it's tailwind, tailwind all the way home.

This evening anything could happen. Really.

## Wednesday, April 13, 2005

I have always been restless. The desire to stay in motion is strong. Sometimes I need to run. Sometimes I need to ride. Tonight I needed to walk. Walking helps me think. Years ago, I used to walk the streets of another town. Back then it was in a desperate attempt to stamp out the blaze raging in my head. The desperation may be quieter now, but the urgency remains. Ten years later I'm still trying to understand myself, and, as always, the progress is

slow. I have always been better at driving people away than at drawing them in. It's a special talent I have, this ability to constantly keep everyone at arm's length. Anyone who's ventured too close has inevitably suffered. And that saddens me.

I tried to smile and say hi to everyone I walked past in the park tonight. Everyone was pretty friendly. This is what I saw in the park: shirtless white males drinking beer surreptitiously while playing disc golf, kids climbing on a jungle gym, a woman walking one large dog and one small dog, a father and son playing catch, and my first ever live armadillo!! You see plenty of dead armadillos on the road here, but I'd never seen one walking around before. It was quite a sight and it definitely made my night.

**Sunday, April 17, 2005**

Every time I run by the courthouse I think about the day I went in there before the judge for my divorce. And that makes me think about my jacket and tie, which I have only worn for two occasions since I bought them a few years back. The first was when one of my coworkers died and I went to his funeral. And the second was for my divorce. I need to get some good memories associated with that outfit or else I'm gonna be tempted to burn it. As a side

note, it's been two years since my coworker died and I now have his job. Let's hope the job isn't cursed. I still get calls from salespeople asking for him. Yeah, that's pretty awkward: "Um...Tim doesn't work here anymore. He died. And, uh, I have his job now." There's really not a tactful way to put that.

## Monday, April 18, 2005

So it seems I may have become a fixture downtown, as in "the guy who walks back and forth on the sidewalk four times a day." People are recognizing me. Considering the glaring dearth of foot traffic downtown, this really isn't all that surprising. But, damn, my invisibility powers are decreasing. Next thing you know I'm gonna have to talk to people and stuff.

Like today, for instance, when I talked to a local celebrity. He's one of our county judges, and he had made an appointment with me so I could show him the library's videoconferencing equipment. I say he's a local celebrity because there was an article in the New York Times last week about my town, and the Judge was quoted a couple of times in it. The article is basically a report on the recent upheaval in local government (police chief walking out, mayoral recall, several high profile officials forced into retirement by

the city council, etc.). The article also references a 2001 *Advertising Age* article that named Wichita Falls as America's Most Average City. Lord help us if that's truly the case. Anyway, there are some choice quotes in this article, all of which speak volumes about this place. But my favorite quote came from one of the city council members. When talking about the mayor, she said, "I could've dope-slapped him" for insulting the police chief (which had resulted in the chief quitting on the spot).

After work, I was late getting started on my evening constitutional, and so by the time I reached the huge sprawling convention center parking lots, I was a bit cranky. I halfway thought about turning around and going back home. But I started walking across the first lot, thinking how much easier it would be if I had brought my skateboard. Then I thought about how fun it would be skating in the smooth parking lot and I started getting really pissed that I hadn't brought my board. But then I thought about how I would've had to carry my board once I got to the trail and that made me feel better because it seemed important that I remain as unencumbered as possible on this walk.

So I get to the falls, and for a change I stop and sit on a rock overlooking the river. Even though



it's brown and nasty, the river still draws me to it. I looked down and spotted a snake lying coiled on top of a glut of flotsam and jetsam. I looked at the snake for a very long time trying to figure out if it was alive or dead, real or fake. I know snakes can lie still for a long time, so I eventually began tossing tiny pebbles down in the water near the snake. It didn't move. Hmm...I decided to keep walking.

I reached a nice spot with a bench among some trees. It afforded a good view of some shallow rapids in the river. I sat down and soon became engrossed in trying to figure out what this particular duck was up in arms (wings?) about. As the duck squawked and I stared, this redneck with his wife and kids came sauntering along the trail behind me. When they passed by the spot where my bench sat, the redneck looked out through the trees at the river and said to his wife, "If I get lonely again, this is the spot I'm gonna come to." Indeed. His wife shushed him and they continued on, leaving me to my duck-pondering.

