

NormalcyMag

Exploring American Culture



Upon A Time That Comes and Passes

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"Better Early Than Never"

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NormalcyMag

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Editor's Standard

Welcome back to NormalcyMag! With this ninth issue in total since we started, we finish our second volume of publication. Throughout we have learned much about our ability to publish a small, somewhat universal, but very regional and personal magazine. First and most important of those lessons: The editors, and I especially, learned that when producing a magazine heavy in written content, by an increasing range and number of contributors, we can always improve the attention to details. For our second lesson, as we plan to fully debut in our next, February 2019 issue, we have ways to improve the presentation. Check back for Volume 3, Number 1, in two-months to see that lesson applied!

Each issue has evolved our production in ways both expected and unexpected. The evolution of NormalcyMag came in a time-frame we expected and accepted to justify the effort and the future return on that effort. In short, we wanted to produce, with some profit return on investment to make the effort self-sustaining, a short, well-written, and inexpensive magazine that people can physically read and value enough to share. Also, despite the business decisions that dictated a price per printed copy, we wanted to keep it free to read always in e-format, both emailed and on our website www.normalcymag.com. We have accomplished those expected goals. I did not expect, however, the many valued readers who responded so enthusiastically to the publication's mission. Readers seem to grasp by their feedback that each person can find a healthier normalcy in their individual lives. Our concept states that normalcy rests somewhere between the extreme definitions of "normal" and "not normal" so often imposed by others in society who seek to gain or profit by those definitions. Thank you for your feedback and for your efforts to find your own, healthier, and better normalcy!

In this issue of NormalcyMag, "Upon a time that comes and passes," we explore the theme of time in our lives. The selections show how time influences us in daily living, in work and pleasure, and also describe how we can both philosophically and practically benefit from understanding some factors of time. For our contributors, I must highlight them. Khaiti Hallstein appears in the magazine for the first time. Her short-memoir under the department of "Reflecting" gets to the pinch how time

affects us concerning the heavy hearts from tragedies everyone faces in their lifetime. We welcome Khaiti's skill and talents as a writer, and her warm empathy. We expect more great contributions from her in the future. Also, J.D. Schloss returns after a short absence with a wild and imaginative short story. Many who work on this magazine (and many readers, too) consider J.D. "The Anchor" of NormalcyMag so far for his wit and creativity. I feel personally grateful that he has solidly delivered another classic for NormalcyMag. And finally, Davey Shoves gives us another light-hearted, but totally appropriate "Check Your Head List" in the "Versing" department. Read it with relish.

Thank you, again, for reading. And as always, please. . . read with open mind!

Tim Krenz
Editor & Publisher



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Ben Plunkett, Treasurer

-Reflecting- Eleven Years By Khaiti Hallstein

If you could take a peek at the end of your story, how you'd finally come to an end, would you? This summer was the 11th anniversary of my mom's death. She had just turned 50 the month before. And in 11 years, I realized that I will reach the age she was when she passed away. That is extremely intense to realize, that I might have 11 years left in my life. I better get on it. Do what I need and want to do in my life. No pressure, but I might have only 11 years left.

I used to live in Minneapolis. Zipping around the city on my bike was one of my favorite things about urban life. 26th Street is a one way and along that corridor I would glide along with the traffic heading west. If the stoplights were perfectly aligned, I could just fly past the enormous hospital complex around 26th and Chicago. This area could be dangerous to navigate through, whether on bike or driving in a car. Uniformed traffic cops would be escorting ambulances into the complex and helping patients and their families into their vehicles.

My sister and I were there with her when it happened, right there in that hospital that I used to ride past on my bike. Her death was horrible. It was not like how they show it in the movies. Witnessing her spirit leave her body was violent and foreign and soul shattering. I had never been around death, but I remember thinking, whoa, ok, so that's how it goes. We all will die, and then just... be gone. It was actually a bit liberating. My life would never be the same.

Right after my mom died, as we sat with her body in the hospice room, instead of despairing and being overwhelmed with sadness, I fixated on everything she didn't get to do. All the things she didn't get to see, experience, absorb, explore, discuss, debate and enjoy. As she closed her eyes for the last time, I felt so robbed by her breast cancer. The disgusting disease had filled her body with so much destruction that after 9 years of fighting against it, she just couldn't fight anymore. While being filled with this rage, I was completely infused by her. Inspired, as if her spirit left her and entered me, to go do as much as I could, while I still could. To follow my dreams and make things happen; to do right by her and make her proud.

My Mom's death propelled me forward into becoming a full-time

farmer. It was what I wanted to achieve more than anything in the world. I'd been playing around with homesteading and hobby farming at my little place in the country, but suddenly the pressure to achieve my goal became an unstoppable force in my life. As I drove to work, I was frantically calculating how many bars of goatmilk soap I needed to make and sell each year so that I could finally quit my day job and just be a farmer. While I made a million mistakes and had many, many farming failures over the next few years, eventually I was able to put in my notice at my day job and check that dream off of my list.

Now once again, I have a timeline and pressure to get all the things done that I want to do before I die. We've all heard that cheesy phrase, "live like you could die tomorrow." Well, how does one live if they suspect that they might have 11 years left? Honestly, the pressure has caused quite a lot of turmoil and depression for me this year as I grappled with this potential reality. Do I sell my farm and go take off on adventures, going ahead with the assumption that I will die in 2029? I don't have any children, so I don't need to hang onto property to pass down to them. Here's the thing, none of us know when we will pass away. Death could be the end, it could be a new beginning, or it could be any number of other hypothesized situations. I can't peek into my future. I may not live 11 more years. I may live 30 more years. Who knows.

Recently I was reading my journals from back in my Minneapolis days, before Mom died, and you know what? I am literally living the dream I set out to live. I wanted to live in the country, to grow as much of my own food as possible, to read and write and work on art. After Mom died I added becoming a farmer; to be my own boss. I did it! My mom would approve.

Live your life as best you see fit. Do what you want, be good to others, be as conscientious as you can be, but always keep in mind that today could be your last. It's the universal bittersweet conundrum, the joy and heartache of existence.



