

THROUGH . *A Wandering Mind in a Not Normal Time*

MY PANDEMIC JOURNALS — (SAMPLE SET K)

dave buckhout

From March 18 - July 4, 2020, I kept two running journals documenting the initial wave of the C19 pandemic. What started as tense topical rants and past-present weave-togethers spun out through the vacuum of those early days, evolved into deep-dive cross-examinations of myself, my home country, and humanity. Throwing my lived experience and those I was in contact with into a thought-blender overflowing with daily headlines, scientific articles, and as much historical

background as I could lay my hands on, I began to hone in on definitive themes to go with each day. There was much redundancy, the days and themes often recursive and repetitive. But, those were often redundant, often recursive, repetitive days. That said, there was plenty of unique mulling too. For this was all new and it was blowing the doors off all that I did know. As if for the first time, I could see just how interconnected all things were. I saw with clear eyes what the pandemic was laying bare in our national lives, how an epic crisis and the tidal weather of America's lurching response to it was dialing into sharp relief just how f-d up our "normal" had really been. It was clear there was much work to do. It was also crystal clear that what I was documenting was a pivot-point instant, a moment that was historical just as soon as it hit the page. Entries that start off wandering about the whirling immediacy of the moment widen in aperture and coalesce into a set of daily rallying cries for how we push through.

What follows is a select set from the 70+ entries that make up the entire collection, pieces that amble about the disorientation of the moment, the roaring lack of cohesion, the individual acts of compassion and bravery, and the historical thunder that snapped into focus all those small clips of joy hiding in plain view. I don't know that I found or provided much in the way of answers to the questions posed in the course of writing these entries. But then, concrete answers seemed less the point, less the charge, than documenting an extraordinary moment while trying to keep my head and move towards a better version of myself.

Concussed . March 25, 2020

It struck me that this was the first time in my entire life when I could look out into the world around me, my immediate plain and far off vistas, and not with complete confidence count out the darker scenarios from materializing. I did not grow up in a war-torn country or a remote poor country. I knew nothing of places where *anything* can happen. I could hardly conjure up what a coup attempt must be like, of what guerrilla style battles in the streets or ethnic cleansing directed by those in charge, of what that must be like. What was it like to live through a complete salt-in-water dissolve of political institutions, a wipe-out outbreak of disease catalyzing a spiral breakdown of society? I never had any reason to war game out such doom-and-gloom scenarios in my corner of the world, in these United States. Nuclear armageddon? Sure. I was of a vintage to have known that as a foreground possibility. But even that had rendered itself remote to my still-gelling brain, something Americans had (it seemed) just learned to live with—like

commuter smog, gender roles, old racist uncles. But I knew nothing of societal dislocation that could pull apart the fabric of nations, cultures. And to be sure, all of that was highly improbable now. We would more than likely muddle through. *But that it was possible. That it could not be ruled out, completely.*

This was all unspooling across my brain waves in the wake of days having rained down like a flurry of blows. Ah, that purple flash disorientation before coming-to, the hazy ring-light drift back into consciousness. Ya, I know that product line of disorientation well, had suffered more concussions than I (or my poor brain) care to remember: collisions in sports with opposing players and at least two thrown baseballs, bike accidents (as in many), having once been kicked in the head (for real). Any long-term worry about CTE seemed remote. But I was no stranger to having your "bell rung," that warrior wave-away descriptor football announcers very quietly dropped from their on-air lexicon a few years back . . . *How many fingers am I holding up? You're fine, Buckhout. Now get back out there!*

And yet a familiarity with head trauma, if minor, provided me nothing to go on this go-round. This was all new: a purple flash of circumstances. The roar of events had been the dealer of blows. I went a good deal of March 25, 2020, not even sure what day of the week it was. The head-smacking wash over of so many pang-pained days, one on another on another on . . . serving up a disorientation foreign as to origin, but all too recognizable in its "bell ringing."

