

2. Beginning Anew

It began like smoke cessation. Try, fail, repeat. The only thing that works, as everyone knows, is just doing it. Al quit smoking that way, by himself, cold turkey. Why not being productive? Must life be work? Why define yourself by what you do? When asked, "Who are you?" must one name a profession? Ben Franklin gave a long list, more proud to say he was a printer than patriot, the latter being more a figment of people's rosy historical glasses than an actual person dared to think. Besides wage earner, everyone can list their sundry activities including caretaker, chef, dishwasher, housekeeper, launder, gardener, mechanic, and other undervalued chores each so incompetently does unheralded. Those with only one profession, or none, are the most incompetent of all. They argue, "How am I to be good enough if I don't limit myself?" These days being flexible beats being good at one thing. Perhaps he needed to be nothing for awhile and just do things without restrictions of labels, see where it might lead.

And yet, working for a living meant rubbing up against others, a hint of intimacy, although innocuous, and better than being alone, both arousing to imagine later, but awful to actually fulfill with horrible consequences. A certain pose, another's hips, exposed skin, fulsome bosom, legs crossed, sultry voice, those lips, toothy smile, all a secret invitation, a slow, subtle dance, a tacit tease that creates an erogenous mindscape without which any actual intimacy is impossible. Average men thought of sex every 30 seconds. He missed the ego stroking intrigue, even if it was only to get some new effort out of him, impose another lame project, another time killer. He rose to small kindnesses. What can you do as life passes you by? Cry out loud? Suffer in silence?

He began walking. Walking consumes a lot of time. It wasn't so unpleasant to regain the use of legs tucked under a desk for what seemed an eternity. It wasn't without discomfort, resistance. It didn't help much, but it *was* a start. One sees so little in 2 to 5 miles: debris, grit, ground up bits of someone else's life. The best venue for walking is a fixed short course that returned often to origin; running tracks sufficed. It gives walker a chance to repeat or end if rabble arrives or weather suddenly changes. Or a walk that passed stops for mass transport, so you could walk one way and opt to ride back at intervals.

Walking has 5 disadvantages. 1) Counterproductive... it's borderline as exercise, not aerobic, and only increases your appetite for a net weight gain. 2) Dangerous... so slow on streets it's hard to evade cars and muggers. 3) Dull... takes a lot of time to see a small slice of world. 4) Rough on feet... every time he ramped up walking or jogging miles, came up with ankle and foot pain, blisters despite cornstarch, corns, heal spurs. 5) Unhealthy... he had hiked out-of-the-way tracts before bears, coyotes, dogs, EEE, Lime Disease, mountain lions, and once rare West Nile Virus along overgrown paths became the norm. About the only advantages of walking are that almost anyone can do it even if not fit for other workouts, and it costs little, so it's better than nothing, maybe an entry into something else. You could jog a bit or walk fast, and then actually lose a few pounds, but then others think you're trying to race them, and they buzz you with cross looks.

With walking you're *free*, or at least feel free, as there's always the drain of fees and taxes for everything whether or not you make money. You can't walk through a national park without paying a fee, despite having previously paid to build it. You'd think a visitor carrying a valid US Passport would get a break. If you're now poor you're excluded. No matter the route, walking held little interest. Branches sway in the wind. Sunlight filters down in blotchy patterns of shadow. Puddles collect in low points. Leaves rustle. Breath heaves as mind grows numb around the same track, day after day boringly the same, tolerable only with a paycheck. Never gets easier as body mass index hovers above merely fat. Something had to change. Change for the better only slightly exceeds change for change's sake. Tao says all is change, that it's inescapable. Even 300 extra miles that year did little to slow rapid physical decline. Too many things were wrong with his cloak of flesh—cardiac, muscular, neural, skeletal, vascular—coming apart at the seams, motheaten, shopworn, threadbare.

