

56. The End

In good times the pace is so fast your mind's a blank, there's too much to do. As recession settles in, input begins to slow, nobody calls, and this great silence ensues. Those who seek harmony and peace find only quiet. When you're left by yourself long enough, a completely new mentality sets in, lonesome contemplation, of longing for an eternity in purgatory. If you sit quietly enough, you might even hear fluttering of invisible bird wings, sounds made by incorporeal spirits. "It was just so beautiful/ Somewhere in between/ What the song and silence say." You begin to think about all that's gone before, perhaps with misgivings and sorrow. One must always leave before a dance is over, yet it's already over even while band rocks on. Boat may be sinking, yet some paddle along as if it's just another day—until they're in over their heads, grabbed by hand, led out, thanked for coming, and told to disappear forever—drowned out, flushed away, suffocated, tidy bowl clean. Somewhere a clock stops. A book closes as history passes and shock of recognition sets in. You ask, "Where was my wake up call? Why didn't an alarm ring? Where did my life go?" It doesn't matter why. It's over.

A life of producing is short. Years of brown-nosing, selling out, and sucking up never stave off dismissal. Clocks spin ever faster and days rush by like commuters to a train. Time compresses. Almost impossible to make it extend or stand still, as you could when you were young, golden afternoons that dragged along until next event arrived. You fill yourself up with a few notions and skills, then go out and try something. Go do until you drop. Figure you'll sleep when you're dead. For recording artists this means a few scattered hours of total music recorded then later compiled onto a best-of CD between touring dates. For sports figures it's a few years of losses and wins. For soldiers it's a decade or less of dying or surviving in occasional battles. Economics force motoring upon most who consume and die behind a steering wheel, or make up time lost motoring. All athletes, models, rock stars and workaholics have short careers. These are generally not life avocations. Better to pick something you can do throughout your life, doctor, factory worker, farmer, lawyer, professional, something that has longevity with generations of needy clients lined up at your doorstep. Yet there will always be age discrimination, and fashions change so rapidly you had to remake yourself practically daily no matter what you choose or there's no curtain call or encore.

Why spend every stolen moment over 1/7th of your life expectancy to produce a bit of literature that demands too much of readers and will languish on a shelf? Lucky if it only languishes, since it may become a source of personal remorse, cause one to be ostracized, and draw unjust punishment. Did you expect to jump into this chapter, figure out where book's going, or gather its gist? No, it's spread across entire book. Flip around at will. Don't read sequentially from "Stuck Indoors"; wasn't written in any order, only later thoughts tucked in as if new mail into old post office boxes; earlier memories recur as if flashbacks under "Reality Fragments" and "Standing on Brook". Pick a paragraph at random. Your entire life is spent playing their authority game, and you believe there can be no alternative. Truth needs no degrees or trophies. As Boards of Canada advise, he was inclined to defend his constitutionally protected rights personally, because no one else was doing it for him. Counterattack is assuredly an alternative, like active demonstrations and systematic stoppage. Unstructured exploration is another, since where society wants to lead you you don't want to go.

Mid-life crisis is a way-station that everyone visits. Its paint has peeled, pavement cracked, roof sagged, and weeds are everywhere. You've got nothing figured out. Life has become a blob of fuzz. Is that bright spec on your horizon a distant conflagration burning itself out or the glimmer of light before dawn? All that finally matters is death itself. This inevitability has a way of focusing your attention. You know you're going to die, but suddenly someday becomes soon. As you wait you succumb to what Freud called a *general unhappiness*, yet better than a virulent neurosis. People don't like neurotics, too much trouble to deal with. Why not give up when nobody wants you around, call it a life? Whoa! Wait a moment. Don't get off train just yet. It'll start up again after awhile, bound for another destination. Al had been on trains that did exactly that, stalled for awhile then resumed as if nothing had happened. Same thing on boats and planes, temporary delays that somehow get straightened out. He could afford to be busily patient, if nothing more than constructing a constitution suitable for more production somewhere down the line. There was no alternative anyway. You suffer a breakdown, roll downhill, then arise from your ashes as someone different, phoenix from flame.