Wednesday. It was a Wednesday. I had to look it up. So fluid the moment, rushing in with dam-break speed, the circumstances and events fantastical but for their exceptional reality, their blowing away of the boundaries of predictable existence. Wednesday, usually a day that would find me swimming at the YMCA. Closed for two weeks now, that had been the first realization in

my own routine that Wuhan and Italy were coming, that they were here, a fellow Y member having tested positive for C19 on March 11. I had been at the Y on March 11: a Wednesday. It was shut down the next day when the positive test became known. It was real, the day it had been declared: *a fucking pandemic*.

My bleary-eyed stumble about days (staying up too late, poor sleep, too many bourbons). It had me wandering about that Wednesday, which might as well have been Monday, or Friday, or a day without a label but only the grey dawn to gloam-of-dusk progression of forces larger than we vulnerable little life forms, backstopped as it all was by the choral improvisation of songbirds moving on with their Spring. They went about their way as if just another Spring day demanding that full-throated songs be sung. This, as all of humanity settled in for a siege.

I was not able to shake the blur that day, the mental and physical haze like a floater but in both eyes. Stepping through the progression of a concussion: the purple flash instant (let's call it March 11), stunned in the immediate aftershock, the actual physical shock, the concussed soup of thoughts, groggy, that damned unshakeable blur and low brain ache originating from somewhere deep-lobed. Grey matter settles slowly after being smashed about: that most sensitive of organs, the cloak-over shroud slowly dissipating and angling down before coming to rest within a low background hum. Ya, I knew what a concussion felt like. This felt like that.

And that, at least in part because of this: *that anything could happen*, that for the very first time in my entire life nothing was off the table.

The resulting measures will attempt to sustain workers and businesses in place as a vast swath of the American economy shuts down under shelter-in-place and quarantine orders, the hope that the economy can rebound quickly once the pandemic ends . . .

This national concussion, puzzling over its long-term effects. Some piece of damage must be sustained, a lump of dead damaged brain tissue forever dormant. This, the out-of-the-blue eye-searing hum, the momentary vertigo and confusion, that telltale dazed look: "where . . . am I?" This would be all the scar we would need by which to remember all the fun we'd had during our pandemic year. That deep-lobed ache suddenly beginning to swell. Another nameless day picking up where the last had imperceptibly left off. . . .

Likely, no. *But that it was possible.*



I, Killer . April 24, 2020

Who do we as a society feel is deserving of an economic bailout? Small businesses are left to wonder as they struggle to hold on . . . Wearing a mask is mainly a tactic for protecting your community, not just yourself . . . Now that experts posit the virus having arrived earlier than anyone originally thought, many Americans are asking: "Did I have it?"

The head-smack realization that you could be an asymptomatic carrier, unknowing spreader of a voracious lung-smothering virus. That you could have been a walking weapon, C19 on you—*in you*—for a month or more, and had no idea, no symptoms, feeling just fine. That is a sick twisted killer, if I can personify an indifferent novel germ. So cunning, using our sociable nature against us, script-flipping strength into weakness in using our desire for close proximity and instinctual gathering and our fluent AI talent for inaccurately gauging risk—using all of this against us. We,

against ourselves . . . which did not sound far-fetched. Humans work against other humans in the competition for resources, wealth, stature, power, authority, each and every bloody day. But this was different. The simple acts of talking, touching, hugging, breathing, turned on us, turning us on each other, biologically. Maybe it's just as well. We had been turning on each other tribally for millennia now. How could we be surprised that a cold efficient killer had simply jumped on the bandwagon? It is just an increment or two more cold, a touch more efficient way to thin the human herd; but for individuals stepping up, to mitigate for the sake of others not yourself.