I sat for a while longer watching another duck as she half-walked, half-paddled upstream, rooting with her bill along the river bottom, leaving a trail of cloudy silt in her wake. Finally I stood up and headed back down the trail toward the falls again.

Checked on the snake; it was still there. No solving that mystery tonight. I passed under the overpass and was struck by how the cars on the freeway sound so much less threatening when muffled by layers of concrete. Almost sounds comforting. I stayed on the trail instead of cutting back through the parking lots again. It proved worthwhile, as no people were on this section. A rabbit appeared on the side of the trail and I walked quietly toward it. It didn't move, and then I was standing right next to it. Gradually it shrunk down, flattening its ears against its back. Nice bunny.

I crossed over one bridge and under another, where I saw an entire outfit of clothes laid out up on the concrete embankment. I walked on, wary of a possible naked person in the vicinity. Reached the coliseum, left the trail and moved through downtown towards home.

**Wednesday, April 20, 2005**

It's easy to stay in control of nothing. When it's all programmed out for you, and you're coasting on casters through it all. But real motion, life-changing motion, it brings the fear. With the first tentative steps the all too familiar failings return. Obsessions, neuroses, and the paralysis of indecision. And yet the tendrils still creep forward, growing from

the scraps of paper lying around here with my future scrawled out upon them in some sort of madman's code. Tendrils to strangle the future, tame it, beat it down so when I finally get to it I'll have a fighting chance.

Meanwhile, I think there's a pigeon serial killer downtown. I keep finding entire wings torn off and lying on the sidewalk.

And I hate when I open the dictionary to the clown picture.

## Saturday, April 23, 2005

Annie Dillard shares this quote from an old Hasid master:

"When you walk across the fields with your mind pure and holy, then from all the stones, and all growing things, and all animals, the sparks of their soul come out and cling to you, and then they are purified and become a holy fire in you."

Today was a good day. It was cooler, only in the 60s, but sunny. I ran early, then came home and ate breakfast. I made coffee and sat down in front of the window to write. I worked a little on sketching out my next big writing project. Then I fiddled for a while with my new novel manuscript, trying to decide if I want to return to working on it now or

not. I'm still not sure.

I left the house. Paid for a haircut for the first time in 14 years. I'm pretty happy with how it came out, but what do I know? I took Malinda's car to the shop to get some work done. She's away racing in the Davis Mountains in southwest Texas. Good thing I brought it in because they found a broken CV joint. When I was driving back to return the car, I saw a man riding one of those mini motorcycles that you know I hate. He was in the *left* lane doing about five miles per hour down Scott Street (the main drag downtown). *And* his son was on the back! Okay, number one: what in the crap are you doing driving that thing on the street. And, number two: those things are barely big enough for one small person, never mind a full-grown adult *and* a kid. What is *wrong* with people?

This did not really upset me as much as I'm leading you to believe. Because I had a plan to go for a walk after I dropped off the car and I was excited. I grabbed my skateboard and skated over to the trail. Then I stashed my board in some bushes and headed toward the park. I stopped to check that clump of flotsam in the river to see if the snake was still there. It was gone! Shocking.

The day seemed to be aging like fine wine. I

reached the pagoda and veered off onto the unpaved section of trail that I've been meaning to investigate forever. I stopped for a minute to crouch on the bank of the river to inspect things. Sometimes in my ravenous quest to walk, I forget to pause and look around, to really *see* things and not just walk by them.

This trail proved to be a wonderful route through some of the wilder parts of Lucy Park. The limbs of the trees overhead curved to form a canopy of shade through which the occasional shaft of sunlight reached down to the ground. My heart swelled as I walked farther, having no idea where this trail was taking me. Isn't that just the best, though? The mystery of not knowing what could be around the next bend? As I walked I recalled the time last year when Ken took Malinda and me up in his plane. Seeing this area from a low-flying plane was incredible! The lack of trees turned into a good thing from above because it allowed us to see all the secret twisting trails and dirt roads that people have made through the years. They were everywhere, it seemed. And as I thought about this today, I also began to discover the network of tiny paths all over the back woods of Lucy Park. They appeared off the main trail, and every once in a while I'd walk down one to see where it went. Usually the paths cut through the woods to the river and then ran

alongside it. They reminded me of deer paths I'd find while hiking back east. Maybe that's what they were, although they may just as easily have been made by local fishermen.