Khaiti Hallstein lives and farms in Clayton with her boyfriend Ben. She switched from raising goats to specializing in ducks and life is good. Check out her website at: www.Ltdfarm.com

Sub Terra Vita Chronicles #54

Pieces of Time

By Tim Krenz

As most people know, at least those who know me well, I like wearing watches on my wrist, to tell “my time” accurately. I often wonder about my near-obsession with knowing the exact time. Most folks tether themselves to their smart phones or other devices in everything they do. A cell phone does not own my attention, but my watches have always felt like part of my left forearm—whole and inseparable. To not wear my watch, by pure accident of forgetting, or when one does not work, feels like a ghostly amputation.

When young, my father drilled into my head the virtue of “show up at least five minutes early, no matter what.” As a pretty good taskmaster and role model, I follow my father's advice, to the tune of my absurdly great punctuality. If I show up five minutes early, I feel uninhibited about leaving early.

I found in my life, whether wearing a Jedi watch, an old-school Swatch, my now-broken Donald Duck watch, or the really old and broken Marvin the Martian watch, that I imperfectly adduced, my very own philosophy of time. After all, I only need to add an “e” at the end of my name, “Tim,” to get the word that I seek to understand in concept, that concept of “time.”

As I approach the half-century mark of my time on earth, I see

many others lucky enough to keep their internal watch wound up and running, and all the while I hope that the clock of loved ones keeps going. Whether family, friends, or others too good for this world to lose, the clock does tick, but I remain grateful that their chronometers keep working.

Time. It controls our lives, as time determines the length of living. Each person as an individual moves on that line we call time. On that line, we have birthdays and anniversaries, appointments and schedules; clocking in and clocking out of work; deadlines for work; wasted time spent useless in between; waiting for others; and constructive uses of time to keep our minds and hands occupied; and, sadly, and tragically, our time may unexpectedly end far too early. We humans have these influences to mark our time and hopefully make us men and women fit or better for our time. If really lucky we may shape the time in which we live.

With these issues of time, we do not seem to have a good philosophy of it, something around which we can build a more ideal state of mind or spirit. Like any philosophy, we must construct one about time each on our own. Such a philosophy should not replace our ideas or ideals of a god, godhead, or other self-revealed knowledge. Any philosophy of time should only



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enhance and enrich whatever beliefs we hold in the first place—about our place in the intricate fabric of space and time. Does everyone grasp the scope of triumphs well spent, when we spend our lives doing that which we love, and with the ones we love the most? For the limited time of one life span, when compared to the history of the universe, we need to jealously guard our time, give it to other things grudgingly, and claw it with our dulling, sore fingernails. When we realize the undue inevitability that we can do more with the time we have, we might think differently about a useful personal philosophy of time.



My father used to wear his father's gold wrist watch, a very special one, with the words "Hamm's" on the face plate. My grandfather worked at Hamm's Brewery in St. Paul his whole adult life, except for the years of the Second World War when he, like other members of his family, served as an enlisted man in the United States Navy. Grandpa's co-workers at Hamm's presented him with that gold watch at his retirement shortly before he passed away around the time I turned 10 years old. My father no longer wears Grandpa's watch because it does not work well all of the time, and Dad has another wrist watch. Dad keeps that gold watch in his special box where he has other mementos of very important value to him that he collected over a lifetime. Once in a while, he hands the things out as the years go past, to me and the other members of my family. A watch may keep time, but only as long as it functions. For me and my own philosophy of time, a good rule becomes: Keep the wrist watches and timepieces in good repair.

Time, like space and position, gives us perspective. Often, we may look at the same things differently from other positions. And hindsight in history always look somewhat different backwards along the time line. As history, a story may regress to first causes, or previous position, the way archaeologists date the time of their findings. In the life of one (or two) old people each 100 years old, a far away world long ago appears reachable. Two such persons a century old standing next to each other and holding hands, and we have a timeline that spans back to when Napoleon haunted the hills of his exile on St. Helena after his battle at Waterloo. Four such people in a line and holding hands, and we have a time-continuum reaching back to right before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth colony and made their first Thanksgiving. To stretch it back even more, twenty people of one hundred years of age, and we have the rough time frame of Pontius Pilot and the trial of Jesus. Thirty people a century old and holding hands, the accumulated years touch the shores of ancient Troy and the combat of Achilles and Hector. History, then, in time and in tangible human form brings us back a long, long way. In this sense, history remains near, and within our grasp to remember on the line we call time.

How does time begin? Astrophysicists call the event the 鈇ig Bang. • Albert Einstein's theories say that space and time exist as one influencing the other, in a similar way the 19th Century American writer Ralph Waldo Emerson called the grand spirit the unified and indivisible 徽ne. • Space and time, according to

Einstein, bends, slows, and warps itself and even affects light, as his General Theory of Relativity explained how gravity functions in the universe. In the equation, $E=MC^2$, c represents the constant speed of light, at around 186,000 miles per second, which Einstein used to represent the base-line of time in his theory. He used the constant c because he could find no other reliable and objective chronometer (clock) to make the calculations. According to the scientists, the speed of light in a vacuum and unaffected by gravity represents the only real way we know our age, as a universe. I wonder if we can accept that? It takes a while, but I did finally accept it. Another good general rule in my philosophy of time becomes: Accept the time as it exists and not as I would have liked it otherwise.

In the telescopes, astronomers look outward, and always backward in time, to see the early light of the universal dawn, closer to the beginning of time, in order to understand more of existence. They explore the depths farther out to see the internal logic of the great force of time and space. How it affects our reality, here and now, I cannot know, but in the present, I only know that none of us have enough of the time we want. This brings me to another rule: Use the time allowed for what I want to do, and not wait to do good and great things for people I love.

In a temporal sense, the line of time, the taskmaster that limits things to come, gives us opportunities to clew to it, enjoy it, and to benefit from the time we have on earth. Forget space, briefly, and all the science. On the other hand, on a spiritual level, time can also magically renew and reveal to ourselves the inherent powers we have to heal, help, balance, reflect and to correct. If we accept that life has justice, we must trust that time will do that justice,



especially for those who live honest, good and loving toward themselves and others. We cannot make more time, due to the wisdom of whoever or whatever created it. As George Harrison once sang, "All things must pass," both bad things and good. Time changes things. A rule: Let time change things, in and around us.

