

## 1. Stuck Indoors

Decades slipped by practically without protest. Subdued protagonist Al Labann stared in shock at concrete block and fuzzy fabric, cubicle confines, choices made, seldom outdoors. After a penniless youth spent looking for love and rallying against war in the turbulent '60's, the true poverty of middle age had set in. He had been a pawn used to build personal empires in an era of Republican trickle, hired for little to serve some good-old-boy vanities. CEOs were making fast fortunes by buying into corporate boards, driving stocks suddenly amassed in self-favorable directions, selling out to foreign interests before the herd, then escaping with prenuptial golden parachutes. Who wouldn't, given the chance? It's every opportunist's dream, a scenario played out innumerable times across America in the '90's, all impeccably legal. No unforeseen threat assailed a nation more, neither terrorism nor war. Securely established systems beget treachery. Was this the same nation that selflessly defied dictators, fascism, and superpowers now succumbing to despotic state policies and personal greed? Yup. Tragic. Capitalism had run amuck. Nobody cared.

Where's all their ill gotten gains? Cayman? Saudi Arabia? Zurich? In New Millennium America, all he knew was it wasn't here. An era of diminished expectations had set in. Never mind nuclear Winter, this was a Winter of displacement, frozen assets, no low hanging fruit, nothing shaking loose, as there should be. "Where are the feasts we were promised?" moaned Lizard King so long ago. Dissatisfied, he didn't care about bags of dough, crippled cash flow, or fat faces laughing at his expense at country clubs. What he cared about most was decades had slipped away, forever precious time, foundation of existence, heal all, wonder drug. Why didn't it make him feel marginally better every day? As time passed he felt worse in every way. This made him chronically grouchy beneath his phony facade of buoyant optimism becoming increasingly hard to regenerate daily. "I've really been the best/the best of fools/I did what I could." He hated feeling so irritated. Why be negative, nasty, seemingly immature? What wonderful adventures had he missed pursuing the so-called safe route?

Moments, seconds, hours, days doing something is like dental floss for the mind. Only doing mattered, kept one's axe sharp,

led to authenticating experiences, continuous personal growth and improvement. But it had to be something worthwhile, not just anything, like blogging to bulletin boards and on-line sites, collecting lost gloves and forensically deducing facts from them, as was someone in Manhattan, or toiling as an ad campaigner, intranet webmaster or publicist. Practically everything felt like that to him, futile.

Got up. Made a Styrofoam cupful of tea. Sweet warm tea, mild elixir, once a dark abyss to peer into and divine a future, now only a bowel calmer, core temperature preserver, welcome companion to a dry biscuit. Did this represent superstitions supplanted by science? Or was it lies versus facts? Or disillusionment versus hope? All he knew for certain is he'd begun to see the World a lot differently and presently there didn't seem to be much in it for him. The mental movie screen upon which his intuitions played was dark and empty.

For one, working for a living is vastly overrated. Get up at dawn. Cart your carcass to an uncomfortable desk. Work is pain. You're paid to take pain, mental, physical or probably both. It physically hurts to carry cartons, lift ladders, shovel shit. Or was he was born too frail despite his 6 foot frame? Might as well give blood for cash, but nowadays they expect it for free. He did many things, had his own business, hired on for others, performed many roles, inside, outside, on teams, solo. Is working for a living worth doing at all? Nearly impossible to do just nothing. It's nice to be able to serve some purpose, to sense your contributions are valued, whatever prayer wheel you daily spin does something to appease whatever angry god rules this mess.

Top 100 Places to Work all pride themselves in their humanistic treatment of employees. Efforts to empower them, make them feel needed, provide paths to wellness are all self serving propaganda. Despite labor laws, employees who can't fulfill quotas or get sick are quickly and quietly replaced. Older workers are turned out routinely, since demographics reveal health risks, increases in medical premiums and no shortage of eager young applicants. Workers are cowed by company regulations, made to feel dependent and dispensable, and subjected to debilitating stress and time constraints, which not only curtail fitness leisure but make vacations from office an unacceptable quandary. To feel fulfilled is not necessary. Commerce wasn't established to stroke like pets those it employs. Your self indulgences will invariably be denounced by those serving their own selfish interests. The way things are, ultimate betrayal is virtually guaranteed.

If neither meaning nor morality is important, this leaves only materialism, for which you need a revenue stream. It's nearly impossible to find work that sustains body and soul. What's worse, there are parasites who'll prod you along as you seek meaning or try to stay clean while they profit off you. Working for those who demand you compromise your principles isn't worth it, just like ingesting poison. As a publicist he was tacitly expected to lie whenever that got copy out or preserved corporate image. Objectivity was deemed too dangerous. Eventually you become all wrapped up in this filth, get sick, then the axe falls. Can't sue companies for bodily or psychic cruelty, since that's why they exist, and you know that going in or you're a fool. Why should working for a living involve the worst the world has to offer? Nobody begrudges your paycheck as years race by. After making someone else's career, you're forsaken, left unprotected, neither fought for nor fill some justified slot. Suddenly, for no good reason, you become a liability, a mistress jilted, played false by peers and ratted out by friends. What then do you do with the rest of your life?

People used to make do: Eke out an existence, engender family, farm their own land, keep cattle, rely on offspring as the spring in their step falters. At least land was left for heirs to lease, remnants persisting to this day along quiet roads leading nowhere anyone wanted to go except beleaguered bicyclists. Was life better then? Sensed it didn't work out of longing for companionship or diversion, and once soil depletion spurred new ambitions. Relentless taxes, too, made it into a do or die proposition despite diminishing returns and extremes of weather. Government continues whether you need it or not. Nice to be secluded with your own thoughts, self sufficient, unpolluted by politics and rivalries, while clearing fields, heaping stones up along boundaries, hefting weight with a strong back in youth, maintaining what's done and nursing stiff joints in age. Yet being among peers also has merit, exposing your thoughts to scrutiny by others, fielding feedback, gaining insight, a leg bone to gnaw in private, like lions do after a pack hunt.