Asymptomatic. That morning, I had wandered through other ways in which I could have been an anonymous killer. I mean, a virus turning us into unsuspecting unknowing reapers is some cold shit, a gold standard (if a rusted out shot-through gilding). But just knowing that I could have been spreading the disease, could have been killing others I do not know and will never properly meet; going about my way, feeling fine. Likely, no. Possible, yes. . . . But, how else had I flat-lined instants of human interaction across this life? How had I murdered moments, floated in-and-out of scenes as a simmering indifferent killer of moods, "good days," or positive vibes? How often had my impatience, my short-fuse remarks thrown out as off-handed alkaline barbs—shitty little word grenades—gone on to ruin a person's mood, their day, a general outlook for one or many? I could not classify myself as a super-spreader of such things, but on occasion I had torn off the mask of decency, let lapse the extension of general dignity to my fellow human, and indulged in the sugar-fat high of selfish venting. I had spread *that* disease, viral vectors of negativity. How often had a middle-finger fury tossed out in a traffic altercation dragged down an already crappy moment to an even more retrograde one, an even shittier "worse"?

It is a trait I had worked hard to wrangle across my years: a public temper so ultimately useless. Unrestrained, it is the sure sign of a petty ego; and if only because it is so easy. It requires no work to be an asshole, only that momentary lapse into the unrestrained shitty-ness of id. . . . I am almost never pushed to that point in a public space anymore, age having snapped such stark and irrelevant spleen-vents into the sharp relief that I am not adding, but detracting—injecting a harmful negativity into the world that only maims. (Those traffic "furies"? Perhaps some work to do there, still.) And yet, there is no doubt in my head: having committed such killer acts across my years, having perpetuated occasional situational murder on those I do not know and would never properly meet. Yes, I have pushed negativity out into the world because I was momentarily inconvenienced, inadvertently (and most often unintentionally) interrupted, denied but a few seconds of unswerving self-absorbed id-fulfillment.

How often had I infected someone's good mood with bad, killed a breathe-easy day? How often had I spread a minor malice, rained all over someone's parade? How often had I been a killer?



Art Never Dies . May 18, 2020

In art, we can find a humbling sort of wisdom. We see themes and ideas repeat over many lifetimes . . . our lives on this earth will always be part of something bigger.

— Sonny Rollins

The pandemic, staggering into month three. I increasingly felt the need to push myself creatively, to stoke the fire within. It may have just been the circumstances, the relative isolation, the lack of the tactile, but those inner embers had blown up into a three-alarm blaze. It was, for sure, rolling out of having recognized the moment for all of its most fucked-up tonnage and historical weight (atonal grating things often found in tandem). It was no new thing, this arms out "get on with it" urging of self. I had had this thought bobbing about the rolling boil of consciousness since I

could recall. A single line journal entry from about 15 years ago, having stuck in my head since and available in just such moments, says it plain, true. A chipped exasperated spike, I wrote:

"Create, dammit!

Here, now, the miracle of living so so obvious, infection and mortality out there and spreading. Too close, too close. The seconds ticking away, a hammer-clang immediacy. Here, now. And I had damned well do something meaningful with it . . . *Get on with it!*

The tone was set in the first paragraph of that day's entry, "Every day: create. Every day: try something in the moment." The heightened sense of the instant was revealing nooks and niches that were always there, but had fallen outside the normal light of day, the ability to see it clearly from within the normal thrum and rush of *before times'* busy-ness. But this, now, the heightened sense aiming flashlights into dark corners, the unknown reservoirs of things needing attention, of national possibility unrealized. All of it: anxious, eager. There was the gnawing sense that it was right there in front of my face, in front of our national eyes, things neglected, things having not lived up to their promise: my creative output, my nation asleep at the wheel. This required urgent action, things long shoved into recesses for their seeming incurability, the everyday headache they would bring, the crude reveal of who we actually were as a people, as humans. We were not living up to our potential. I was not living up to my potential. This here and now was a time for art, for creative light to flood in and step up. Its tried-true ability / utility to shine light into corners, to illuminate in a way that allows a side entrance into difficult subject matter—personal, national—showing where and how light can enter, reveal, cleanse, remake.