About ten years ago, I received a present from my parents at the family Christmas Eve. I opened the wrapping and the container and I found one of my father's heirlooms from his special box. He gave me a gem of a chronometer, from my grandfather or an uncle, I do not know which. He gave me a pocket watch, stainless steel with a glass face. Time in a box! On the back, it had engraved "US Navy Bureau of Ships, Comparing Watch, 1943." A true wind up watch, I carry it only on specific occasions. I found it to valuable personally to carry it casually, even on a chain I added to it. Since I have to wind the old watch to keep it going, I wondered if I can keep the clocks ticking by my efforts. Given the times, I must try.



-Story- Take It, Easy

By J.D. Schloss

Easy Brazos was nervous. His presentation was next and he was fairly certain he'd be laughed at and promptly sent to the principal's office within 10 seconds of his report. "Maybe, they'll even send me to that headshrinker," he worried as he listened to little Busby Splurch recounting-in song form, no less, how he'd spent his Christmas vacation "a-wassailing here and a-wassailing there, wassailing, wassailing everywhere..."

"Thank you, Busby. That was beautiful," Miss Trang sang in praise as a beaming Busby made his way from the front of the room to his assigned chair in the back row. "What a joy caroling brings to us all." Easy had a crush on Miss Trang. She radiated positivity. His dad would often say the problem with optimists is, "they don't have all the facts."

Sometimes his father would throw sky-high pop ups to him; other times his dad would disappear for days only to return and sleep a few more. It was rough living with an alcoholic. Easy realized time had done a number on his father and his holiday travels had allowed him to develop some compassion for his father.

Miss Trang singing back to his friend Busby helped young Easy get back in the moment and regain his confidence.

"So we've heard about visits from and with Santa, about Hanukah miracles, snowman armies, and now we'll hear from you, Easy. Tell us how you spent your Winter Break," Miss Trang asked as way of introduction. Easy made his way to the front of the class and began...

"That was great, Busby. I love hearing you sing," Easy started. He closed his eyes and found his center.

"It all started Christmas Eve, sledding. I was flying down Baldhead on my racer, got serious air on Big Fat and never landed. Total whiteout and without losing any speed, I ended up on the back of this humongous black horse, my arms wrapped around its neck and bullets whizzing by my head. I looked to my left and a huge red sun was just setting over the foothills. 'Faster, King, faster boy,' I shouted, pushing all my weight up against his neck. I looked to my right and there was Rowdy, with a big old smile on his dirt-covered face. 'Split up! Head to Willow Springs. I'll lose 'em in the forest and come find ya,' he yelled. I kicked my spurs into King and veered off, away from my partner. . .

"What led to this? Well, we had been providing security for Pastor Blaster and his traveling show for a few weeks. The Pastor drove this rickety horse-drawn paddy wagon around the territories screaming fire and brimstone. '*Time Has Robbed Them of Their Dignity!*' That was what he called the show. The cell was big enough for three to lay about in misery, but he usually had it stuffed with five or more of the most '*Depraved Degenerates*' on god's great earth.

"The cell was covered by a greasy tarp on which he'd painted the name of the show on both sides. The back flap read, '*HELL IS WAITING FOR YOU! REPENT!*' There were hundreds of clock faces on the tarp as well. Instead of putting numbers on them, he'd draw all these weird goddamned symbols and characters. Save the whiskey bottles, syringes, serpents, skulls and crossbones I couldn't make heads or tails of them. The Pastor was not well. I'm not so sure what a moral compass is, or if I even have one, but the Pastor...

"Life could be good, in between the horror shows, for a stolen moment or two. Pastor would usually let the gin-soaks and hop-heads out of the paddy wagon for an hour or two; chained together of course, and I'd get to know them a bit. The towns were usually a few days ride apart so once we got out of town, Pastor would open up the lock box and dole out booze to the swill-tubs and opium and powders to the fiends. It was like magic. They'd go from bughouse to calm and downright friendly even. They were men, just like my

long dead Pa. Some had been teachers, steamship captains, soldiers, blacksmiths, gentlemen even.

“After a few hours of joking and palavering and just being under the clouds on the open range, decency would come to a crawl and all creation seemingly ended. These men needed more—they were a desperate lot—and their natures would just change. That unrelenting darkness would follow us into the next town. The Pastor would keep the poison coming for about a day or so, then, you’d never heard such a racket when he turned off the faucet. The smells and shrieks and moaning were downright hair-raising. Rowdy and I would take turns 'scouting'—which was really just an excuse to ride ahead a few miles to get away from it all.

“About a quarter mile outside Heartless, Pastor began ringing the bell to announce our presence. A swarm of kids and dogs came running out to greet us. 'What’s it say? What’s it say?' The youngsters couldn’t read and were curious as to what was written on the tarp and more importantly, what was underneath.

“In time, heathens! Run along and fetch your parents. Hell is real,' the Pastor bellowed.

"We made our way into the little village and a crowd of about one hundred had gathered. 'Step right up, step right up and feast your eyes on the ravages of time,' the Pastor implored the townsfolk. His booming voice competing with the howling of the men and the gathering crowd. He thrived on this chaos. 'Easy, you and Rowdy know what to do.' We each took off our hats and hopped down from our horses to collect the money. The Pastor of course had no idea about our plan.

“Repent. Repent. Pay the boys and Repent! Pay up and time will be kind to you. Let this be an object lesson to you all in what time without the Lord begets.' Pastor Blaster was as hooked on the stuff as the men in the wagon. The only difference was he’d use the hypo on himself at regular intervals. 'Bring me the coins, boys. Let’s not keep these good people waiting.'

“Our hats were heavy with coin. At this point, we’d typically approach the Pastor and he’d make a big production of emptying the monies we collected into a bejeweled strong box. Once this was done, he’d make his way to the back of the wagon and pull the drawstring revealing the writhing men with x’s in their eyes in back. Instead, I hit Pastor high and Rowdy hit him low. He dropped to the ground and I yanked the key from his hand, pulled the drawstring and unlocked the cell. 'Run. Run. Your free,' I yelled at the men. None of them moved. I should’ve known they’d be too sick to escape. 'The key, the key,' one of the men whispered as he extended his hand. All he wanted was more of the poison. I felt helpless. I couldn’t do anything for these men. I put the key to the lock box in his hand and closed my hand around his.