Collecting—disability, severance, unemployment, welfare—is like a farm subsidy that pays you not to grow food when there are starving unfortunates in war zones. More injustice. Severance is as if they are so relieved that you're no longer doing what you used to, they are willing to pay you for doing nothing. At least that's what they think. They might be horrified to know what you are actually doing with your insider knowledge of their best-kept secrets and

undeserved laurels. Betraying them to competitors? Making them public? Anti-disclosure agreements were one-sided; they could destroy your reputation and you weren't supposed to do anything? Those in power get you to stifle yourself while they do whatever they want to you. He refused to be broken, idle or useless. Not a day went by he didn't scheme, scribble, seek, or solemnly pray. Those who do wrong think nobody notices. They feel invincible, get arrogant, when opposition doesn't immediately arise. Someone keeps notes and waits for an chance to drag them down. What legacy are you creating for yourself? All who ever mistreated him were about to get theirs carved in stone. He'd never exact vengeance or take satisfaction. Not even vengeance would satisfy the need for change beyond this existing paradigm, to overturn this rotten apple cart. Whoever's first will later be last, anyway, but this inevitability hadn't occurred to him yet.

Success interacting among others breeds nothing but scorn. You offer, promise, successfully follow through but then can't expect respect or rewards? Apparently not. Everyone wants the same edge, just like every man wants the same woman, a rare incredible beauty, maybe one in a thousand, who, in 5 years, can't be picked from a common crowd. Each new hottie, Helen kidnapped by Paris, creates another rivalry, one smug winner, several losers. Frustrations, general strife, hostilities, resentments follow, not always in this order. Craving at the start ends in chaos. Possessing destroys possessor and possessed, and often everyone around them. Collateral damage is a daily result. Men and women are only fellow travelers through space and time, perhaps lending each other assistance, but mostly alone. Of course, everyone wants personal health and wellbeing, especially whenever deprived. Unfortunately, that requires hard work, luxuries forsaken, and pains endured, a foolish exchange for more of the same. So snake oil salesmen push all kinds of bogus elixirs, effort mitigating nostrums, shallow philosophies loosely based on politically sanitized Christian ideals turned into hopes in handbooks and on cassettes and compact disks. They sell you what you can hear for free any Sunday: Good manners and tolerance with rationales for underhanded opportunism thrown in.

Everyone wants a prestigious position with big pay and few duties, short hours, or, even better, something for nothing. While industry was once rewarded, now delegating is. All business had become a conspiracy pitting inexperienced cheap labor against shrewd suits on expensive salaries. Nowadays, companies don't have enough informed decision-makers to evaluate expert

contributions. All they have are bean counters who look at bottom lines and know-nothing managers hanging onto unmerited precedence. They only value style over substance, how individuals represent themselves, not what they know or can do or how it effects profits, too difficult to quantify. So up marches an unbroken string of personality professors: Dale Carnegie, Napoleon Hill, Orison Mordents, Tom Repeters, Steve Covey and the like, dedicated to polishing the surfaces of empty vessels. Sure, they're engaging, their sole stock in trade. They oversimplify, speak of secrets as if any were under your control. Takes no skill to motivate aggression, ambition, and self-aggrandizement suppressed by years of religious proselytizing. Spanning 20th Century, they preached success strategies, how to press flesh and stick to 12-point plans. Having had a modicum of success themselves, they appear as experts, confident in their teachings, ministers in a world without religion, pastors to a flock of self-servers.

Today, as it's been throughout history, achievement sells and failure sucks. Most of you hate a loser, as Thompson called it, "the one unforgivable sin in America". Isn't success a result of determination, hard work, and positive thinking? Really? None of these guarantee fame or fortune. Depends much on how you define it, of course, and what you bring to table. Unless you're bright, comely or handsome, quick, right place at the right time with the right idea, no amount of preening and wishing will do any good. Bad haircut? Mental illness? Physical handicap? You don't get a chance to audition for the likes of wiggy tycoon Grumpy Trumpy. Rather, having a miserly ancestor is all you need, and that takes no talent whatever. Many a mindless millionaire had it dumped in his lap: born into the right clan, bulled by a pope, granted by some king. Surely this made things easier for one lucky recipient. Many a great soul has been ground to dust or forced into ignominy by simply not making the right contacts at right time. Persons who could help you never got a glimpse, never were sold. Failure is a bit of bile, black ball, missed appointment, needy nephew, nervous blemish, sin of the father, stupid sibling, or unfavorable word. It's not easy. Loser or winner, mansion or prison, it doesn't take much to tip scales in someone else's favor.

Where are the incentives? Careers in management are disappearing along with core industries. Airlines, like all passenger carriers, are going bankrupt. Maybe travelers are staying put, working smarter over email and Internet, and so don't need to move as much. Maybe economy and personal debt are so bad that people can't afford vacations. Only Boards of Directors and CEOs

are doing well, flying charters when they feel like it, unaffected by long lines and undo hassles, unafraid of terrorists. They aren't famous. They use their money to build a wall of anonymity that defies the closest scrutiny. All society offers by way of incentive is a small stake in their games, hardly worth the effort necessary to earn an infrequent romp on a tropical beach.

It's easy to make friends. Promise them anything. Hard to keep them unless you follow through, put in the effort. If you don't deliver the goods, satisfy hangers on, you're vilified as a *small man*, someone with whom nobody wants to associate. What if you instead define success as wisdom applied in whatever situation you find yourself? Or as fighting off temptations to crawl under a rock, help yourself and nobody else, or run away? Or being a good provider, taking care of your own business and family first so you can position yourself to help others? Maybe fame and fortune aren't so important, not really a measure of self worth after all. How could this ever be? People wouldn't want to. Market economies would collapse. You couldn't claw tooth and nail for a better lawn than your neighbor. Pride wouldn't be served. None of the greatest minds in recorded history ever cherished a lawn, not that he could recall. Mother Teresa, who in life glowed ethereally divine with kindness, died with only battered shoes, a bible, eyeglasses, one set of tattered clothes, the Nobel Peace Prize, and requisite credentials for sainthood. Hard to match such success, an inventory you *can* take with you.