I travel down one of these skinny side paths I've been noticing and suddenly arrive at a paved section of trail that I've never been on. Weird. I thought I'd been on all the paved trails in the park. Apparently not. And I've seen no one since I passed the pagoda and left the beaten path, so to speak. So I walk down the paved trail, pleasantly clueless as to where in the hell I am, when all of a sudden I have one of those transcendent moments that happen in the woods sometimes. I'm walking and there's this grove of young elm trees to my right, all spaced equidistant from each other, growing tall and thin toward the sky. And the sun is shining down through the canopy, falling just right all around these trees, and the air is completely still and I just have this feeling that I could be anywhere right now in any woods on any trail, but I'm here and it's beautiful. More beautiful than I could ever hope for. I am humbled.

I end up sitting on a huge elm limb that stretches out over the river. Ducks fly purposefully downstream, their bodies tucked into aerodynamic arrows. A brash grackle bathes in the river, making



sure to squawk each time it splashes its greasy wings in the brown water. Those grackles, they just have to let everyone know what they're doing, even when no one is around. Except me.

I return to fetch my board and skate home with the quickness, filled up by the wonder of life.

**Monday, April 25, 2005**

When everything seems like you're looking at it for the last time and your mind is a fissure, split like atoms that don't create bombs and you're too tired for sleep, you spend the cracks between days with a dictionary in your lap missing the words you need to write sentences that see verdant rolling hills and hear melodies washing through unclouded days. I'm so tired...so tired of trying to bend bars I cannot see. It's been a long day and none of this is supposed to make sense.

I found some pages from a handwritten letter dated May 26, 1990 in an alley the other day. They were just lying there with some other junk. It was a grey afternoon, looking like rain, and I was already starting to feel a bit down. But I stood there in that cruddy alley downtown reading this letter anyway. Here's an excerpt:

"Well it is 12:30 in the morning + I am think

thinking about you. I suppose Shiela came and visited you. I hate her and I don't even know the bitch...

Dennis I want us to be together but I'm scared of you now because I know that you have done heavy duty drugs and that makes your mind [the page ends there].

Dennis I wish you hadn't of gotten messed up with these people. Dennis I feel really, really bad that you are in jail in fact it's killing me to know that you are in jail, you let your so called friends take you down.

Dennis I wish I could help you but I can't and I know you are doing drugs cause you are too skinny. I wish I could just hold you and tell you that everything will be alright God I wish me and Dennis could just go away together and live happily ever after but I know it won't happen at least not for a while maybe someday we can."

**Wednesday, April 27, 2005**

Tonight I ran in the rain with the sting of ozone sharp in my nose. It was good. On the sidewalk behind the library I passed a cute girl dressed all in red. She smiled and I said hi. She said hi back. I was so happy I kicked a pinecone. Right after that I found a gold coin in the street commemorating the centennial of Lincoln County, Kansas. I tossed it aside for another lucky pedestrian to find. Greasy Mexican

food smell drifted by, making my mouth water for the kind of food I haven't eaten since I went vegan. The rain stopped and I was feeling pretty good, thinking about some of the things I'll miss about this place when I finally leave. And just as I'm thinking this, I'm running across a parking lot and I see an old red pick-up truck on the road that I'm heading toward. I'm about 20 yards away when the guy in the passenger seat yells, "Fuckin' faggot." Impressed by his bold attempt to determine my sexual orientation from so far away, I enthusiastically salute his observational powers with my middle finger. He yells "faggot" again. Touché. I give him the finger again. We appear to be deadlocked. The truck passes me and reaches a stop sign. I keep running toward that direction. The truck stops. Man, oh, man, I think. This is it. Fisticuffs. But, no, the driver flicks on his left signal and they drive off. I guess I wasn't worth it. In short, there are still some things I'll miss about this place, but roadside heckling sure isn't one of them.