“We got to get, Easy,' Rowdy yelled. 'I got the money.'

“I jumped up on to King and followed Rowdy out of town.

“Rowdy and I met up hours later and neither of us felt too good about how things went down. We’d let the men down and Pastor Blaster was still out there and would be up to his brand of devilry in no time. Those men were sick and needed our help. The Pastor would surely make his way back to Heartless to use the men to replenish his coffers. Our plan had been to use the money to head out West and start our own ranch. The coins were dirty and corrupt; profits gained off the agony of good men. It was time to take action.

“We rode all night and hit the outskirts of Heartless at sunrise. The paddy wagon was still there and we could see the men, sitting in pairs, chained back-to-back. It was obvious they had just gotten their fix. We counted five gunmen, dressed in black guarding the

wagon. The Pastor was most likely holed up in the Metropole. I had no gripe with the gunmen, but they were going to have to pay for choosing to be in Heartless at sunup. Rowdy and I aimed our rifles and nailed all five. The Pastor came running out of the hotel, pistols in each hand. I got back on King and rode towards him. I drew back my saber; hell-bent on removing his head from his body-and swung it. I swung and...

“...There I was, back on my sled, mid-flight in the snow. I hit the landing. And that’s how I spent my Winter Break,” Easy finished. His classmates were transfixed.

“That’s quite an adventure you went on, Easy,” said Miss Trang. She uncrossed her legs, stood up, and walked over and wrapped Easy up in a big hug. She broke the embrace, stepped back and asked, “What did you learn?”

Easy smiled and replied, “I had a great time and I can't wait to get back up on Baldhead and see my dad again.”



J.D. Schloss lives, works and writes in Taos, New Mexico.

-Versing-

Check Your Head List How to Build A Time Bomb by Davey Shoves

1st Step—Compress all your memories into the darkest corner of your brain. Not because they are bad; because they are fragile and need preservation.

2nd Step—Gather up all mixed emotions storing them in air-tight barrels down the mind hall across from fragile memories.

3rd Step—Combine positive thoughts and forward thinking, neatly packed in multi-colored boxes and clearly marked S.S., for “Superb Shrapnel.”

4th Step—Make sure mound of love is piled directly in the center of warehouse-slash-brain, reaching from the floor to the rafters.

5th Step—Apply bricks made of anger to wall being built around perimeter of storage facility.

6th Step—Dust almost entire warehouse with black powder residue of past, present 'n' future guilt, leaving the love pile untainted.

7th Step—Unravel thread of existence until it reaches deep into the love pile. Placing it close to but not directly in the center of smoldering love. Connect other end of existence thread to detonation box labeled “desires for negative positive gains.”

8th Step—Make sure blasting box is located outside of ear canal. Double check to make sure thread of existence is connected to internal clock.

9th Step—With goggles and helmet on, gently push plunger firmly down, igniting a chain reaction. Thoughts, memories, feelings and love are blown all over the place.

10th Step—Pick up scattered pieces of old life that are relevant to a new time.

11th Step—Realize we have no control over time, bombs, others, weather, or lottery numbers. But we do have control over what we store away.

Davey Shoves lives, works and junks in Amery, WI.

Low Adventures: Trekking the Superior Hiking Trail

Part 8: Baptized Up Two Creeks

By Tim Krenz

In the spring of 2005, after Craig and I spent a couple of weekends in March scouting for trout runs near home in Amery, Wisconsin. He and I ventured in the middle of May for a two-night backpacking trip to the Superior Hiking Trail. This trip, for the first time, we brought two of our friends. We would have a good trip, despite my negative attitudes during it. Not quite proud of my words and feelings that surfaced during the trek in northeastern Minnesota, I can only say that at least the other three did not tie me to a tree, dangle bacon over my ears, and leave for the bears.

I probably deserved it, if they had done such a thing. Instead, I learned a lot on that trip, the effect that disgruntled expectations could have on me and neutral parties. I have never quite grasped why I got so bent over things. In the end, though, we had a great trip, even if not my best moment in the woods.

Three years after I graduated university, I became friends with a girl a few years younger in high school, the redoubtable Mary. Actually, that same summer she and I became friends, Mary had introduced me to her classmate that I only vaguely remembered slightly more than Mary herself. She brought me together with her best friend: Craig. Yes, Mary stands responsible for my very great friendship with the man who instigated this whole, immortally self-acclaimed Low Adventure.

Mary, always a sweet friend, had her charming, even disarming ways, with her ready laugh, her vibrant smile, short red-blond hair, and her stories of wacky adventures living in the Twin Cities. Luckily, my girlfriend back

home, Looney, did not mind my friendship with Mary, since Mary and I would have to share my tent. “Who’s Mary?” Looney asked me. I explained. “Sure,” Looney said, “. . . sure.”

The first day of the trip, Mary picked me up at my parent’s farm in the morning. After stopping at a Minnesota Walmart so she could get knee braces, we drove straight up I-35, farther north of Duluth, MN, to Two Harbors. There, we met Craig and his friend from university days, a software engineer named Bryan. Further up the Lake Superior coast, we parked Mary’s car in Silver Bay and we all found ourselves in one car on the way to the parking lot for the section of trail before 1 PM.

When we started our walk I carried the lightest pack I had brought so far for these trips. Before I left my parent’s house, I weighed the gear—most of it heavy and obsolete by today’s standards—at thirty-nine pounds. I did not, however, get into very good shape over the winter or early spring for this particular trip. I should have, if I only remembered how I carried my own ass after the walk on Christmas Tree Ridge the previous autumn. As my trail journal reminds me, I hurt like hell that first day. Combined with the frustrations of life and the trip, and with the clouds and chill rain all that weekend, the effects made for a very “crabby-sour apple” me.

That first day, Friday, May 13th, I found a new definition of awesome, of truly awe-inspiring power, on that Superior Hiking Trail section. As the beautiful views of the big lake became dimes by dozens from high

hills in the woods, the new power mixed with beauty brought me a new sense of the word “WOW!”