Help isn't pretty talk, it's dirty work, a dull daily grind. It's being there for those less fortunate, comforting lepers, never ignoring the most important issues, and speaking up to someone who might do something about it. All those who felt especially fulfilled took a role of directly serving those with special needs. You can't stuff that in a neat white envelope and mail it in. Help is a bulldozer, not a feather; grimy, not pristine; normally defined by actions, not words. It's doing for others, not being counted among those who pay success sellers, study how to be a phony, suddenly being born again or getting politically correct, then raising themselves above a fray. He wouldn't give 2¢ for promisers who said they'd do it and forgot about him as soon as he walked away. Only those who accepted bonds and followed through mattered in this world. Promises must be kept. Aren't those who serve the real successes, measured by what others think based on the good will of those they've helped? Balance sheets don't count, never will. Balance itself counts but not accounting.

Yet they don't give prizes to firemen who rush into burning buildings, police who collar felons, or those private citizens who jumped into the frozen Potomac to save airline crash victims, only to lose their own lives. No, they reward whoever supposedly advances an art or science that might help many people, not individuals in death or life situations, as if one soul is not as important as many. "The needs of the few do not outweigh the needs of the many," someone once said as if an inalienable truth. Not very comforting to those who suffer and struggle, but gospel homily given by a tiny minority who holds most of the wealth. Of course, everyone would like cures for AIDS, cancer, or any of the thousands of illnesses that afflict mankind. You'd think they'd spend more time and effort on such widespread pestilence. Instead they wage war, which leads to more and solves nothing. They beg for funding and produce nothing. They hire security guards to hoard more. Instead, self improvement: financial, material, physical. Because governments do such a lousy job ensuring subsistence for all, greed becomes the logical alternative. Connive, conserve, earn, or steal, just don't forsake capitalism, by all means. Appearance fools those who think it's substance.

Usama Ben Gayden, for example, should never get a prize. World has no need of his ill-informed hatred, prejudicial violence, and unholy war spurred on by betrayal, dishonesty and fear of a globalization which overturns prejudices and traditions that can be milked for fatwas. If justice prevails, this pain in the ass will accidentally die in a random car bombing. Bicyclists always battle butt pains. But there's seldom justice. These clerics are above it all, as are Forucant, Grayamen, Sharptongue or other media mugs with gab going for them. They have no desire to lift a finger to do anything meaningful. Why should they? Society doesn't reward that. Imust (ranch for kids with cancer), Newton (food sales for homeless aid and political action), Goldoff (end poverty), and Bonose (battling AIDS and canceling Third World debt) join other damaged, egomaniacal, twisted self-servers, but at least they've channeled it into some good, or maybe not, who can say? Talk isn't doing. Words don't add up. These people get away with gross misconceptions, live in self aggrandizing bubbles, never have to justify or prove. "I'm so beautiful, important, vindicated." He knew that could change in an instant, being called in without warning and turned out unceremoniously. Cut off, individuals dangle by a thread. It's no wonder gangs form, and rightly so. Anyone you don't have direct access to cannot be trusted.

In any such case, you'll never know all the harm a person does or how it affected society then or now. Ben Gayden's presence makes World less safe, because national figureheads think they must either retaliate or look weak and lose votes. Afatrat was supposed to distribute aid to Palestinians yet kept it all and instead spread lies and strife, so those who could have been helped instead hate countries who gave and tried. Greed is not what Ghandi had in mind when advising, "Be the change you wish to see in the World." That's the trouble with a half-truth, one that requires further qualification. But they yank quotes out of context, never question its issuer's intentions or motivations, then pervert it for their own use. Afatrat won a Nobel Prize, so it's clear what establishment values, not someone doing good but notoriety that affects many lives whether negatively or positively. Usama, your award awaits.

He had no heroes. All life is process. Only individuals can decide what to do with their time allotted. Some capture how it supposed to work and make it happen, and they benefit along with everyone else. Praise is unnecessary. Others just don't get it until there's nothing more they can do and society is deprived of their contribution. Then all they've collected are regrets. Al was on the cusp of one or the other, his to choose. You could win a Golden Globe or Pulitzer or Tony, convince strangers you're marvelously unique, but among your confidantes, family, and friends you'll always be a buffoon. Winning awards just means you're more well known than most people, not better or smarter. Everyone hits a wall sooner or later. Life is only so long, and at some point you're past all propriety, assessing your own rubble following another emotional wreck. What's the psychological equivalent of the jaws of life? How does one extricate oneself from self-afflicted mental cruelty?

Burnout occurs when you realize nobody appreciates what you're doing, say psychologists. When you're enthusiastic, you'll chase something until you fall asleep on your feet. Undermine enthusiasm, devotees grow bored, drift off, find something better to do. Lacking encouragement at large or work, some individuals obsess on all manner of frivolities and personal hobbies: bicycling, blogging, building ships in bottles, fishing, golfing, jigsaw puzzles, stamp collecting, writing bad novels. They work unhappily all day then race home to pursue their cherished hobby. Sometimes a good attitude rubs off on an unloved activity. Sometimes the extremes of cheer and despair grind a mind into catatonic apoplexy. Bonsai and origami, as ways to control and fold space, do help overcrowded

Japanese cope. Sales motivators suggest, "Get a hobby!" Makes for a better salesman, since there's something else to talk about than strictly business. Makes for at least a 2-dimensional person, not in the dubious ultimate cosmic ascension scheme, but in here-now reality. Surely, the more dimensions the better. He occasionally challenged salesmen who were posers, but that game benefits nobody and wears thin quickly.