Indoors, everything goes wrong over time due to entropic decay. Systems involving energy—including buildings, cities, companies, human bodies, machines and nations—must be constantly replenished, rejuvenated, restored. Otherwise, one becomes a blob, couch cushion, sluggard destined for an early grave; or groups become stagnant, nations despotic. Body and mind were surely meant to be used together. Meanwhile, man remains on a maniacal mission to apply technology so nobody has to go to a library, leave home, shake a tailbone, shop retail, sniff richness of what's outside. On a treadmill you could at least watch DVDs with exotic locales.

Email, Gameboys, Internet? Maybe they offer cautious ways to interact; maybe they keep you from doing wholesome things. One might argue that via the Internet words are being exchanged and unanimity is being sought while less oil is being consumed. Yet people hardly ever agree, and despite this rapid exchange, were becoming ever more polarized. Meanwhile, evidence overwhelms that sedentary lifestyles are ruining health and wellbeing. In America, childhood obesity is at an all time high. If only you could get them to aerobicize between email flames, illegal hacking, and Internet searches. Must somehow renew, replace the failed potential. If you stay healthy, you can at least work, if work is available.

Turn off your television, but not because it makes you stupid. Shows are all about one inhuman act after another. Dehumanizes and desensitizes. Just flipping around channels on cable to find a story one could latch onto could take hours when a big game or interview wasn't on. Commercials, which occupy almost as much airtime nowadays, are all for things you don't need. They need not advertise things you do need, because everyone knows about such staples as bread, cream, dried and fresh fruit, eggs, flour, meat, sugar, and tea; might as well consider beans, eggplant, grains, greens, herbs, milk, pasta, rice, salad, and squash as staples, as well, since that was practically all else he ate, yet can't forget bathroom tissue, shampoo, soap, and sundries which completed his shopping list. Suspect anything they advertise. Mostly it's beer, cars, hi-octane fuel, and medications you shouldn't use with heavy equipment—at best a bad mix—and people wonder why they can't reduce traffic accidents. His television viewing consisted of highly select educational programs, governmental proceedings, speaker forums, sporting events, weather forecasts, and what's happening at the moment that affected his life. Entertainment and sports are fine products on their own, what you paid cable bill to see, but commercials infuse cash and drive up salaries and ticket costs. Movies on DVD or videotape were infinitely superior viewing—so many interesting stories yet to discover among hundreds of thousands of titles—without overly loud commercial interruptions, which resulted in headaches after extended exposure and mental baggage you didn't need taking up space. Trying to get their bile across to him was all but impossible. Denying yourself is like a cloak of invisibility. “No, thanks,” is a polite turnoff, deflects begging institutions, clawing salesmen, or lonely losers. Once you say, “Yes,” or show any interest whatever, they never leave you alone, stalk your every action, waste your time without remorse.

It made no difference whether he was driven to these decisions by personal choice or overly aggressive admen, he was out of any consumer demographic. He once filled out a sweeps survey for a month, which showed only 5 hours of total viewing. Pathetic? Or was sweeps programming that bad? They never sent another. He suspected there were hoards of people glued to sets, since the ratio of houses to people outside them in their yards was about 1:500. Perhaps instead they were hiding inside engaging in embarrassing acts, filming amateur porn since there's so much of it around, making a beeline to a motor vehicle, off making money, or sheltering themselves from passersby.

Whatever is, is. It's delusional to think otherwise. It is *not* delusional to probe the reasons why or state what's counterintuitive for most people. The overwhelming majority run around with blinders on, pay absolutely no attention to important issues that ultimately affect the quality of their lives, waste most of their time and energy on pet projects that drain them of health, serenity and wealth. This is delusional. Take golf: Chasing an unruly ball around a toxic farm covered in petrochemicals, not even a good walk spoiled, somewhere to stay away from altogether. Yet condo owners pay a premium to live alongside them, lured by adjacent open expanse without neighbors to deal with, no more than a futile attempt to blot out society while rock hard spheres crash menacingly through your picture window during any daylight hour.