Coming down from the north side, we arrived at the shore of the Baptism River. To our right, the four of us gawked at the wall of water crashing down Baptism Falls. From across the far shore to our side of the water, the rushing, gushing cacophony lifted spray from the impact of millions of gallons of water that daily fell down from the heights above us. The cold mist of spray lapped our faces, clothes, and packs. It caused me even more chill inside than the light rain and cold air did. After we climbed the stairs to our right, directly next to the falls, my legs hurt horribly. Wherever Craig and I found stairs to climb on our two-person trips we would always swear at the makers of the Superior Hiking Trail. Those cruel trail designers always seemed to put the trail up the nearest hill where flat ground would have worked. Yet, here we had no choice. Up the stairs we climbed. At the top of those Baptism Falls, I would not complain due to the Wow-factor.

About thirty or forty yards from where the water toppled over the edge, we turned left to cross a bouncy suspension bridge made of some rusty metal. Although quite stoutly built, which impressed our group's engineers, Craig and Bryan, the sign still warned all hikers in groups to cross one at a time. It did not help Mary's anxiety when Bryan or Craig stepped onto the bridge while she and I crossed in our turns, and they began jumping up and down on the metal grate path. As the whole bridge plumped up and down, its bounce freaked Mary out. Not too fun for Mary, we all made it across safely and in good humor

A short distance from the Baptism River, we climbed a narrow path of rock-strewn gully, something the guidebook called The Drain Pipe. I ran out of breath a little, but worse, my legs and hips burned like a steel furnace from the stress. Straight up almost, I remember

we had to climb somewhat hands over head to grab supports to support and balance us. Up the Drain Pipe, and trekking more, we later made another tough climb, up Mount Trudy. By this time, we had only hiked 4.5 miles, and since Craig had the map, he could see we still had more than 1.5 miles to walk to our planned campsite. “Just up ahead, not too far,” Craig kept saying.

“Just around the bend.” Craig said repeatedly, encouraging us. He said those words all the way up the hill, even after we stopped to look at big pile of bear poop in the middle of forest path. It looked at least hours old, and it did not steam, which I took as a good indication. We had contemplated a wolf leaving us that huge bread-loaf scat, but a pile of bear chip seemed more likely. Big as an Egyptian pyramid in size and shape, a bear's presence unnerved me a little.

At the top of Mount Trudy, Craig ran ahead to make sure we could get the campsite before anyone coming from the other way could occupy it. Mary, Bryan and I trudged along, with me and my now wet and heavy, blue backpack weighing down the group from the back end. We walked “just” a little farther, and farther, and farther. Craig's words kept stinging my memory, “Just up ahead, not too far.”

When the three of us stragglers reached Palisade Creek campsite, a lovely little alcove of space in the tall pine and birch trees across the bridge over the creek, we saw Craig sitting next to a stranger. He had come from the other way, I believe. I subsequently called him New Guy. When I walked into the camp, I shouted at Craig who sat on a log bench, “Fuck you and the map you were using!” It probably shocked everyone and also New Guy. I took no notice of my temper but proceeded to calm down as Mary took my tent poles off her pack. I then began to assemble the Eureka tent, the body and rain fly of which I had carried. My 39 pound backpack

by the end of that day's walking felt like the burdens of a hundred stones. Luckily, I did not pack more.

On the trips, Craig always made sure to assemble menus and apportion meals and various ingredients and parts for me to bring. That night, while still daylight, Bryan, Mary and New Guy, and I tried to build and maintain "the little fire that could." Craig boiled water for dinner on his rapidly malfunctioning, two-piece gas trail stove. The menu that night? Noodles in individual Styrofoam packaged cups.

Eating, the slight rain continued as Mary flung chicken parts into a pine tree from her cup of mixed noodles and veggies. She did not care for the chicken, apparently. When I noticed her flinging food around, I asked my friend and tent-mate, "Mary, are you throwing chicken into the trees?"

She smiled wide in her way, and said, "Yeah."



Mary on the trail (1). She introduced me to Craig two years after I graduated from university, six years after I graduated from the same high school as both Mary and Craig. While I vaguely remembered Craig from playing football, I did not remember Mary at all. She has become a good and honest friend the past 24 years.

"Mary, ders barrs in dose woods," Craig said, sounding rather concerned although he tried to disguise his voice in a verbal pantomime of language.

"Oh!" Mary replied, now worried that she just invited the forest animals for supper. Oh, Mary!

That night, as everyone went to their tents, New Guy to his, Craig and Bryan to Craig's blue domed "Hilton of the Forest," and Mary and I to the little gray and green Eureka, the rain started falling harder. Mary had a high-tech sleeping bag she borrowed from her sister. It could have fit into a small purse, and it weighed almost nothing. I knew then that I had obsolete gear. I worried greatly, though, when Mary unzipped her backpack to take out snacks of dried fruit, nuts, jerky, and other yummy things that she brought into the tent. It worried me a lot, but then again, I ate the snacks, too, and we left the bags in the tent vestibule outside the door. I only hoped that if a bear came into the tent that Mary's red flannel pajamas would wave him off or wave the okay for him to sample taste her first while I "ran" for help.

Luckily, through the night no bear came to get Mary's food, and apparently none came into camp to eat rubbery chicken out of the pine tree next to our tent. Mary fell asleep early and after I read more of Thucydides' book, I also dozed off around 9:30 PM. I did sleep well and kept my legs warm by putting my empty pack under my sleeping bag to give me more insulation from the cold ground.

The next morning, we all woke around 7 AM. We ate oatmeal and drank coffee for breakfast. Then came the worst conflict of the whole low adventure walking the entire Superior Hiking Trail over those years.

We packed tents and bags. And although we had a nice running stream of cold water below the campsite, Bryan asked to use my water bottle. He had water from home,

good clean drinking water, and he wanted to save it. I had filtered my two bottles the night before when we arrived. Filtering with an older hand-pump, with charcoal canisters, gummed up from years of use, took about five minutes per bottle. I had one liter bottle of water for the walk, thinking we would find a water source along the way. To my astonishment, Bryan used almost the rest of my drinking water to rinse his breakfast dishes. As soon as he did, he and the others (minus New Guy, of whom I lost track), began the day's walk. I packed my bottle and rushed to keep up with my gang. I had no time to filter more. Unfortunately, we never crossed a water source. Worse, I soon drank the remainder of my bottle early in the walk.