Of course creativity and art could do this. It would make the most of this moment that it could. It already was. We could see the lid gurgling atop a nation locked down, locked up, bored, fed up. The creative use of time and talent underwritten by effort and ingenuity. A guy created an amazing playground for his kids out of hardwood lying about his property, having used nothing but a chainsaw. Photographers criss-crossing the country: four wheels, tents, recording the isolation, the beauty within it and just at its periphery. Musical groups recording in separation, creating the unity and synch of song after-the-fact with post-production software. My own band, our weekly practice night a rarely missed ritual—its moon-howl therapy, its recharging of the bone-bag batteries having just entered its twenty-second year—blown up. But, how we quickly sub'd in weekly video hangouts (something not even fathomable to those isolated in 1918). And this, followed by our own ambitious recording project: one member at a time, one track at a time, record and upload the digital master, hand it off to the next, and then the next, until the song is finished. . . . Art is the ultimate survivor. It has survived the purges and partisans, the puritans and executioners, the small, the petty, and all those come-and-go egos humanity must endure and has long endured. Art has survived wars, plagues, and fanatics, the church and the putsch. It has outlived them all. Art will never die.

But at that moment, there was legitimate worry about so much art in the moment dying. All of the shuttered venues: all of the live music, comedy / improv troupes, dance, theater; all of the movie theatres, the chains and independents; all of the symphonies and ensembles and operas and choirs; all of the museums large, small, in-between. It was a cultural wipe-out in the making, the hit landing hard on ventures whose profit is not measured in massive fortunes, but the flush of creating a rich creative world worth living in. There are the brain numb down through history,

and to this day, that would dismiss the arts as "not real work." And this, as they listen to music on their way to work, watch Netflix at the end of their days of work, consuming art as if another bag of chips. It has always been so. And yet, what is the first thing marauding conquering hordes have done throughout history? Destroy the culture of the vanquished. Destroy the heart of the vanquished by appropriating their culture. Kill culture and you kill the soul of a people. In step (if in a less dramatic slow-drip frame), allow the die-off of culture and you are but a pallbearer for the soul of society. What's the point if the only point is money-making and bill paying? Art is the sun that clears out the grey. It is the soft halide glow of the moon in the bone-dense dark. It is the light we seek, if not fully recognizing that fact. It is as indispensable as clean water, a roof over your head. It is the heartbeat of any nation professing to own greatness.

In the low depths of the Great Depression, the FDR administration rolled out the massive Works Progress Administration. A New Deal shovel-ready program designed to shock life back into private enterprise having flatlined, to curb the mass unemployment and suffering (something here again, too close, too close), the WPA included a sub-project: Federal Project One. "Federal One" was a direct work relief program that provided not only a stage and a voice, but a living for unemployed musicians, writers, painters, and actors. It stands, still, as the most direct significant institutional support the American government (voice of *We, The People*) has ever considered. Many decried the expense then. "Get a real job," many said. And then they went right out to attend one of the program's thousands of musical and theatrical performances staged in cities, suburbs, and rural blink-and-miss-it towns across the country; they went right out and bought one of the 48 state or hundreds of other territorial, city, and regional American Guide tour books, mostly hard-bound guides (some 300+ pages in length including fold-out auto-tour maps) that

flowed out of the prodigious Federal Writers' Project; they went right on without missing a beat to fix pride to the countless civic and post-office wall murals laboriously painted by artists with no other outlet for the skill-set that defined them as individuals. At a bucket-drop 1% of the WPA's average annual budget, the vast scope of creative output over its eight years in existence places Federal One atop, if not alone on top of the most cost-effective government programs in American history. . . . If we cared about the state of our national soul, we must care about art. Would we initiate a "Federal One 2020?" Could we? . . . *Get a real job. Not real work.*