How people value and pay professionals determines the avocations people choose: ball player, business manager, novelist, physician, rock star all outshine more important roles as auto mechanic, sanitation engineer, soap maker, and social worker, who, if they do their duty, make sure you're not compelled to frequent doctors. Isn't prevention worth more than a cure? A person who ensures clean, pure drinking water is overlooked and paid little. Garbage collectors are held in contempt and disgust. People claim they value fitness, freedom, social justice, but not enough to pay for them. So what is the truth? Put commonwealth on a back burner? Hope it'll happen? Avocations don't just occur. Workers gravitate toward opportunities, either currently existing or impending perceived. Often employees with invisible roles want to keep it so: no hassles or rivals. They wait around for complaints rather than proactively eliminate. Employees poorly multi-task any excessive responsibilities heaped upon them. The public should expect little, be delighted by anyone actually serving their interests, which is rare.

His enthusiasm would wane into a mental rut. A chore would seem particularly hard, or he'd get no help, not that anyone would complain, since he was doing it all for them. That had always been his role, doing the heavy lifting, either mentally or physically, for bosses who later take all the credit. Did it matter? Doing is interesting, makes you strong. Some are born to Herculean Labors, some are born with a silver spoon up their nose. Beasts of burden who take initiative never transform into bosses, because they are far more valuable as worker bees. These master-slave relations work as long as slave "knows his place." When bad attitudes inevitably arise, bosses toss aside slaves as if a tool that's worn out.

Just being among people invites malaise; their bad attitudes rub off on you. How do you avoid giving up on them while maintaining your own integrity and spirit, not simply conforming? Educational systems are set up to do the opposite, whittle square pegs into round pegs, so they plug into a preordained servile holes; "the cult of Same is all the chic." Back off and conform might as well be today's mantra. You can't act or be intelligent lest you make public at large feel like idiots, who then hate you. Bashing whatever

you don't understand is tantamount to killing foreigners because they are different. Baiting, flaming and trolling are on-line equivalents. Best to stick with issues, not personalities, but then hardly anyone knows what the issues are, only faces, feelings and mannerisms. Your most efficient route is to simply let them hate you, rather than give up years of erudition and mental application. Seemed almost a conspiracy, though he knew it was thoughtlessly executed by unknowing and unthinking pegs likewise whittled. Despite trying to be sincere, writers involuntarily pander to tastes, public sentiments, styles du jour. To prove it, notice how they copy one another, repeat catch phrases, reuse cliches to round out volume: bug on a windshield, tick on a dog. If one hits it big, everyone jumps on that bandwagon hoping to cash in on a fad. Without such a mindless continuum, capitalism would inevitably crumble. With it, no better alternative could ever be conceived and implemented. People capitulate to this precept, as RZA snarled, "Life is hectic. Cash. Rules. Everything. Around. Me. C.R.E.A.M, get the money, dollar, dollar bill, yaw."

Don't go on about any good you do. It should all be about possibilities you make, not catering to the poor or patronizing them, rather creating worthwhile opportunities and providing a safety net. Unemployment services should be set up to explore someone's preferences or unrealized potential, not plug one into existing system. Better to find your own path to follow, maybe discover a mentor to haul you up, stay busy at least so something meaningful might ensue, and steer clear of those who'd drag you down. Sometimes that means quiet solo industry. Other times its looking for causes worth fighting for, maybe elevating losers, or seeing through unimportant nonsense. It's all about *living*, being really alive without dead time, in the moment, not a slave to past or future. Surely, everybody should have the right to eat daily, to enjoy nature in a world preserved from despoilment, to live. Why should life be so fragile, harsh and tenuous? There's plenty of help and power tools around to make life better, if only the majority wanted to. Does your agenda benefit everyone? He could already hear lunkheads laughing at him, while he pitied the meaninglessness they invariably derived, as with every philistine's self-serving schemes.

One can't say there aren't endless opportunities, just how do you fit into the millions of important things to do? Maybe your role is just to be a good example, because you're not smart enough to lead or organize. What's wrong with that? Well, for one thing, it doesn't pay, so you can't meet obligations and survive. So, here he

was, wondering whether he'd even survive. This is America? Certainly not what he'd been led to believe or trained for. Land of opportunity nothing, there's one position for a thousand applicants. Only a pretty face had a chance; only the lure of sex was effective as job bait. If you are compassionate, competent and strong, you should never need to explain or exploit yourself.

Everybody is obliged to help victims of natural catastrophes, and to prevent manmade ones as much as possible by preserving environment. Nobody has the right to clear cut, destroy ozone, induce erosion, lazily luxuriate in extravagance, overfill landfills, pollute atmosphere for profit: no ENRONIC CEO, Fortunate 500 businessman, Humdinger driver, New World Order paper shuffler, non-recycling consumer, thoughtless taxpayer, or Wallymart exec. Movies like to depict villains as mad megalomaniacs bent on world domination, but they aren't the norm. Bureaucrats and privateers are practically as bad when egged along by duped minions. Commission or omission, still clearly wrong, both are a disservice to humanity, an indefensible injustice. Few see it this way.

Domestically, it's speculated a mere 15,000 families, <.02% of the population, hold 90% of nation's wealth. Curious irony is, if anyone is lucky to become wealthy, that person can afford to pursue good, but seldom does. Too bad those who couldn't care less usually get there first, block the way. Wealth is wasted on the rich. Affluence comes in all flavors from a lucky upper class, who can't be held accountable given prevailing scheme of a market economy, to a kind of wealth that's inestimable. If you had a billion dollar bills you'd soon grow bored trying to count them and never finish. Banks use machines for that, and it takes days to put together a million, never mind a thousand times that. If you need computers to estimate your wealth, you have way too much. Most folks worry about things in mills, pennywise, reusing paper towels. Thus, people's lives are wasted, and for what? So a gross goon can light a cigar with a \$100 dollar bill?