He recalled some lyrics from his counterculture youth, "I took a heavenly ride through our silence/I knew the moment had arrived/for killing the past and coming back to life." Few actually pay attention to lyrics, never mind literally live them. Bicycling lost in thought and lost in time was how he would pursue resurrection,

but now he stood naked and without form, no harmony and peace, only hunger and silence. Had to start again from scratch, discover a new way to survive. There were always ways to glean, perhaps stop and pick up pennies that fall from pockets of seated motorists who rarely opened their doors when it could no longer be avoided. Somehow got it into his head that writing a book would create a state of grace, obtain closure, result in some sort of revelation, rewire his brain, or somehow he'd grow through all this cerebral struggle and its attendant austerity. Nothing like that happened. He was practically the same from start to finish, stuck outside providence. But comparisons require frames of reference, and he had none. If anything, he'd gotten fatter and lazier. Eyesight was deteriorating. Can't all be poets, songwriters, and wordsmiths singing for supper. Somebody has to cook, produce, ship, stock. He really had nothing left but being an example to others who might bike and warp existence, too.

Bicycling worms its way into your life. Sometimes you may have to abandon your former life when some tragedy occurs, or put aside bicycling, too. Associating it with dead family and friends can be bittersweet. It's a mood mender when depressed, or source of solace during bereavement. People seldom express such sentiments about motoring, less a spiritual relief than a mundane annoyance. Cycling stays closer to your heartstrings. He was no psychologist, but could see clearly how investing effort and time forms a healthy passion that affirms life, keeps you as long as possible out of those high rise warehouses of tottering senility. Smiled whenever he read stories of seventysomethings logging lifetime mileage totals in 6 figures, and still pedaling. There's no limit except ones you impose upon yourself by abandoning health to persistent luxury. Bicycling celebrates your continued vitality. Motoring, with its incredibly high number of fatalities and occasional roadside shrines, confirms death and insensitivity. The single best use of a motored conveyance was a rescue squad, closely followed by a hearse, suited for when you can't propel yourself anymore. Yet your cremated remains would fit nicely into a pannier.

Many people are possessed with a vague idea that this is finally the end of all days, near a tipping point environmentally, or nuclear winter, and perhaps that's what will happen. Or an age coming to an end, more homogeneous thinking on a global basis, traditions swept away. Or agreement on important issues that affect everyone yet commingled diversity for forms of expression, pastimes, sexual orientations and things that only matter to individuals; this would be a fundamental departure in a world hitherto intent in

controlling every aspect of how you act and think. As long as everyone essentially follows Hippocratic Oath, "Do not fail to act toward another's welfare, yet do no harm," the method doesn't matter. Can have no consensus without ethics. But it would probably take a global conflict or invasion by space aliens to depolarize eastern and western prejudices and evade a 4th crusade.

On a Fall day he rode the Snake, to the ancient lake. The snake is long, 7 miles; it's old and its surface cold, at least that's what he'd heard. Is there a better ride in all of state than Snake Hill? He felt at one with it. Actually, all of it is more like 11 miles including section called Old Snake Hill, which ends with a brutal rise, like a cobra's head raised, ready to strike. Foliage colors were peak, made intense by damp overcast, droplets acting as tiny lenses to magnify hues. By colonial stone walls and postcard farms, terrain rolls with long risers, sharp upticks, undulations, over willowy hillocks, then turns curvaceous, and quiet, almost private. Pavement was a clean, gleaming, unblemished stripe parting fuzzy undergrowth around its margins. After a long, slow grade came a 3-mile downhill plunge he'd always wanted to try. It was a stimulating and very satisfying respite, a few hours of earthly pleasure after many years of concentration on conquests for others. Every so often you must do something for your own sanity.

Being an overcast day, he steered for Central Pike, another dome, where its Eastbound uphill had recently been repaved but not relined, like a gray satin ribbon on a birthday package, as if presented for him personally, which led to the same long bumpy decline, nevertheless welcome gliding. He enjoyed bumps, made him feel alive, reminded him how the sensual pleasures of bicycling contrasted with ascetic sterility of motoring, devoid of wind effects, lactic acid burn, putrid garbage dump odors, tastes of lung, temperature cautions. This descent was only suitable on overcast days that allowed him to read its cracks and outcroppings and gently steer closely around them. Wouldn't attempt in bright sun or dark rain. He didn't trust it as smooth, well-drained, direct Snake Hill, but he couldn't go to and return from without negotiating more difficult segments between. Lives, too, were full of pitfalls and traps. Male praying mantids mate and die, devoured by females. Consuming passions eventually kill. Home is a destination one never reaches alive.