I could have borrowed water while walking from others, but no one had very much to spare. All day, exerting or resting myself, I need a lot of hydration. I took some sips of Mary's, but she had very little. The whole thing should not have bothered me so much. After a bit, I got into a verbal tussle with Bryan, which I should not have done. I liked Bryan, even if I did not know him too well the past ten years since I met Craig.

Bryan and I camped as a group before, and we did much camping later since then. Sometimes we camped in a group on the Superior Hiking Trail and in the Boundary Waters. And even years later, when we separately visited Craig and his family in Washington state, Craig and I camped with Bryan and his two teenage children in the Cascade Mountains. However, that day and with my attitude I almost nixed a friendship with a decent, hard working person. I later regretted my outburst, but the issue of lines and tolerances never had to become an issue again. I also learned the easy way to avoid that situation by always keeping my water bottles full and purified at every opportunity. I also learned that justified anger on my part cannot exist in my world. Such self-righteous outburst does not do me or anyone any good. I do not know what really bothered me on the inside of

my thought and life. Perhaps I have more to write about that elsewhere.

When we trekked that morning, we walked up Round Mountain, not as high as Mount Trudy the previous day, we still had a clear view to the northeast, toward the big lake. I got some good pictures before my camera rewound after only a few frames. I probably hit the rewind button accidentally. Ahead of us, though, we came to another hill and we stopped at an overlook above Bear Lake, a clear and deep looking body of water below us, filled by innumerable streams flowing from the west. On that entire northeast side of the our view, we surveyed a landscape of downed, leafless timbers. These views, although dimes by dozens, each had their own striking individuality. At this view, I remembered how it all looked with low ceiling clouds just above our heads.

I do remember an incident that day, on one of our stops on an overlook. Bryan jumped off the cliff, freaking out Mary, even after she and I realized that Bryan landed a narrow piece of outcropped rock and thin grass a few feet below him. Mary's anxiety shot up several levels. For me, I thought it a clever antic, but I would never jump on a rock outcropping without courage or caution . I saw too much of the trail already to trust a tuft and thin ledge where grass grew.

Around noon, we reached a multiple-group camping area, a large patch of dirt under a thin growth of trees, at the place called Penn Creek Campsite. After Bryan and Craig set up their tent, the two of them walked back to the small, deep, clear lake we passed but this time they carried reassembled fishing rods. In camp, Mary took a nap in our tent and I read more of Thucydides. I also cut up the plentiful firewood left by previous occupants. Of course, I made coffee over a little fire in the rock-lined pit. Meanwhile, when Bryan and Craig fished, I watched over the dehydrated venison stew in a steel pot where Craig had let it soak in some water to re-hydrate. Before

the trip Craig spent hours making the mix at home, cutting, drying, etc. all the vegetables and venison. The pot rested, somewhat precariously, on a split log shelf wedged between two trees. Knowing my usual luck and clutziness, I remained far away from the pot. I had one job: Make sure no critters got into it.

After a stew dinner boiled on the fire, since Craig's stove immolated in fire upon lighting it, we enjoyed a bigger fire over which we made a pot of coffee. At 7:10 PM, I wrote in my trail journal, "After raining hard last night, a muddy campsite last night and this morning, and cloudy, chilly drizzle all day, the sun just popped out. Here comes the Sun!"

The evening wound down. The others most likely thought of their loved ones at home. Craig had his wife, Jen, and his daughter, Anya. Bryan, a wife, Tanya, and two children, Blake and Alyssa. Mary had her son, Jimmy. I thought of my girlfriend, Looey, my cat Bettee, and our dog, Nacho. I thought of the value I had in that. Two years into that relationship with Looey, I missed my kookey sense of family every time I camped.

In the tent, Mary and I talked and ate more snacks she brought back into the tent. Like good friends of ten years standing, we always enjoyed our own company. While she snuggled in her high-tech sleeping bag, I read some more ancient Greek history. I never felt old on the trail, but at age 35, life's history of my future looked entirely positive and longer. Then, we heard it, and all of it became a question mark in my head. We heard the sound of something huge scuffing hard at a tree, loudly, and not very far away. It definitely sounded sharp, eerie and large. "It could be a deer, rubbing its horns on the tree," Mary said, looking a little startled in those large green eyes.

"Ah, yeah, but it could be a bear rubbing its back, too," I replied.

"Oh?" Mary replied.

With food in the tent, NEVER A GOOD IDEA AFTER THAT TRIP, we could only offer tasty morsels to the fierce beasts of the forest, moose or bear, or Big Foot. We heard the noise, but no roar, no murmur. Nothing other than the scraping and scuffing of a tree. Resigned to our fate, we ate more snacks. We never discovered the source of that very, very loud and disturbing noise. Something, on the other hand, watched over the camp that night.

The next morning, following breakfast of jelly-filled snack bars, we stood around drinking coffee. One by one, we each took turns walking down the side trail to the open-air, fiberglass latrine over a shallow pit. At the creek, drinking coffee, the others could see the head of the person sitting, looking embarrassed, and only wanting the natural privacy which brush and branches from downed trees could not provide.

We encountered no problems walking out, or getting back to the shuttle car. After taking time to shop in Two Harbors, Mary and I drove home to Wisconsin. She dropped me off at my parent's farm, with my parents happy to see her again. The trip complete, at home in Amery at Looey's house, and future camping trips to come, these low adventures continued to tell me more about the nature of nature and the nature of human relationships than I ever realized before starting to walk the Superior Hiking Trail. I concluded that I wanted to trek some more. Craig and I definitely would.



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Alone at the End of Time
By Pi Kielty

Alex woke up Sunday morning, the last Sunday before Christmas. He felt better than he had in several days, as his throat had cleared and his head felt not so heavy.

"One hundred degrees," his mother told his father, as she sat on the bed side. "What do you think?"

"How do you feel, sport?" his father asked.

"Warm," Alex replied.

"I think he should stay home this morning. Rest up today, sport, because tomorrow you go back to school."