Internationally, Ben Gayden channeled his \$300 million petrobucks into a culture clash in which hundreds of thousands have died, with the potential to kill millions, if not billions. Was that the best thing to do with a personal fortune? Terrorism is for idiots with no imagination. Anyone can be a terrorist; prisons are full of bullies. Terrorism is a logical by-product of Social Darwinism. Disenfranchised losers connect their woes with predatory capitalists, and rightly so, since corporate and governmental polices are stacked against them. Becoming a successful contributor to the common good is so much harder, yet it's not generally honored.

Ben Gayden is famous; hardly anybody remembers names of fire fighters who died in World Trade Center outside immediate bereaved families. Motivated by pride, terrorism serves ego. Angels are invisible and only a few are identified by name, as far as anyone knows.

Billiongate Inc built a fortress of solitude so Billious, World's richest man, wouldn't have to interact with rabble, particularly you; even has a foundation for that, making a vaccine for malaria, opening new markets in Africa, and so forth. Billiongate gets involved with governments because both spin lies so frequently you need software to sort them all out. Even then they outright deny making statements caught on videotape months before. Deny, deny, deny. Never admit to anything. Infomercials tempt have-nots with "get-rich-quick" schemes. What a waste of talent and time! It's not as if there aren't millions of challenges facing mankind that billions of people or dollars couldn't address. But if you're incredibly wealthy, can you even conceive of ways to address them? Wouldn't you miss most, confused by not having any experience in suffering? You can't skip like a stone across placid water on the high points of great thinkers, who, up from blood and tears built their great thoughts. You have to experience deprivation for yourself. Billionaires act on guilt or whims. Big fortunes and well endowed foundations are ill equipped. Better there are many small, unknown do-gooders, all fighting their own causes, as long as their causes all benefit society and are not locked in counterproductive inter-negation. Good when there's discussion among advocates. Maybe they'll row their boats in the same direction. Sure, there are times when compromises must be made. You can't have progress without funding, funding without cash flow, cash flow without good paying positions. The thing that precedes the good is a vibrant middle class, something rapidly disappearing. What does that tell you? Where was it all heading? Think!

Are there so few rich families because everyone else is too lazy? Or because there's a conspiracy among them to keep it so? Or because success is naturally elusive? Or they're smart and you're not? Or because it's just HIS will? Does the reason matter? Accumulating is a given, as trickles then streams forced by almighty gravity feed mighty rivers and fill oceans. Picture World's wealth as one huge pile of gold dust. He was just like most people, given a teaspoon to take what he wanted a little at a time, politely, as needed. Then comes around some Greedy Wacko Bastard with a bucket crane and dump trucks. Pile quickly disappears, flow is cut off, and majority suffers. Well, that's analogous to 401K's and IRA's,

a big pile of money for chisellers to cheat honest wage earners out of their savings. They juggled tax code to help bankers and wealthy; retirement accounts lock up yesterday's earnings at rates of interest below inflation. Later they'll suspend your social security benefits. You're compelled to conserve now so they can take something away from you later. Bankers sit up nights thinking of new fees to assess. Forces individuals to find fast, efficient means of hoarding for themselves, legally or not, swap teaspoons for pails and shovels, everyone grabbing what little remains. You conserve. They raise prices to maintain profit margin. You buy nothing at all. They charge you to breathe, drink bottled water, eat, and not freeze to death. You dig your own well, hold your breath, move somewhere warm, and go on a hunger strike. They don't care, move onto next victim. GWB can't do it single-handedly, hires a few of you, so you, too busy raping nature and your fellow men, are required to buy goods and services from bottom feeders. So, round and round it goes: filling and spilling, getting and spending, trickling up. This leaves a path strewn with those dead and dying from want. Where's the justice? Maybe there will never be any. Revolution becomes the only answer. But this only replaces Dudbubba with another dictator.

Take lotteries. Some lucky lamebrain wins \$100 million. You can bet one so blest spends a few bucks then socks away rest. This funnels a little money from a lot of people, potential spenders contributing to vocation creation, into hands of one banker. State coffers fill from what they extort from you, but is money used for good? Where are all the new public projects, safe routes, schools promised? Money on deposit can at least be lent for new construction, usually for temporary retail outlets, which were turning his state into one big parking lot. It's just another way to redistribute funds, but he'd rather they'd create stable employment, not ruin environment and lives as a result. The chronicle of lottery winners is strewn with heartache, failed marriages, squabbling heirs. If he had \$100 million, he'd consider opening a factory to produce something that the nation now imports, something too important to national security to let be done elsewhere, as if creating jobs stateside wasn't of the ultimate importance in itself. He'd set it up so profits would be shared equally by participants, his gift to mankind, a self furthering enterprise where everyone excludes, includes, makes decisions by committee, monitors itself, like an acropolis of democracy with no bloated board of parasites. Farm cooperatives mainly work this way already. It would be crushed,

surely, like anything better or different, by the corpulence of mediocrity. All things democratic are mediocre, as are all things touched by committees, whose members dilute anything brilliant with personal doubts. Lone visionaries may not be bright enough to conceive of misgivings. Deming quipped, "One of us is not as smart as all of us," which requires most on team be at least as smart as the one, or the one to be so convincing or persuasive that teammates submit. They don't erect statues to committees, but, then again, they do erect statues for stupid reasons, to whomever was born in your town that became famous for anything at all, which is nothing more than capitalizing on someone's notoriety. Better they erect sculpture to noble ideals.

Economists like Gallbladder convincingly claimed America would be better off as a nation exporting its manufacturing efforts. Which Americans? The rich? Wrong! Even the rich will suffer when everyone else has no choice but to watch cities crumble, crimes mount, infrastructure collapse, properties foreclose. Seen all this in Columbia, drug lords hiring armies to protect them from starving villagers. There's a kidnapping for ransom every 60 seconds in Latin America. More officers, some of them promoting misdeeds rather than deterring, means more taxes. Instead, more citizens abiding laws, employed constructively, reduces collective burden, a better solution if you can arrange it. In their scramble to eliminate waste, enterprises downsize into an increasingly smaller presence. Why shoot for 2% of \$500 million, why not 11% of \$100 million? Extra profit, fewer employees, less headaches. In studies he participated in, he learned that for every lost employee a company ultimately loses \$100,000 per year in potential business. Profit priorities don't necessarily serve communities, employees, shareholders, or those stakeholders who make it possible for companies to exist, only executives. Maybe what Gallbladder couldn't step away from was the vast financial enterprise of money management (and income it produces), and understand clearly that if you're not manufacturing something, there's nothing happening, treading water with every hour, yielding only an hour out, not 10% to 15% more, ultimately, no money to manage anymore.