Some cultivate their innate abilities to become carpenters or machinists. Some have all the skills required to find steady work in human resources or managing mid-sized companies that makes parts for cars, airplanes, shipping. Some have the frame of build and will to be shrimpers or to farm peanuts. Friends of mine have run restaurants, a few master chefs sprinkled in. In my family alone there are marketers and project managers, electricians and childcare professionals, account executives, an actual executive, engineers and computer scientists (including at least one actual "rocket scientist"), those having served in clerical roles, those working retail, teachers and counselors, a used car buyer, a boiler technician, a lawyer, a postman. A grandfather and two of my cousins gave the title "professional musician" a shot. They were both successful, though their careers in the arts were short-lived, all moving on to "more steady" work. For they found, as so many do, that in step with being a professional athlete, being a professional in the arts is a hard gig. There is little in place to ease the down-turn of fortunes in professions deemed, somehow, "not real work." And though the pandemic had made clear that we do not, and may not be able to live without the output of creative artists, still, the not infrequent claim: "get a real job." It is a fatally uninformed view most often falling out of those who have never taken such a risk, have

no idea of the raw financial exposure and monastic fortitude required to take such a leap, opting instead to throw weak-kneed shade at those who do and fail. It seems more of jealousy than a realistic op-ed on "legitimate" work, a leveling tactic by those unable and unwilling to understand what makes fellow citizens who happen to be *artists* tick.

Some have all the innate skills to take up plumbing or programming. Others are artists. And the irony of the mentioned slam is that to be a pro athlete or a professional in the arts, you have to dedicate yourself with near, if not outright obsessive zeal. You have to work harder and longer and for less than the average project manager or general contractor, if only because we are a country that—*still*—considers such professionalism to be novelty work. Situations and innate skills honed over time deliver ways to make a living. Some have HVAC repair. Some have a plumb account services job or a position in forestry / natural resource management available to them. Some have art. And being forced to wait tables, work retail, deliver packages, is sidebar to the core skills of a person whose product is creativity. No thinking person would say that a hard-working dedicated sous chef should be a full-time grocery store shelf stocker / part-time sous chef. Yet that was precisely the average working artist's lot in America, 2020.

And then, this thing gut-punching the professional creative arts harder than any other industry save maybe travel, restaurant services, event planners / rentals. Art would survive, but many careers in the arts might not . . . *Would we? Could we?* . . . Limping on into the third month of this mess, the virus calling the shots, there was that one thing gurgling up as painfully clear: as with the application of craft in professional sport, we could not do without the application of skill in music, theatre, art. Harry Hopkins, the director of the WPA (and by extension executive director of Federal One) said it true: "artists have to eat too."

The Actors Fund had picked up its megaphone and was reminding us all not to forget the performing arts. The rallying cry went up from the National Association of Independent Venues, asking: would we "Save Our Stages"? Would the heightened sense of a stricken moment, one having already come wrapped inside a fraught fractured real, the nation toying absent-mindedly with autocratic solutions to democratic problems, could we see through all of the quaking and clack-clacketing-along to reframe what seemed, now, to be for all times obvious: That we cannot let art die. That we are soul dead without art. That letting the livelihoods of project managers and cabinetmakers and distillers and civil engineers and warehouse workers and all the thousands on thousands of other ways to work evaporate for lack of logistical and organizational focus, that demanding the work of politics does something beyond the sugar rush of its performative power mirage trappings (and how about starting with giving their all towards containing the fucking virus, *let's never lose sight of that fact*) . . . that for all of these thousands and thousands of ways to work, we could, we should, add creative artists to that immense varied list and pledge to do what we must as individuals—as a nation, a culture—to save as many jobs in the creative arts as was humanly possible? We cannot know the all of what makes fellow citizens tick. But we can support their efforts to add to the world in pursuing their craft. That was where we were by mid-May. And creative artists were in the process of losing their careers, if not their shirts, as well.