Wednesday, May 4, 2005

Tonight it seems like I have x-ray vision. I went out walking and saw all this stuff I hadn't noticed before. I saw through walls! The alleys are where all the action is. I found a pair of license plates

lying face down in one alley. They were off to the side, against a wall. As if I wouldn't see them. Abandoned license plates are a sure sign of illicit activity, and that's exciting! Also, it's funny how people think that by throwing something in a dumpster you can make it disappear. You can't. It's now there for the taking by the rest of us.

## Monday, May 9, 2005

Downtown is quiet. A train passes by on the tracks in the distance but I can't hear it. All there is to hear is the wind moving between these silent buildings. The sun leaves; only a few gold-tinted clouds remain in a sky of darkening blue. This is my time to walk, to prowl the alleys and sidewalks, stopping to look up at the birds circling endlessly, singing high and free. I could stare at them all night. I really could. Passing the hotels and motels that long ago shut their doors. Abandoned motels hold a certain special sadness, all those empty rooms that were once constantly changing occupants.

Larry McMurtry announced he's closing his used and antiquarian bookstore Booked Up at the end of the year. He plans to just lock up all the buildings and leave those thousands of books forever trapped in time. I thought it fitting, considering how so much of

this area is already that way. It's like someone locked up all of downtown and threw the keys down a storm drain. Then they sauntered over to the southern end of town and reeled in all the chain stores, leaving downtown to sit undisturbed and gather dust.

## Wednesday, May 18, 2005

So I came to a realization tonight, after another interminably long day. I've been on edge, restless, and generally feeling like I'm about to explode since I got back from my trip. It's like each minute of the day has a steel sinker dangling off of it. Time stretches in a viscous mass around me. Rescue Remedy isn't cutting it.

But this evening I went on a ride with Malinda. And I'd forgotten how good it feels to ride with someone who will push you to ride harder than you would on your own. Malinda's gotten really good. I'm proud of her for becoming such a skilled rider. We did the church loop and when we finally came around into the headwind, it hardly fazed her. She seems capable of turning her power on and off at will, and to me that's a sign of a good cyclist.

After the loop, we hit the coliseum parking lot and practiced cornering, then raced around the perimeter crit-style. It was so much fun. So my reali-

zation is this: to get through the coming weeks, I'm just going to have to push my body as hard as I can whenever possible because it's in those moments only that I'm able to shut down my speeding thoughts. Or at least dilute them with sweat.

## Monday, May 23, 2005

In the heat of the evening, I walk down to the river and open my eyes wide. I'd been inside most of the day working on an article. Early this morning I ran in the cool air, thus avoiding the threat of heart failure.

At the river the lush greenery still shimmers in late golden sunlight. The air is still and everything looks surreal. I spook a bird. It flies up into a tree and I stand there trying to figure out what kind of bird it is. I stand there for a long time. The bird is uncooperative, perched motionless except for its swiveling white head. I try to fake it out by turning my own head, but when I turn back it has flown away. Sneaky bird.

Next I come upon a young squirrel hanging in the intersection of two thin branches of a tree. I walk right up to it and it doesn't move. Its eyes are open but it simply hangs there limp, its limbs draped carelessly as if it had fallen there. I move to look at it



from a different angle. Still no motion. It's so relaxed that its body shakes slightly in the breeze. Just when I start thinking maybe it's dead, it stretches its head under the branch and stares at me. I continue watching it until it finally snaps out of its reverie and scrambles away up the tree.

I walk to the riverbank and watch the mysterious ripples and bubbles across the water's surface. What is underneath? Fish? Turtles? There is a curious mixture of wildlife and trash floating in the river. A tire somehow stands upright floating in the water near the opposite bank. I walk past the falls, which stink to high heaven, and sit down on a bench to contemplate the weeping willow. Its new green leafy branches sway back and forth, lulling me into a daze.