Only 3 categories of industries create *value*, the only real wealth: farming, manufacturing and mining. Ore underground is worthless, becomes valuable only by digging, drilling, or pumping it out. But a bucket of crude or lump of ore still has low value until refined as fuel or smelted into pure ingots, then, through effort invested, manufactured products. You can't do any of that unless

you have food to eat; you can't eat dirt, can't work without fuel. If you export these 3 enterprises, there's no beans to count, no information of value, nothing left.

Writing was invented by Sumerians to record grain transactions. Can you picture a time when writing was such a chore that only the most important facts, or what people viewed as most important, were ever recorded? They described births, deaths, major business transactions, and pride in victories. Everything else was just too mundane. Lives of gods and kings were only remembered in as much as they effected lives personally. Words are still only necessary when value changes hands, whether through internecine change or peaceful exchange. Novels aren't important, pointless paragraphs slapped together on laptops. Do people even need them? Better would be earnest discussions on global issues, since you live in a global village where countless transactions occur every second and everyone affects everyone else. Contemporary novels have trended toward dramatizing real biographies, especially of individual achievements of people who've done nothing that benefits you. Novelists win acclaim, fame, wealth, but not those who bring you what sustains life, not those who should be celebrated.

Being masters of the World never works; buying up companies like soda cans, sucking them dry, and tossing aside eventually catches up with you. Foreign ownership never works, either, something to do with native intelligence, nice intangibles, subtle nuances. Companies are employees, humans easily confused and demotivated. No more is it, "What can you do for me?" It's now, "How much can you do and with how little?" Empires crumble not because they don't recall history. Collapse comes from a few jockeys on the backs of masses, racing and whipping. They think there will be ice cubes in hell for them, or there's no afterlife and they must grab whatever they can while they can.

Easy to see how mobs form. Government gives tax breaks to wealthy. Wealthy ensure a real break by offshoring their corporations to hide income in foreign accounts, thereby evading revenues altogether, and paying domestic employees minimum wage. Low and middle classes folks fight over having kids only when they can afford them, unwanted pregnancies, welfare abuse, and other such hateful situations unmercifully forced upon them. Affluent congressmen buy a free and open market myth and push for it among dupes. The needy ask, "If governments do, why shouldn't we?" and create their own unscrupulous opportunities. A simple solution is an embargo on foreign imports relative to location of

headquarters, as they do in China, European Union, Japan, and practically all industrialized nations except America. There's no evidence that policy to the contrary results in anything more than select pockets padded; certainly doesn't help average citizens.

Preserving the middle class should be a national priority; after all, it's what made America great, all that middleclass spending. Instead the current administration favors wealth, a key obstruction to profit flow, and pursues betrayal and eventual enslavement of other classes. Played out to fulfillment, anything is possible, gang violence, general lawlessness, massive riots, population displacement, ruthless death camps, savage cannibalism. The skin of refinement falls away like wet wallpaper when economies fail. Yet, there's so much wealth around; it never goes away. Limited concentration of it instigates all the evil that befalls man: Only fuels pride, a few *them* and many *us*, thus provoking unresolved tension.

In 17th century France, 15 million poor Catholics massacred many of the 1 million rich Protestants, the Huguenot minority. Was it an economic or religious war? What do you think? Ironically, Catholic Church today is one of the cash richest organizations, increasingly a target for child abuse lawsuits. A century ago Engels and Marx laid the foundation for a worker's revolt, laughed at today with failure of most communist states. Their collapse was a self-fulfilling prophecy. Even Marx had to admit that communism would only succeed when entire world subscribed to its altruism. An altruistic majority? Laughable. Capitalism represents the failure of mankind to strive toward mutual wellbeing. Perhaps communism held no incentives, but at least everyone worked. It was a worker revolt, and why not? Too bad KBG ideologues pried into every family's closet to ensure total compliance, while party bosses elevated themselves above everyone else as if royalty. Who sets these pendulums swinging so far into extremes? Can't you also reproach the Romanovs? All monarchs are to be held responsible for the bad examples they've set. Those in a position to help who do nothing are worse than those who take matters into their own hands to restore equilibrium.

Unless the wealthy few start loosening purse strings to the poor multitude, horrors will surely follow. Some happy martyr long ago got it right: Give it all away. Wealth is poison, an idea the rich publicly applaud while they shrewdly wish the poor believe. Their old saw is, "A fool and his money are soon parted," and plan to be around when it happens. The holy parable of the talents reasoned otherwise. Hoarding was damnable. Only by increasing cash flow do people and organizations survive, fair open trade, getting and

spending ever more, win-win transactions. This doesn't include harvesting organs from condemned religious dissidents. Americans were beginning to view China as rest of world views America. Can never blame an entire nation, only greedy individuals, who, unfortunately, make up majority. A nation can't stand by and tolerate such behaviors. When someone complains, allegations need be heard, indictments brought, and justice prevail. This doesn't bring back victims, but does slow traffic in human body parts, at least for awhile. Agencies like Amnesty International were founded for exactly that reason, cruel and inhuman treatment of political prisoners, as those incarcerated at Gitmo. If you must continue capitalist, you must preserve cash distribution and punish human rights violators. You must take from the rich to feed the poor.