"You only have to go three days this week. Christmas break starts on Thursday," Alex's mother told him. "What about church?"

"I think you're old enough to watch yourself for a couple hours, Alex. I have to usher today and your mom has a meeting after Mass," the father said. "You'll be okay?"

"I guess so," Alex said. His black hair, short and tussled, had the sweaty sick look after staying in bed for the past four days. The red nose from the constant running and drappiness made it look like that reindeer on the Christmas television special.

"All right then. You know the drill. Do NOT answer the door. Let no strangers in. You can watch some television, but it had better be something you don't like since your too sick for church. We'll be home after your mother's meeting with the other church ladies. Let's go," the father said

Alex's mother kissed him on the forehead. "Bye. I'll make brunch when we get back."

Out in the family room after they left, Alex turned on the television by the knob, wishing his parents had got one of those new remote control television sets like Peter's family. He crawled into his cocoon of blankets on the couch, realizing that he did not like the program. He got up again, slowly, and changed the channel to a movie to the fourth, independent, and last channel in the market. He had never before seen the movie. Before the end of the movie, Alex heard his dad's Mustang pull into the driveway. He woke from a small nap, which somehow finally broke his fever.

After a Sunday morning brunch at the kitchen table, Alex and his father watched a football game. Their team won! But Alex's father missed the fourth quarter, napping out in his reclining chair with his half-finished whiskey and soda on the end table next to him. For supper, Alex's mother made a Sunday feast of pot roast and gravy, and potatoes and carrots, with fresh bread, which the family ate at the dining room table, straddling between the living room and kitchen.

"I thought Father's sermon rather weird today," Alex's father said to his mother.

"It was sort of odd, wasn't it," she replied.

"What did he say, Dad?" Alex asked.

"Nothing ten year old boys need to hear," his father replied.

"Oh," Alex said, putting his eyes down to the empty plate in front of him.

"How do you feel tonight, son?" the father asked.

"Oh, I feel better. A lot better!"

"You're going to school tomorrow," his father said.

The next day, Alex had to bring a note with him to school. His mother wrote on it, "Please excuse Alex for missing school Thursday and Friday. He was sick." On the school bus, with the few other kids who got on early at his stop, his friend, Peter, asked him, "What happened to you, Alex? You missed school Thursday and Friday." Alex told Pete how he had a sore throat and fever and about the icky medicine the doctor gave him, and how he almost died a million times.

"At least you missed church, too, but I saw your parents there. Your dad and mine were ushers."

"Weren't you alter boy, Pete?"

"Yeah. Same old stuff. Ringing the bell, holding the plate, wiping the wine cup. The priest said some weird things, though."

"Yeah, he did," said Karah, Alex's nemesis friend, as she hung her head over the back of the seat in front of Pete and Alex. Karah's red curly hair came out from under her pink knitted hat, and her big blue eyes, moist and almost teary, would make any ten year old boy

sick to his stomach with feelings he would not understand.

“My mom and dad talked about it last night, but they wouldn't tell me what he said,” Alex explained. “What did he say?”

“It was weird, about some woman, or harlot, called Annie Christ,” Peter said, “and some numbering thing, sixty-six, and how the moon turns to blood, and crap, when the world ends.”

“World ends?” Alex said. He felt a warm sensation inside, as though his fever returned. But this time, he felt a little queasy in the stomach. “Why would the world end?”

“Yeah,” said Karah, “Father Stanley said the world will end.”

“When?” Alex asked. His eyes looked big, and afraid, like when kids do not understand the madness of the world.

“Some tributor thing. It comes when a new 'yeara' arrives and love goes out of the world,” Peter tried to explain. “Or so Father Stanley said.”

“New year?” Alex said, mostly to himself. His best friend, Peter, and his nemesis friend, Karah, seemed rather less than concerned about any impending end of the world anytime soon.

“Wasn't it a great game yesterday, Alex? Did you watch it?” Peter asked, pulling up his blue and red stocking cap, with the big red string-fringe ball on the crown, after it almost slid down and covered his brown eyebrows.

“Yeah,” Alex said, as though reluctant to talk about how he had a big problem with the world ending. Karah and Peter did not seem worried, though.

“Why would the world end?” Alex wondered. Then, he said to himself, “Oh, my gosh! I missed church yesterday! They went! What will happen to me! What did Father Stanley say?”

By this time, after several stops, the bus filled and became noisy, with throwing paper and shouting kids swirling the air of the very cold, yellow bus to school. The windows now had moisture and frost on the inside, as forty kids expelled their warmth through breathing. Amid the tumult, Alex said a prayer, an “Our Father” and then two “Hail Mary's.” He added his own plea.

“Please, God. I missed church and I don't understand. I don't want to die when the world ends. I promise, I'll be a better boy. Please, don't let the world end and I'll not never want to go to church again.”

After school that Monday, Alex's mother picked him up in front of the school building in her little blue Bug. All day long, Alex had sat morosely at his desk, trying to pay attention but wondering about why the other kids who went to his church could act so nonchalantly.

“How was school today, honey?” his mother asked.

“All right,” he replied.

“What's wrong? Still don't feel good?”

“I guess.”

“I'm making your favorite for supper tonight!”

Alex made no response, as he looked down where he tucked his snow pants into black rubber and canvass boots.

“I'm made spaghetti for you. Doesn't that sound good?”

“I suppose.”

“Just think, two more days of school, then Christmas vacation. We're going to Grammys for Christmas Eve Friday. We'll stay over night and Christmas morning, Santa will leave you presents under the tree. You're cousins will be there and everything.”

“When will we come home?”

“Well, you have to be altar boy Sunday.”

“Will we go to Church Friday, too?”

“Yes, we'll go to Grammie' church for midnight Mass.”

“But, we'll be back so I can be altar boy Sunday?”

“Ah-huh, we'll drive home Saturday. Does that sound good?”

“Okay.”

The short school week passed slowly. The Christmas concert on Wednesday, the last day before the winter break, went uneventfully for Alex, singing with his classmates. All week, Alex had kept thinking about the end of the world.