I had no immediate logistical, political, or economic solutions. Few did. But I was every day mourning for those things of the immense varied national soul that we might lose along with all the actual souls we were losing every day. Here was the raw nerve reveal that ran through that day's entry. All I had was the ability to push myself—a long-aspiring, occasionally financially successful creative artist—to work harder than before: *to get to it*. What did I have to lose? Why

would I stick to a more conservative predictable path? This thing, staggering into month three, having recognized the trembling totality of this instant, why—*how*—could I hold back?

Go big. Create. Think beyond what I might have thought possible, what "normal times" had consumed in money-making, bill paying, the drone-on routine busy-ness of our unrelenting modern schedules. Go for it now. *Now*. Every morning, document this bizarre alternate world we had found ourselves in. Just get it down, capture the emotional *now*. I could come back to it later, pull out the central drift, try to make sense of it. In light of art withering all around us, here was my answer: See to your art. Document this moment. Do it with a creative slant. Rip quotes from headlines, dig out the themes hiding within. Be opinionated. "Stick to your guns," I thought. But do so while making sure it was all lit from beneath by compassionate common sense . . . *Don't forget to be nice*. . . . There was more than one way to interpret common sense in the moment, but there could be no mistaking the ultimate inevitable need to go about self-preservation with compassion and selfless respect, to go about both until it hurt, to look out for others as we all made our way through.

So immense. So much unknown. Beyond platitudes and prognostication and the sudden abundance of small frail egos. I would have to check mine at the door . . . Could I? I could push something meaningful into the world . . . Would I? I could and would attempt to do so through art. Every day: create art. Every day: work at compassion. And given the heightened sense of all things right then, the totality of it all, I felt not just released to do so in a way that the busy-ness of *before times* had invariably interrupted, I felt compelled to do so. All things that once stood in the way had fallen away. There was no time to lose. Reshape and remake my own existence around a driven creative pace stoked by the warmth of compassion, of caring, of giving a shit. It

was a way to live. And in the midst of all the terrible tragic weirdness, that thought, that goal, settled my concussed mind. *Art will never die.* Make sure that this was so. Attend to your art.

Movie theatres are largely shut down. Concerts are on hiatus. Broadway has gone dark. The pandemic has turned the world of culture on its head. At the same time, the capacities of art—to soothe, to diagnose, to help make sense of these times—have never been more apparent. — The Atlantic Daily e-newsletter



This Present Sea . June 27, 2020

The reality of this pandemic is that nothing is definitely safe, and nothing will definitely give you a bad case of COVID-19 . . . We almost always exist in grey areas now.

— James Hamblin

A vast ocean of fathomless present. That is how it seemed. That was not a new sensation, but was still a most observable trait. In a row boat, a simple pair of oars, no land in sight. This sea did not seem necessarily angry or forbidding; more tepid, rolling, endless. There was so little motion it made it hard to gauge what was happening, at all. Were we turning a corner? Well, no. One thing was obvious, things were getting worse. But how much worse? Was this the end of the "wash back" of Memorial Day weekend? Probably not. Hope wanted this to be so, even as reality wanted to shout: no, no, and not by a long shot. In a boat on a horizonless sea. If only to beat the

fatigue of inaction—*the quarantine blues*—rowing in circles, around and around and . . . rowing in circles preferable to the brain-numbing evaluation of a contour-less void, this grey sea.

And again, there was no immediate and obvious malevolence on which to fixate, just a fucking microbe beyond the ability to size up with the naked eye, but for its watershed effects. And that lack of a discernible enemy, the invisibility, the world as same-seeming as it had ever been to the naked eye; this, though we knew—though we all should have damned well known—that it was not the same, not by a long shot. It was a real we had to sense as much as feel, though we dared not touch it, or breath it in too deep. Suspended in mid-air, an uncertain gravity having rewritten the rules of physics and mortality: the malevolent tick-off statistics, the infected, the irreversible death. Those remained the same, as true as they had ever been.