Back the way I came, and there's not so much to look at. I make eye contact with a rabbit, and we are mutually unimpressed. Through the coliseum parking lot, pause to admire the native grasses and touch their fuzzy tips. Up in the sky hangs the moon, full and waxy bright. I ponder it and think good thoughts about my future. I can barely hold it all inside of me. I know whatever happens next will be right.

Friday, May 27, 2005

My old friend Mohammed once said to me, as we stood in the dishroom scraping half-eaten food off of plates into the trash can, "To meet, to know, and to part is the sad story of many human hearts."

The beginning of this day was an ending of sorts. I gave notice at work. I walked in the director's office first thing and told her I was moving back East. She subsequently went outside to smoke and on her way out told just about everyone else on staff. That was easy. Everyone is happy I'm leaving. And not because they hate me. June 28<sup>th</sup> is my last day. I'll be packing up and heading to Baltimore some time in the next couple of months.

I don't think I've idealized Wichita Falls since I've been writing on here. I've pointed out its faults. But there really are things I like about this place, and I like to share them. It took me a long time before I began to appreciate the good points, but they're here. So without further ado, here's my top ten list for Wichita Falls:

10. Talking (and arguing) about vegetarianism with the teenage cashiers and baggers at Market Street.

9. Seeing the awesome artwork through the Studio 717 window every day on the way to and from work.
8. Texas-sized grackles and all their crazy antics.
7. Downtown streets, alleys, and abandoned buildings.
6. Summer sno-cones.
5. Lucy Park and the nasty trash-filled brown river running through it.
4. The library.
3. Bike rides in the country and running through downtown streets.
2. The nice people I've met and worked with.
1. Malinda.

## Monday, May 30, 2005

Few trees come close to my favorite, the American sycamore. However, one has caught my eye this spring. It's the cottonwood, and I think it's rapidly sidling into second place behind the sycamore. There are some giant cottonwoods in Lucy Park, with thick bark so deeply furrowed you can stick your hand in between the gnarled ridges. Cottonwoods can grow to be more than 100 years old! The cottonwood is the sacred tree that Plains Indians use to make a Sun

Pole, around which the great Sun Dance is performed. But my favorite part of the cottonwood is its leaves. They are large and broad, silvery on their undersides, and when the wind moves through them they rustle and flash their silver sides in a remarkable show. It sounds like applause! It's one of the most wonderful noise I've ever heard in the woods. Today I stood under the cottonwoods and my heart was filled with joy at how awesome they are. My walking inventory:

2 herons strutting down the middle of the river.

1 suspension bridge over the river, from which I saw:

2 gigantic fish acting suspicious and

1 turtle soaking up the sun.

2 cardinals flirting (how romantic!)

1 dead armadillo, upside down in a field.

## Saturday, June 4, 2005

Yesterday I felt tingly all day.

I had nice dreams last night, and was rather disappointed when I woke up.

Today was a good mail day.

I think this month will be both too long and too short.

I crave resolution, but think I'll have to settle for distraction.

Wednesday, June 8, 2005

I had a sublime experience tonight. It rained torrential downpours over the weekend, and the river was already high. One of my friends at work told me it was up over its banks in places. So I hurried down there after work to have a look. I was walking along the path, listening to the cottonwoods, startling rabbits, and generally having an excellent time. Then I reached this bridge, and I stood underneath it. The current of the river was moving so fast. I looked up at the underside of the bridge. There are six horizontal concrete supports spanning the length of the river. And the sun's light was reflecting the movement of the river back up onto these supports, so that light and shadow moved across them at dizzying speeds. It awed me. Seeing it reminded me of that scene in *Koyaanisqatsi* where the time-lapsed clouds are racing across the sky above the canyons. And when you see something like that, you feel nature's power knock the breath out of you, making the hair on the back of your neck stand up, and you just want to kiss someone because your heart is bursting with such joy for the world. And, well, I just feel so lucky. I can't imagine being any happier than I am right now.

Friday, June 10, 2005

Spent a truly relaxing evening over at Malinda's, eating sugary raspberries and listening to AmAnSet. I almost fell asleep a couple of times, but Malinda didn't seem to mind. She's racing tomorrow so she was probably preoccupied.