Something had to be done to end time slipping away. Living has to be done during the process of life. Life must challenge death, face fears, make you strong. Without much strength left, few options were presented to him. You must fight all your life, not just when young, not give up later, self-actualize, stay in shape, and thereby become whole. But working for a living butts in, clouds mind, destroys spirit, enfeebles body, pigeonholes you into a bizarre undesirable specialty, predestined to a dustbin of forced retirement and indignity. Employment is the great succubus, a seductive evil that drains all life out of you, not just another pastime. Salary is a carrot dangled before those not imaginative enough to create their own cooperative businesses. What else was there? Being seduced implies you're valued, therefore instills loyalty and raises self-esteem. The admission that anyone can be replaced is demoralizing, leads to betrayal, people endlessly searching better horizons, wretched discontinuity in which nobody benefits. When they set up situations that virtually assures nobody can contribute, who benefits?

While a teen he'd take long bicycle excursions. It strongly contrasted with other forms of travel. Drove among 14 states, flew to several more, jetted to countries abroad, took trains on occasion. Traveling had been exciting, change of scenery, exotic foods, hotel stays, lugging suitcases around from one mode of travel to another: buses, planes, rail, subways, taxis. But cycling relatively short distances, living lightly off what you can carry, was a truly an adventure. It represented stuff below the conscious, not obvious, like contingency planning, gathering, hunting, quick thinking. Reverts to some primal instinct—chasing game, going into battle, scrambling for survival—yet without all the concomitant death, destruction and horror. Driving to work, he'd always carry a heavy briefcase full of personal implements thought somehow useful but seldom used. "Wasn't this unnecessarily compulsive?" he thought, and began leaving them in office.

Reckoned he'd been bicycling for about 40 years, all day as a kid, crazy stuff, flying off jumps, going airborne. Remember your first bicycle? Oiling everything excessively, racing out, shoving balloons and baseball cards in spokes, squeezing everything out of it, taking it apart to figure out how it worked, washing it diligently? Back then there was time for corny jokes, "A bicycle can't stand by itself because it's too (two) tired." For him there was also a mesmerizing fascination with rolling, staring down onto macadam where gray flecks against black tar excited retina's peripheral vision like video snow after station's broadcast day had ended, so much so that he once crashed into a parked car. First bike commutes were to school. Went "all the way across city" to high school, but he couldn't find anywhere to secure his brand new 10-speed, then a hot commodity likely to be stolen. One shady character let him use his garage, but that meant bestowing trust, enduring inconvenience, having to find key keeper to redeem, and hoping he had a bike to ride home, too uncertain. Once burnt, trusting comes hard. Later took day trips around Cape Cod, state parks, wherever motoring was restricted. For him a bike equaled holiday fun. Rides, though, were all short distances, under 10 miles.

Why not ride a bicycle again? You never forget how, sort of imprinted on mind and muscles at an early age. He'd bike sometimes just because he was too lazy to walk as far. If birds fledge by flying from the nest, humans do the same by riding bikes with training wheels and tricycles. *Fledging* is a rite of passage that parents and progeny don't understand anymore. Matriarchs clumsily try to free themselves of their juveniles. It's a rather critical

stage of development through which some become so scarred as to influence their entire lives, or don't even survive.

Bogotá's former mayor, Enrique Penalosa, felt sympathy for herons learning to fly, when some fell from their nest to where crocodiles mercilessly ate them. For Penalosa, this resembled Columbian children going outside their homes and getting run over by cars, and so went about courageously freeing Bogotá of this public peril despite retaliatory death threats. "Modern city dwellers fear cars like Medieval farmers feared wolves." Families still move to suburbs to protect children from cars, but seldom succeed. Learning to control movement through self propulsion builds confidence; putting children on motorcycles too early makes them aggressive. Bicycling should be a prerequisite to motoring. INXS lyrics hint at how dark and intertwined the two are, "Two worlds collided... we could fly/'cause we all have wings/but some of us don't know why." If so inclined, one could easily prove that those who started biking before driving made better motorists. Angels don't venture forth in cages spewing filth. Men can't quite fly without wings. Bicycling is the closest they come.