This sea of the present had spread out beyond all visible horizons. Deal with the virus. Deal with the new normal. Carry on, keeping calm. Row in circles if you must. Continue on. An unknown like anything most of the world had faced in a century. The horrid face of Ebola and SARS and HIV had been limited in scope to those caught in its whirling malevolence. But this was global. A great global unknown . . . *It's a virus we don't know enough about.* . . . And yet, there were those attempting to lay claim, grasping at overarching truths, proclaiming those truths as certainties—these people all the more coming off as people we should not be listening to. A healthy skepticism queried those who claimed to know all. For they, like we, still did not know shit. We would have to row through this non-storming grey in circles, if need be, awhile yet.

All that, even though it seemed more obvious than at any point since I had first put ink to page back on March 18, that though this be a fathomless present, a grey void, we already had the ability to move through—and always did. We just had to scale up, be as big as the void is wide.

Answer the listless roll-along drone of an invisible killer in our midst with constant motion. Move, do so relentlessly towards bigger better versions of our previous selves. To sweep away the ideological sludge that had turned our mechanisms for complex government into some nihilistic cult of ideas. To redress 400+ years of economic and societal privilege having fallen on the backs of the brown and the black and the "other." Restore a galvanizing sense of equitable reward for work, and do this by revoking the hall-of-mirrors distortion that was rewarding wealth above all else. We did not have to agree. To agree was not the point and never was the point. But we did need not devolve on ideological religion in which each side casts the other as arch-angel v. demon. We need not face-plant into a talking-point oblivion, a carnival of chaos capitalizing on the fury of extremes. There was work to do. It was work worth doing.

If this was the beginning of a national reset, a reboot, a retooling (and if it was not, then shame on us), then what now? At present, there was grey sea. A boat. A pair of simple oars. And yet, quite suddenly, here on June 27, that did not seem to me like nothing. We were three months into a state of suspended animation. The world at a glance still seemed very much as it always had. But the world, we knew, had been upended by what we could not see. I was *still* hammering on hope, leaning on the playbill of "better" . . . *Coming soon, if only via Zoom, to a screen near you.*

If this next act was a great remaking, then we would have to straighten our course, and soon. Where were the lines to be drawn? George Washington was a slaveholder. We need not tear down the Washington Monument, but we must deal with the fact that the symbolic father of our country held human beings in bondage. "We hold these truths to be self-evident. That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men." Indeed. How did we forget that? At what

point did we dismiss the act of democratic governing as important? Why did we forget that? "We must historicize more, memorialize less." Statues are not history. Statues are an interpretation of history most often told long after the fact to clear the way for nostalgia. Instead of letting statues prolong half-truths, if not flat false myth, how about we tear down those that symbolize the many having chosen the wrong side of history and reckon with that history, as painful and ugly and vile as that might be? This would all require a thick skin and mettle, at the same time requiring equal doses of civility and modesty—all of those things and more. We would have to widen the aperture, greatly. Did we have it in us as a people? Did I have it in me?

Circles. In circles. This listless, often listing grey void. It had done us one solid, having revealed from its obscure oceanic depths all the foundational cracks, all of the quiet relentless suffering, that all of our modern grasping at greatness was as void as this grey sea was obscure. It had been a mirage of enlightened progress in its best moments, a mockery in its worst. But that we now knew. *That was not nothing.* And that listless present, as lethargic as it seemed, was passing through rays that hinted this tragic mess would not be in vain, that deep systemic bedrock change was possible, and possibly inevitable.

This grey, this present sea might yet reveal sun-soaked horizons in what was next to be. We just had to be willing to see it for its long game. And if that meant I needed to row in circles for some time yet to come, if only to keep up strength / fortitude, then so be it. I still believed with all that I had in this country, this world. It would, it could, seem a relentless slog-through journey yet to go. But there it was, in a spot-lit corner of my brain: *In Union, Strength.*