Enchanted city streets guided me on my trusty bike toward home. Passing through amber pools of streetlight, the crickets sounding in my ears, thoughts of someone far away from Texas making me smile.

At my place, I push my bike through the doorway, the red light below the seat blinking on the wall, triggering thoughts of other red lights in my past. I stare, clicking it through the different sequences before switching it off. Daniel Johnston's words ringing in my head, "my life...is starting over again...over again..."

Monday, June 13, 2005

The scene outside is truly surreal. We are in the midst of a vicious storm: purple lightning, cacophonous thunder, spitting hail, towering sheets of rain torn out of winds whipping through the streets. Yet evening sunlight streams brilliant down from the



sky, defying all the chaos. A river runs down the alley behind my building. I'm listening to Broken Social Scene and feeling like I am on another planet.

The storm passes, and everything turns orange. Anne calls and I talk to her as I stare out the window, gazing at the orange world. Malinda calls and I talk to her as I practice minor chords. I love them. They are my new favorite friends.

Outside calls and I pick my way through the battlefield of dead and dying crickets outside my door. The temperature has dropped from 97 to 72. Flashbulb lightning muted by late night cloud cover. I stand in the parking lot, staggered by the beauty of it all. I wish you were here to see it.

The streets and sidewalks lie virtually dry by now. The storm wiped all the humidity away, and I walk through air that's lighter than, well, air. AIR. I walk slow and see things I've never noticed before. Exit signs, hidden stairways, a plastic cup rattling through the post office parking lot. Runoff thunders down the church gutters. It is really the only noise.

**Saturday, June 25, 2005**

Attended my last CATs (Council of Advisory Teens) meeting at the library today. Man, I am going to miss the teens a lot. It's so sad saying goodbye...

Two more days of work to go. I don't know what I'm going to do with myself for two weeks off work before I move. It'll probably only take me a couple of days to pack, maybe another day to clean. One option would be to obsessively pack everything up and do the cleaning immediately, then sit in a corner of the apartment for the rest of the time, rocking back and forth violently and gnawing my knuckles until they bleed. Another option would be to piss away the time until the very last minute and then stay up two days straight getting it all done, before then driving across the country without stopping, hepped up on trucker's speed and delivering long convoluted and brilliantly unbalanced monologues to the cats as they lie cursing me in their carriers.

Uh, yeah, I think I need a more rational plan than either of those, but they were the first two to pop into my head. Should be interesting to see how this actually pans out.

**Monday, June 27, 2005**

Reason #493 to stay home instead of going to work: you never miss the package delivery person.

Home for lunch. One-and-a-half days to go. True story: I was riding my bike home late Friday night, which is the absolute worst time to be on the

street on a bike on account of all the drunken idiots out and about. Anyway, I'm speeding along down Huff, which is one of my new favorite streets to ride on, wondering idly if I'll make it home without getting heckled. Not likely. I turn onto Brook and some guy yells, "get a car, bitch" at me. I almost fell off my bike laughing. The sheer ridiculousness of the incident still overwhelms me.

On a more pleasant note, earlier that night I was riding down Harrison and I saw four ducks on the side of the road. Another duck was walking across the road toward them. They were watching him, waiting patiently. He reached the curb and hopped up on the grass next to them. Then all five of them walked off together toward the pond. Why can't people always be that polite?

**Monday, July 4, 2005**

High lonely wail of the sirens...running through the streets this morning feeling like a wrecking ball keeps crashing through the caverns of my heart...the leaves rippling in the wind releasing blurry memories into a mind struggling to carve out a peaceful corner in which to hide during this unsteady time.

Finally slept well last night, after being rescued from my emotional quagmire by Malinda, who

took me to get a sno-cone and then to see the prairie dogs, which cheered me immensely.

I really didn't know it was going to feel this way. I know it's all going to be okay, but it's still much more complicated than I thought it would be.