Proust sat and recorded every impression, from taste of a delicate pastry to torment of unfulfilled needs, throughout a short intense moil before an untimely demise. Marcel showed a mind for what it is, a stream of impressions, and invented a feminine form of

writing suited to this right brain task. He didn't have time to spend recording deranged observations of nondescript detail. Unlike Proust, people depended upon his efforts to bring in dough, bake bread, sell himself, and succeed monetarily. Somewhere there may be answers to all his questions, faiths to believe, organizations of people similarly minded, paths to follow or diverge from, philosophies unexplored, or soul mates. Practically every thought has already been conceived and explored in such detail, you'd have to be an expert in a narrow discipline to join any argument, and what a waste of life! Why be fascinated by a deathbed confession or dying luminary's last words? Isn't everyone dying every day? Those who are truly alive can't express their wonder fast enough. Shouldn't you listen to them instead? If he was compelled to write this much, then there must be questions that still demand discussion after all, topics that haven't been fully quizzed out, at least not by someone whose only ambition was either to get into your pants or siphon your wealth.

No time for any of them. No time to read long, sad tales. He barely had energy enough to cause no harm. Not easy giving up violent forms of transportation. Before, it was only with fear and revulsion that he'd even smile. Is this any way to be? Being able to get around is as essential to life as energy, food, shelter and work. Just surviving in a market economy meant depriving someone else. Worst case would be to engender more suffering. But he couldn't be anything other than himself. That's honest, not wrong. The best case would be that revealing his core would lead to an interesting pastime where he'd be appreciated among those on his own wavelength, and his presence would amount to a net gain, as usual. Meanwhile, though, he needed to button his lip or learn to go without. More than not, he'd gone without, unashamed of his choices. Time to finish book, he decided, and get on with dying. Always deadlines to deal with, none of which he'd meet, the only deadline that matters is death. Once your race is run, step aside. Stop sucking up all available resources. Be like aged dawn people, who didn't break camp with tribe when their last Winter arrived. No regrets or tears. But until then, run fearlessly strong and swift.

So you're possessed by a sense of mortality. Everyone's going to die. What would you prefer to be doing when that happens? Having great sex? Getting torn to pieces in an ill-planned battle or terrorist attack? Pursuing a quiet pastime alone? Working for someone else? Of ways to die, bicycling seemed rather pleasant. Just let go of your handlebars and let that big bus crush you. Life is just a big adventure, no? You arrive with blinders on, but gradually

give up your pursuit of truth, after thinking for years that's what your purpose in life must be. It's the final delusion to which many succumb, suicide that preserves pride after you realize you're worthless on your own. You can't escape anything, still must face yourself. Better to die trying. Your worth is only in how you much you share of yourself. You create meaning that way, and it'll be measured by how much you'll be missed, but not by you.

After all, what qualified him to write about Truth? Nobody can possibly summarize experiences of billions over 6 recorded millennia, but you can distill from them, at least a little. He had paid plenty of dues as a corporate and personal diarist. Pursued a career very accurately and unromantically recording scientific details. But more than gaining skill, you have to be well positioned to acquire information. Spent every day observing a exemplary slice of World's most diverse nation. America today represents more bits and pieces of humankind than imperialist England ever did: all of Africa, Asia and Europe, plus original America, from Abenaki to Zuni, including those indigenous to South America. Like Mohammed, he need not go to a mountain, because the pinnacle of all humanity passed before him every day. So, he was uniquely predisposed to look and see. Then again, maybe all one needs to do as a writer is make a little more sense of the same things that vex any reader who happens to pick up one's book. Most writers would rather be read than right. Lacks any integrity whatsoever.

Why seek direction from another, when tools are innate, built in, come with package? Selma reminded everyone that they are going to have to find out for themselves. A notable passage in life is to realize you *are* truly alone. There's no source to draw on but yourself. Nobody honestly wants to give you or take your advice. Those who do only want to control you and take advantage. His answer? Create your own path. Chart landscapes and mindscapes. Explore worlds without, manmade and natural. Find pleasures within. Dig your own wellspring and use it. Make contact, stay in touch, take a stranger's hand in a desperate land, but don't be deceived, no, never. Roam with an open mind, a mind of childish wonder; see everything as it is, not colored by prejudice. He set out doing so himself, as he intuitively knew it was the only true path, but only gradually realized how he'd strayed into what some might consider a nonviolent, productive life which caused no offense but served no purpose, something, luckily, which he could amend by distilling his essence and bottling it in a book, even if it's not a perfume anyone would want to wear. Already taking on a life of its own incomplete, it grew distant to him before he began to share it.