Not being a philosopher, he could only speak in short bursts, shake out a grain of sand in his shoe, irritant of the moment, momentary image fired from a single neuron. Besides, he wasn't disposed to being thick and impenetrable, hallmark of the illuminati, except when called to testify. Then he could debate semantics of the word "is" as well as gunslinger Clint Beaton. Spoke his simple mind; his flashes of insight while bicycling around retreated into banalities. Let people talk among themselves. He had some vague notion about his own self help book, something along the lines of "How to think for yourself." But he abandoned idea. Can't be neatly defined in 8 to 12 steps, only one: Trust nothing you are told, imagine yourself, or, read, especially old saws and presumed facts. Truth is remarkably simple and unprofitable. Only by making a mess can you profit from cleaning it up. Anyway, in the end, after many words have passed, all great minds come to the same conclusion. They hope people can work together. They must. Alone, a man is powerless, an advantage governments and businesses use against you. He recalled a quote attributed to Daniel Webster, "There are many objects of great value to man which cannot be attained by unconnected individuals, but must be attained, if at all, by association." Webster may have had booze or dames in mind, but it seemed a universal truth, nonetheless.

Look what America did for Europe against totalitarian domination. Wasn't even its fight and there was a lot of opposition at home. But, when the States decided to kick ass, they did. They pulled together, lent their strength, sacrificed much, and overcame. This World stays afloat on momentary heroes. It's sort of like you must avoid all temptation, fight apathy, boredom, fatigue, and lethargy, stay in shape just to be ready for that one moment where you're the conqueror, hero or heroine that saves the bacon, child,

day or game. This world, your world, is that fragile. It rests in the hands of a few do-gooders who just by chance are where and when they need to be, as if guardian angels. There are certainly a lot more do-badders who would wreck anything they could for profit. Does well to make and keep friends, if they are good and true. But trust is hard to bestow. He recalled an anile French saying, "You come to hate the people you've wronged." Guilt boomerangs pain. Conversely, when you pull your friend's hide out of a frying pan, he might resent your help. Damned if you do, damned if you don't. Little wonder it's a lonely planet.

Why must it be so hard to get along? Alignment of opinion is rare but potent. When people can't agree, they condemn decision as well as issue and its adherents. How is any progress possible? Gridlock brings nothing but failure from missed opportunities and waste. There are too few consequences beyond being looked down upon, when jail time should be given more often, which, in his case, meant penniless freedom. When legislators fail to agree, taxpayers don't get their money's worth. Partisan bickering is intolerable. How many brainy billigerents bother to vote anymore? Mere opinions are what you get when you abandon logic. Failure is never an option. Bad policies kill. If you create a society where the only way to survive is to bilk, loot and murder, you can't damn anyone who does. "Aren't all enemies of tyranny my friend?" he asked.

Meanwhile, small personal successes breed more books on how to be nice to fellow humans for readers who nod in agreement then do nothing noble ever. Political correctness it's called. Be glad there are readers. Be gladder still if they stop nodding approvingly and get off their butts. Of the millions of titles in Library of Congress, think of all the effort spent that could have been instead focused on solving real problems. Businesses fret over tiny amounts of waste, when authors, with inflated egos, jabber about identical things in louder, loudest voices, drowning each other out, filling shelf after shelf with misconceptions. Albums and books are often produced by people who just want to hang onto celebrity. Revelations were few and far between. Their only value was soporific, and his was no exception. Books can be cheaper and more effective than sedatives.

Historically, the most popular book ever written by copies sold will always be the *Bible*, the first printed and widely distributed western volume. Actually it's an anthology written by various reporters over the course of a millennium, one of its impressive strengths yet a source of suspicion. There's been another

millennium of commentary and elaboration from apologists and detractors, but they aren't included, except in how the original texts were adapted and mangled. Most irksome were modern interpreters who focus on a single line, take it out of context, insist it means that rubes send them money, threaten brimstone and fire if not. If you discuss what isn't knowable, powerful stuff, everyone jumps on bandwagon with ill-considered impressions. Moral high ground is a fine stance when an activity serves the common good, spreads wealth, not lines a sole someone's pockets. All communities really need to do is agree amongst themselves, then set priorities. Could it be that simple?

Must have been tried, he guessed. Can't agree even when they try. Family members can't get along with each other. People are conditioned to seek differences rather than commonality. Can you say who's expendable? Shouldn't mankind's business be to ensure the survival of all? Those who promote global awareness don't mean for businesses to use it to exploit poverty. Nice if you can preserve biodiversity, ethnicity, tribal uniqueness, but at what price? Can't let world's greatest gross national product collapse in the process. Doesn't serve anyone's interests here or there. Can't give away store to swindlers subverting the Constitution. The bigger the infraction, the more injured, the harsher the penalty should be. Mass murderers merit a tortured death. Instead, they sit them on thrones then burn solitary agnostics at the stake. Acceptable to slaughter innocent heathen hoards, but intolerable to ask a single question?

Nations do not yet possess any technologies to preserve planet from asteroid collisions, climatic upheaval, ecological rape, or pandemic diseases, but they do possess the means of self-annihilation, extinction of the human species and most others. How did that come about and why? Where is this headed? "Use it or lose it?" Is that what they mean to do? Leave this beleaguered planet fit only for certain species of bacteria? That would be pure waste: a bad strategy, corporately unthinkable, totally unprofitable. Yet companies don't concern themselves with that, think one dedicated employee's salary is a horrible waste. They'll gaily roll dice for the fate of mankind, but sweat blood over the impact of a single person hanging on by his fingernails. Bosses misconstrue priorities aiming for easy targets. Those in charge pick lint when they need to weave a whole new paradigm, preferably a healthy system made up of Koestler's holons. Wouldn't know a holon from a hole in wall.