As planned, Alex and his parent's drove home the evening of Christmas Day. The next morning, Alex and his father went to regular

Mass. Alex's mother stayed home with a huge headache from the Christmas weekend revelry. His dad dressed in some of his Sunday best clothes, a gray sweater, black slacks and shoes, and a black overcoat with fur-lined collar. Alex stood with the other boy, both dressed in vestments, on the altar platform on either side of the priest. After the Mass, after the boys took off their white shrouds in the back entryway of the church, Alex asked Father Stanley his question, while the priest put on his overcoat to get to the next city an hour away for the playoff game on television.

"Father Stanley, may I ask you a question?" Alex started.

"You already have by asking me if you can ask a question, Alex," Father Stanley joked in dialog worthy of Plato and Socrates.

"Oh, well I have a second question then, Father."

"Yes, Alex. Ask away." The elderly priest put on his black fur hat, one with a red fleck of feather in the band.

"What does it mean in the Bible about the end of the world?"

"Well, like I said last week, Alex. The Bible says in the book the Apocalypse of St. John that the world will end. But for the saved, it has a new beginning."

"Who's saved? And how does it end?" Alex implored.

"Those who believe in God." Father Stanley answered as he tucked his scarf inside the neck of his coat.

"That's it?"

"The book of the Apocalypse, also called the Book of Revelation, says a lot of things, but like I said last week, Alex, it says a lot of non-sensical things that confuse more than clarify. Its God's mystery to keep the logic to himself, men and young boys guessing, and the dead as the only ones with exact knowledge of his nature."

"Yeah, but. . ." Alex started.

"Such heavy questions from one so young, Alex. Just remember what I said last week about it. . . ."

Before Father Stanley finished his thought, his driver came through the back door of the church. "Ready, Father?"

"Yes," the priest said. "Now, run along and play and your friends, Alex." With that, Father Stanley walked out the door to the church car.

Alex stood dumbfounded. He said to himself, alone, as he watched the car pull away, "But what did you say last week?"

Alex walked outside with his head lowered, looking toward the ground. He avoided playing with his friends in the snow outside the small parish in the countryside. He walked over to his own father talking to the other men. At home after church, and following the usual family brunch, Alex quietly took the big family Holy Bible off the bookshelf. Without his parents seeing him, he brought it to his room. Blowing and wiping the dust off the top of it, he thumbed through it. First, he read some of the hand-written names and dates of various family and their events. He saw the entry of his own brother's name, born and deceased on the same date, when Alex had already turned two years old. He knew about it, somehow, even though his parents never, ever discussed it.

Farther into the Bible, he saw a book titled "Maccabees." He read a couple of verses, but then he figured he would find something on the end of the world at the end of that really, really big volume. There, he found what he sought. He had opened it to "The Apocalypse of Saint John." He read it for a bit, as much as he could before supper. He kept the Bible in his room, under his bed all that week, and spent the hours trying to hide his reading from his parents.

He eventually found what he wanted to find, "and the moon turned red as blood. . . ." By the time of New Year's Eve, the book of the Apocalypse, or the Revelation, had made him sick. The talk of fire, something called brimstone, and the dead walking the earth unnerved him with its appalling account of how God would let the world suffer at the hands of its own misguided judgments in sordid ways. Alex did not quite grasp what the city coming down from Heaven meant. At the end of his reading, he even said out loud, "What the heck is a cubit?"

The whole matter of the world ending, what his friends said, what the Holy Bible said, made him feel so sick he vomited on the morning of New Year's Eve. "Not feeling well, honey?" His mother asked him, as he came out of the bathroom. "You've been spending an awful lot of time in your room the past couple days."

"Yeah, I'm okay. I just had a little upset stomach."

"Will you be okay by yourself tonight for a little while?"

"What?" Alex replied to his mother.

“Your father and I have some visiting to do tonight. We both talked and we think you're a big enough boy to stay home at night by yourself. Remember the rules. We'll only be gone a couple of hours, and we'll be home around midnight. Is that okay?” Before she even finished, Alex's mother had already put her glass to her mouth.

Alex did not know what to say, so he said, “Okay,” but without enthusiasm.

After his parents left, Alex watched the special movie night for New Year's Eve on the independent channel. The black and white “King Kong” showed up just as black and white on the color television. He started to watch short episodes of “Flash Gordon,” but his mood became more dour. He turned off the television to go sit in his room. Through the house well insulated and shut up for the cold winter outside, he heard the faint noise of the fire siren far downtown. Turning to the window, he saw the flames, big flames, with an orange glow above them. It outlined and illuminated with its light all the houses on the block. It looked close, but far or away. In the sky he looked up. The moon low on the horizon in the direction of the flames had turned to the color of red blood.

“The new year! No, no, no!” Alex started to cry out loud, and to cry tears. The thoughts raced around the rat track in his head. “NO! Why God! Why! Please don't let it end!” He said, blubbing. “I promise God! I promise! I will be a good boy! Just don't let it end this way.” The crying, the strain, and the dry heaving and vomiting motion—in fact, the Apocalypse—put Alex forcefully on to his knees. He prayed more, “Please, God! No! I will do anything! Just please, don't let it end!” He crawled to the couch. Then, he passed out.

Later, Alex awoke to his mother shaking him, “Alex, Alex.”

“Mom?”

“Happy New Year, honey,” she said, giving him an alcohol-smelling kiss on his forehead.

Alex said nothing. “Your father dropped me off early. The guys at the party went down to see if they could help at the tire factory.”

“Tire factory?”

“Yeah, the tire factory. Didn't you see it on the news? The tire factory's burning down. Its glowing and lights up the whole city. It was like daylight on the other side of town. Five fire departments called in. Bad news for the town, though. The news says it might end up a total loss. Thick clouds of smoke are all over. It smells awful outside. A lot of people work there. Lucky your dad doesn't.”

“Fire? Smoke?” It took a while for Alex to connect it all. He got up off the couch and looked out the window. The glow. . . it did look awfully bright. The moon had arced up in the sky. It looked more orange up there in the billows of the smoke, or at least less red, he thought.

In the bathroom, Alex brushed his teeth. He felt drained, tired. When he spit and rinsed his mouth, he looked into the mirror. He spoke low so his mother could not hear him outside the bathroom door. “God, what does my life mean anyway? What does it all mean?”





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