If you give offense you must prepare for retribution. But what if you've been beset, had to bite your tongue and repeatedly swallow indignities your entire life? Shouldn't you expect justice? No, it seems. The worst aggressors get away with it, go unchecked, rise to power. They cry, "Don't judge me! To point a finger aims 3 back at you." Society admires them. As an individual, you can only decide what you'll give, not what you'll be given. You can be delighted by kindness and reciprocate with grace. Or you can dish out cruelty and reap horrors, punishments or rewards. It's yours to choose.

After a half century, he was just beginning to understand how life was supposed to work. You're either darkness or light, a meaningless hanger-on waiting for someone else to make things happen or someone who collects himself/herself and crosses boundaries. Visionaries lead, like pioneers braving deprivation, bad water and tribal apprehensions, and followers stream behind, contemptuous of fools who put themselves out for their benefit. Sadly, followers don't know what they're missing, a chance to be first, to breathe fresh air, to create new mutually rewarding relationships, to view lands without footprints or ruts. It goes beyond courage, curiosity, and pride to some deep rooted need to explore what's new, possibly for the betterment of all. Must be an instinct for species survival. Warriors are only one subset of explorers. If you don't let your explorer inside manifest itself, you harvest nothing but remorse. "I'll end truly by finding myself," wrote Eluard. This World is so interesting and mysterious there's no end of people and things to understand better, treat with respect, work with cooperatively. Bikes are a surprisingly good way to begin, go a full century.

Walking is pretty slow. Driving is too fast. Jetting around everything looks like a blurry map. Why not use all modes? Drive/fly/sail somewhere new; get off and poke about by bike; hike paths, stroll centers, then go somewhere else in a hurry. Doing this made him feel alive. Sitting in a cubicle never did. This transformation is amazing. Wished he hadn't waited so long to get back to his original impulse. At least he still had strength to go on a short tear or perform something useful. But, assuredly, he never expected anyone to take anything he said as advice, only perspectives to factor in while making their own decisions based on their own infinitely varied life's circumstances. Whatever book is in you forces itself out, and you have no control of this except to shut up, which is exactly what he'd done for decades. A writer is barely a thin clay amphora, book its contents gushing out once cracked.

Sparing people's feelings is no kindness. Only truth is direct, honest, kind and pure; it founds relationships, gets things done,

increases faith. People may have the means, strength and tools but not the will. Everyone's here now with daily needs. Why not come together, help each other? It's easy to be kind when you're alone. So much harder to bite your tongue when family or friends force you to do something against your will. People try to poison you with bile, cardinal sins, dirty dealings, shared manias, and syndromes by proxy. When one is unkind, it splashes into hearts of everyone around, then ripples out to all they know, and so on. Someone has to be a veritable stone bridge unaffected by temporary surges, break ripples, let people cross, stand steadfast. Instead of fueling someone's rant, calm them, carry them. While this implies a passive role, it takes far more active courage to absorb hate, accept bonds of restraint, and transform it into love. Try it sometime, if you know how. Barren landscapes aren't exciting unless shared with a partner. Connection to others, fraught with so many pains, is still the most incredible experience.

What's revealed? No facts, just truths. No talk, just do. No executives, equality. No religious excuses, goodness. No greed, sharing. No money, common cause. No more rules, only evaded by clever and used to subjugate dim-witted. No more lies. Honesty. Undo all complex protocols used to build walls around entitlements. Greet summits. Reach horizons. Simplify. Why? Because. What better thing is there to do? Not tomorrow, today. Tomorrow you'll be too tired and devolve into something practically useless. Eventually everyone returns to origins, childlike naïvete, kind in a kinder mankind, then dust. The journey in between is what matters. Nobody ever knows or lives through time outside the boundaries of birth and death. It goes so fast, make it count.