**Wednesday, July 06, 2005**

So this guy sometimes walks by my window while I'm typing. He's tall and skinny, with black glasses and a goatee, baggy thrift store clothes and black Chucks. He slouches by, jumps up on this cement wall and does a sort of spastic pirouette before continuing to slouch through the parking lot. So last week I saw someone lying on the sidewalk outside the law offices of Steven M. Williams. I'm looking across Lamar Street from my window, wondering who in the hell would be lying stretched out flat on the sidewalk in the middle of the day, when all of a sudden the figure leaps up and it's this same guy who I just described. He walks back across the street, through the parking lot, leaps up onto the wall, does his pirouette, then continues up the hill out of sight. I have no idea who he is, where he comes from, or why he was lying on the sidewalk, but I find it all strangely comforting nonetheless.

Saturday, July 9, 2005

I'm packing up the computer so this'll be my last entry from Texas. Here's a little fiction for you...or is it?

The other day I was out on one of a series of "farewell, roads of Texas" bike rides I've been taking lately. The heat had broken and it was only in the lower 80s. Blue sky and sun but not brutal heat made it a perfect day for riding. Wind was coming from an atypical direction, but it was good because it meant I'd have a tailwind coming home. I did the standard 30-mile group ride loop and had altered my return a little for some variety. I was cruising along back toward town on Airport Road at top speed when I got a flat. Damn. I hadn't had a flat on a ride in a really long time. Last time it happened, horseflies swarmed from a nearby field and bit the hell out of me as I changed my tube, and then I ended up being almost late for work. Now here I was again next to a field where horseflies were likely to be lurking. At least I didn't have a job to be late to. I wheeled my bike off the road and leaned it up against a fence. A few cows milled around in the field on the other side. I fished my spare tube out of the back pocket of my jersey, kneeled down, and set to work. I moved quickly, sliding the tire off the rim, and pulling out the bad tube.

After a few minutes I was soaked in sweat. I raised my head and wiped my arm across my eyes. That's when I noticed the shadow crossing over me. I looked up into the deep brown eyes of a cow hanging its head over the fence in my direction. Startled, I rocked back on my heels and shook my head. The cow cocked its head to one side. I stood up, stretched my legs, and walked up to the fence. The cow's gaze followed me. I tentatively held out my hand...the cow pushed its nose into my palm. I slowly raised my hand higher on its head and traced my finger down the space between its eyes. It closed its eyes, then turned and sauntered away. Huh...that was weird, I thought. I knelt down again and finished up changing out the old tube before fitting the new one inside the tire. I'd just filled the tire back up with air, when I again sensed a very definite shift from sunlight to shadow overtaking the spot where I knelt. I looked up from the tire into fifty pairs of deep brown eyes staring back at me. I swallowed hard and stood up. It looked like every cow in the pasture had wandered over and was now standing patiently, yet expectantly, at the edge of the field. I sighed and looked up at the cloudless Texas sky that you can never escape. I was leaving soon, but I still had a little time. So I reached out my hand again.



## Zine Micro-Reviews

**Consumption #10** Amazing political cartoons by a very well-informed bike advocate. Tom Lechner, 818 SW 3rd #331, Portland, OR 97204, lechner@ispwest.com, \$5

**Dave K. Greatest Hits** Dave's drawings and comix always reach me deep inside. Order this best of collection from [www.bodegadistribution.com](http://www.bodegadistribution.com). \$5.50 with shipping. A steal!

**Driving Blind #3** Open honest writing on attending college, tabling at Beantown Zinetown, being disabled. Erin H., PO Box 656, Keyport, NJ 07735, [www.drivingblind.org](http://www.drivingblind.org), \$2

**Dumb Jersey White Boy No. 2** Wonderful childhood comic by a guy who grew up in the same area of NJ as I did. Mark McMurray, 441 Warren St., Scotch Plains, NJ 07076, [www.mark.mcmurray.de](http://www.mark.mcmurray.de), \$1 (obscenely cheap!)

**Library Urinal** Even if my girlfriend wasn't one of the editors, I'd still love this irreverent underground library zine. POB 4803, Baltimore, MD 21211 or 915 W Second St., Bloomington, IN 47403, [libraryurinal@gmail.com](mailto:libraryurinal@gmail.com), \$2

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