About time mankind began a new course toward cooperation, improvement, mutual survival. This will mean sacrifices, giving up luxuries, redefining how to do things, using less resources, replacing sources, instead of destroying, extracting, pillaging, uprooting. In Somalia they tore plumbing out of buildings to cash in its value in copper; how desperate can people become? You may yet find out. He recalled a small story on how some components of the most expensive cars were made of renewable coconut husks or tree bark or something. But did cutting down more trees make up for fresh air fouled? Each process has to achieve self-sustainability. For every liter of carbon dioxide you exhale and oxygen you inhale, you should nurture enough plants to do the opposite. Even if you don't own property, you can rally around initiatives that clean up oceans and lands that befriend oxygen producing biomass. Planting a few evergreens in public parks would be good, or recovering abandoned lots for neighborhood gardens. Everyone can't be a farmer or live in a biodome, but you can support sound farming practices, ones run organically, by buying their products. Eat more beans, fruits, nuts and vegetables. What can communities do with landfills brimming over with nowhere else to go? Surely they could mine them for valuable waste materials, like metals and plastics, or use microorganisms to reduce mass. How about alternative energy? Couldn't garbage be used to fuel electric plants? It's done elsewhere, where land is too precious to dump on, uneconomical only when you forget to factor in costs of clean up. The recycle circle must be completed. Consumers should seek out recycled materials, and limit amount they waste. Packaging can be redesigned for minimal effect. Nothing should be dumped, and, if so, only as worm food. What long term opportunities are society missing under the auspices of immediate profits?

Settling into the here-now made one tends to forget how today's actions might affect mankind's future. To avoid unforeseen catastrophes, one had to work off key principles, filter everything through an organizing construct that ensures a desirable result. Meanwhile, these principles had to allow for individual interpretation, self expression, those who didn't want to or weren't able to comply. How do you define such a construct? Someone must decide for those who can't.

For example, nations have to wean themselves from fossil fuels and increase efficiencies of furnaces and vehicles that do. Everyone needs to self propel, as in bicycling and walking. Surprisingly, for

85% of typical transportation needs, trips less than 3 miles, given the growing amount of gridlock, bicycling and walking might even be quicker than driving. Most commutes are less than 5 miles, easily completed by pedaling and no problem parking. Bags, carriers, and trailers solve issues of carrying loads. Redesigned clothing and new fabrics solve discomforts of cold, heat, and wet. Motor restricted villages encourage bicycling. Thousands of engineers are looking for work. Why not task them with solving such problems? Improve design and material of shoes to avoid blisters and corns, as well as ergonomics of bags and carriers, and everything that assists self-propulsion.

Fanatics have often tried getting others interested in this stuff, sometimes going to an extreme—remember the Unabomber?—only to find that cheap, easy, lazy and stupid always win in America. Berlin and Vienna, where gasoline prices are outrageous, have 500 miles of bikeways. USDOT consultants outright label bicycling a “fringe mode”. It has to be made a choice between undesirables. Self-propelled means physical effort, nixes that. What if gasoline costs \$25 per gallon? Ouch! An additional surcharge on fuel could legitimately be imposed for cleanup and conservation. Then physical exertion doesn't seem so bad, or fuel efficiency, or mass transport for those incapable or unfit. Unfortunately, such a surcharge would only be born by middle and lower classes, as well as small business, thereby stifling fiscal growth. People unable to balance could try adult tricycles, paraplegics hand-cycles. He noticed wheelchairs users on bikepaths. Most were elated to be out and about without vehicular worries. Bikeways were suited to persons with diminished mental capacities, although they were found more often behind the wheel or epicenters of opinion. “Cars for everyone!” was once something people thought reasonable.

America seems resolute on preserving a dead paradigm. The age of cheap energy has passed. And along with it all infrastructure and technology that goes with petroleum consumption: asphalt, automobiles, commerce, defense, planes, shipping, trains, trucking. The enormity of such issues overwhelms. Change didn't appear possible in his lifetime. But here it was, being forced upon him. Oil was becoming increasingly unprofitable to drill for. Once, if you scratched the surface it bubbled up, then it took a derrick, a pumper, offshore rigs, through Arctic tundra, and now having to wage billion-dollar-a-day wars over it. When costs become prohibitive, oil is over. Then what are you going to do?

Such were the thoughts rattling around his skull like birdshot in an empty dumpster while stuck indoors. Who put these ideas in his head? Was it careful listening or reasoned extrapolation? Did he read them in *U.S. Snooze & World Distort*, a magazine chock full of cutting-edge but superficial teases. An article 6 months after 9/11 spoke directly of what he had been gassing about, finding some meaning in work, inconclusively. Disasters, floods, hurricanes, tsunamis always spin off eddies of malcontents. Worse were market analyses, with jobs du jour for which you need certification, and, by the time you get certified, there's a glut of applicants and nephews already promised. Whatever Human Resources managers said wasn't borne out by help wanted ads, which predominantly sought hospital workers, security guards, and truck drivers, all semiskilled but certified laborers who really needed health care after enduring bacteria laden squalor and bad OSHA practices. Anyone who wanted to do asbestos abatement, clean bedpans, sling burgers, or slaughter enemies, was sure to get a job. For putting themselves in harm's way they'd pay minimum to hapless unskilled hopefuls, but not anyone with any acumen from whom they dread reprisal. Why shouldn't everyone expect whatever effort one expends to achieve the best results for the common good? Isn't that what they try to instill in prisoners? Or was that all talk, too?

The longer he remained inside, the longer his manifesto grew. His most self-pitying output came from dealing with bloodless, passionless coworkers. You can rise above continuous, downright rude treatment by merciless strangers, but minor mistakes among intimates drive you insane, become the straw that breaks a camel's back. Apathy descends into whining pessimism. When people share a meaningful vision and achieve together, there's no room for recriminations or second guessing. Easy is it to succumb to negative thoughts repeated from all quarters, reverberating incessantly, thereby raising questions you don't want to deal with. Hard is it to discover answers, figure things out yourself. If good attitude is supreme, why is all the most important work accomplished by reluctant heroes and stubborn mules? One could cry, laugh it off with humor, or melt into an emotional breakdown. The only cure for his malaise had to be in participating, but in what?