As reluctant as Aristotle to actually count teeth, he guessed his bicycle chain has about as many link pairs as this book has linked chapters, not individual but intertwined, no less or more, only bins into which to store 2 million characters. Needed to mark dust jacket to scare off people who might later bother him, "Warning: This book contains explicit *advice, politics, opinions, and religion* for which Surgeon General has yet to determine a risk," in big damn letters. There, full disclosure—line drawn, cross at your peril. While arbitrary restrictions are bad, natural limits are good; besides, they simply are. He kept bouncing off walls that confined his imagination and intellect, skin and skull, trying to explode barriers between every individual who is, was, or will be and he. Nature was full of constraints, but no ball as big as globe of humanity, no chain as binding as the urge to interact. Need mankind add more? A thick book isn't comfortable to cradle, makes a better doorstep

than a lover. One should only bite off what one can chew. A handful suffices. A book format has at least this advantage: he didn't have to repeat setups for each point made, so individual chapters could forego usual introductions; this provides better flow and pull, don't you agree? Perceiving them spinning quickly around was a meaningless blur, never intended to be thus reviewed. Contemplating them at rest soon resembled meditation. Only by slowly savoring them at just the right speed—like a film run correctly at 24 frames a minute, pedaling cadence of 80 rpm, or solemn procession—did they work at all. Success demands balance and pace.

Once book is done, you look back and wonder what's wrong with you. What madness possessed you to speak plainly? Why get in people's hair, under their skin? There's obviously a whole realm of smart and talented people out there based on the vast number of extraordinary things they accomplish. Had he nothing better to offer them in reply? It occurred to him writing was a barber combing hair, aligning some unruly strands of a huge mane, inadvertently plucking out some, the most knotted and twisted. One can only begin combing, then leave it to others to braid or cut. Menninger argued that a person's vital balance stems from social equality. Comb enough, mane will flow all together in the same direction, dissident and mainstream strands all agree and shine together. Without prejudice, unique strands can slip into an elegant whole.

Only good of writing a book as this is its author never again need answer questions, can simply point to a biblically numbered page or paragraph, nothing left to add, no opinion hidden. Ha! Reminded him of a gaunt anecdote. Convicts serving time hear few new jokes, so they assign retreads a number to speed retelling. During still of night, someone might call out "10", and cell block chuckles, or "12" evokes a belly laugh. A newly arrived prisoner hears this, and questions his cellmate, who says, "Go ahead, give it a try." So newcomer yells, "25." Nary a snicker. Cellmate suggests, "Try again." A timid "12" is met with cold silence. "Why isn't anyone laughing," newcomer asks. Cellmate explains, "Humor isn't in the joke but in how you tell it." This pretty much sums up futility of trying to reach people with words. Go do something wonderful.

Hanging onto a few petty metaphors as if they were worth something, jewels and pearls, and working it all out were exhausting, reading about it moreso. It stole minutes, hours, days, years from his life. Some claim it had all been explored ad nauseam in film and on paper. He fully admitted his views were a crazy mess, because reality itself is chaos. Instead of a pleasure, it becomes an insufferable chore. In the end your work will be either beloved and

lionized by someone influential or founder on a sea of indifference. You have no say in this. Without encouragement one inevitably stops. *So this is the end*, beautiful friend, what anyone who'd read this far must be, a member of a select sliver of society that he'd reached out to who had responded by their persistence. But it was not over. Oh, no. Left were denuncements by self-appointed authorities, illegitimate indictments, greedy grifters looking to blackmail, screaming, tears and undeserved punishments. Don't forget general ridicule by those who haven't read through and will never understand, that is, if anyone actually ever paid any attention to anything anyway, something he never personally witnessed for which he'd given up all illusions. Just let penalties match offenses, tooth for tooth, word for word.

What's your penance for seeking truth? As slain civil rights leader King often said, "Salvation isn't a destination, it's staying on the right path." Mohammed similarly stated, "To leave home and seek knowledge is to walk with God." It's the journey itself that matters. Just to recognize the World for what it is is genius. Unless hungry for truth, how can you remain upright along a narrow, straight line? Mad to stray. Word *madness* comes literally from infinitive *to be unbalanced*. Bicycling, if nothing else, teaches balance. Leaning changes course and leads to crashes, instances where you learn only if you survive. Listen to those who've already learned. He was done answering questions; desperately had to get back to work making a buck, hug survival or starve. Time to share some of yours; was done sharing all of his.

Descartes knew where to start: deconstruct existence to affirm individuality; turn everything into a bifurcated conveyance of body and mind, a duality oscillating between actions and thoughts, a quintessential bicycle. He knew where to end, this very paragraph, having disaffirmed greedy self and reconstructed existence through a union of diverse entities, physically dependent yet intellectually free. Chains that bind are your means of escape. End with truth. Men get from place to place a leg at a time along a woven line. Society sustains and is sustained by its constituents. Work gets done as each shift passes. Sleep overtakes a weary head, and some replacement steps up. Round and round spins the wheel of World on buttery smooth hubs. As a means, this is the end. Fade to white, the unprinted page.