What better way to start living anew, even if much of life has passed? Marshall "Major" Taylor, the Worcester Whirlwind from where he also once lived (10 blocks from Columbus Park), allegedly said, "Life is too short for a man to hold bitterness in his heart." They erected a statue to him outside the public library, although he died a penniless pauper, victim of prejudice. You'd think bicycling's an innocuous pastime. At least it's an activity you can feel good about, further respect for wilderness, negligible harm to places visited, nonpolluting low impact test of damaged body, and, unlike parachute jumping or rock climbing, unlikely to result in death when approached intelligently. Excess weight and improper posture causes veins to kink, which makes blood pool then clot; clot travels to your brain, heart or lungs, and you die. Only by moving under your own power are you safe. Thoreau would have biked instead of hiked had equipment and roads been better back then.

He wrote an essay to commemorate new millennium. In it he recommended going motorless as a major plank on a platform of world improvement. Closed minded client didn't buy, told him he was no economist; got tossed into his idea box for later repurpose. John Stuart Mill wasn't an economist either. *Economist* is a label that historians pin on writers after time passes and works are compared. Can't write about truth then expect to be left intact or make a few bucks. Loss from litigation was more likely. But criticism didn't deter him from doing so himself. He went out and bought a local

guru's book, took some suggested loops, Soon found he was going farther, in fact, combining loops or riding to the closest point to begin them, then recording jumbled impressions for later sorting.

Would it become an addiction? Obsession? Or instead something more sensible than parking your obese ass on a lazy-blob recliner? "Enough of fat, I want muscle. Enough of pity, I want humor, Enough of vanity, I want pride," wrote Saroyan. Addiction to comfort ruins lives. Everyone runs from discomfort as if it were a bad thing. Is sex comfortable? Sex is a powerful motivator. Salmon swim hundreds of miles upstream for a single chance to mate. Some men sell their souls for it. Even late in life, people long for "Just one more time" of being distracted by an all-consuming affair. Urges are confused by desires and drives, as well as deep secrets humans on hormones hardly grasp, never mind comprehend.

"Why would someone want to pedal when a motor vehicle is available?" he was asked.

"Why not?"

"Wouldn't you see more if not distracted by exertion?"

"Actually, slower speeds get you to look, and sitting up higher, one can see over walls into gardens as you drift gently by. The net increase in sensory input is amazing. The faster you go, the less you notice." Cycling is a real movie, albeit a dull locomotive one, like TV-land on steroids. There's no better way to acquaint yourself with your community, because you can see *all* of it in short order.

"What do you do with all the crap you collect and carry in a vehicle?"

"Simple. Don't. Or carry a bag on bike for what's absolutely necessary. A small knapsack works for short trips to market." He wasn't all that acquisitive, anyway, and only seriously shopped a few times per year, when his pickup truck was more than adequate.

For the moment this notion resisted fulfillment. He couldn't get past exchanging passive entertainment for active. Pleasure and work were pureed into plain ahedonia. When did computer monitors and television come to resemble one another? His brain was already wired for processing on-screen images and words having absorbed thousands of book pages, emails, films, and websites—even generated blizzards of the same out of his own skull. There was some logic behind visualization, but none with mathematical certainty or precision. More like what Jung called the collective unconscious, a mad flow of facts and pictures as if synapses firing indiscriminately poking up out of subconscious of past memories

or previous lives into a fuzzy awareness in present, which means little but clouds judgement, yet *may* result in a nexus creating a new reality not yet imagined. If everyone blindly believes, is nonsense willed into existence? Describes the Internet exactly, vast cesspool of detail one not only can't grasp but hardly wants to with the stink. Maybe only honey truck driver, who gets paid for the service and has grown insensitive.

The subconscious is a cesspool, too, from catch phrases, jingles, sayings, sitcom themes, all memes that spread from one brain to another like a virus. No, one must move through space powered by body, not just mind, or reason becomes distorted, some vital balance is disrupted, strange monstrosities are produced.

