

**Only The
Moon
Understands
The Beauty
Of Love**

Thomas Slatin

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TomSlatin.com

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This work depicts actual events in the life of the author as truthfully as recollection permits. While all persons within are actual individuals, names and identifying characteristics have been removed or changed to respect their privacy. These are my memories, from my perspective, and I have tried to represent events as faithfully as possible.

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Dedication

To my wife Amelia, who showed me unconditional love, the likes of which I have never truly known before, and who always believes in me.

I want to express the immense significance you hold in my life and convey my gratitude for having you as a part of it. You have enriched my existence in countless ways, and I cannot fathom a life without you by my side.

The moments we've shared carry great meaning and value. You have been everything to me. Every tear, every laugh, and every embrace. You are an irreplaceable part of my life, and my appreciation for you surpasses what words can express.

Foreword

In 1998, Thomas Slatin embarked on a journey that simply wasn't considered an option before the turn of the twenty-first century. Plenty of people started websites back then, but often only in the hopes for making a quick buck. So, to say Thomas was ahead of her time was an understatement.

As a long-time photographer who'd already been honing her craft for over a decade, she saw an opportunity to share her photography with the World Wide Web. Even more important to Thomas, though, was the opportunity to share her other passion: her writings.

Thomas and I crossed paths casually a couple of years back on Twitter before I went on a long social media hiatus due to various personal issues. Back then, I knew Thomas only as a professional photographer who dabbled in creative journalistic nonfiction. It didn't occur to me that writing was as much a passion of hers as photography.

Reading through a number of her essays, I could tell that she was a specially talented writer who'd been long toiling at the craft. But, she seemed to look backward far too often, something I have done myself on many occasions. I asked myself, what if she were to

project forward how much her already beautiful writing might evolve?

While Thomas dabbled in journalism and even poetry at one time, creative nonfiction is truly her bread and butter. Without a doubt, her writing has always been good; but there's no doubt that she reached new heights with writing "A Little Ghost for the Offering." It remains one of the most beautiful pieces I've ever read.

I come across plenty of outstanding writing every so often, even on online threads as commonplace as a Twitter writer's lift. But, there was a special level of care taken with this piece and the emotions were easily palpable as I read it. After reading it, I made it a point to better know Thomas Slatin. Even though we'd casually known each other for a while, it was very important to me to get to know what made her such a special writer.

As it turned out, my initial impressions of her writing style were proven correct. I'd assumed she'd been influenced by beat writers like Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, authors who influenced my own work over the years. Not only were they influences, but Allen Ginsberg himself personally mentored Thomas! Ginsberg saw legendary writer potential in her from an early age. While I certainly could see the potential now, having a legend like Ginsberg tell her that and personally show her the tricks of his trade is priceless!

Thomas and I began to talk intensely in the year 2020. COVID-19 hit both of our creative efforts very hard. We both dealt with many different issues in our lives and both of us had a lot of things to work through. It turned out that we have almost identical personalities, both of us having the INFJ personality type.

We got along famously within a very short time and became close personal friends. It then became our mutual life purpose to help the other find a crazy high level of success. Thomas helped me to raise my own standards to brand new heights; meanwhile, I made her realize that Allen Ginsberg was correct about her.

I feel honored to have my words serve as the foreword to what I believe is the culmination of blood, sweat, and tears that have often gone mostly unrecognized. While her photography has won awards, and it's truly brilliant to be sure, Thomas' writing is what truly drew me to her. Thomas has the most beautiful soul I've ever met in another human being; not only has she helped me to take my own writing to another level, but also helped me become the best possible person I can be.

It's amazing how life works sometimes, to take two people that feel lost and at a difficult crossroads, and somehow get them standing side-by-side seemingly by completely random chance. Without a doubt, certain things do happen for a reason. But, oftentimes our own

free will leaves us with a choice that we can't possibly appreciate in the moments we're forced to make them.

Fortunately, for Thomas and I, we made the right choice to partner up and make one another stronger. Sometimes, in moments of great weakness, we finally dig into the deepest recesses of our hearts and pull out our very best stuff. It's my greatest honor to be a part of making her work a finished product. You'll get a glimpse into how genius is certainly born, but legends are made through the tireless, painstaking toils of an indomitable spirit.

Writing can take you places that perhaps no other art can. It can help you meet people you couldn't have dreamed of ever meeting before. So, if you take just one thing away from this tremendous tome of wisdom and sense, let it be this: writing is perhaps the hardest profession there is, but just as with anything else, success is there for those who never give up.

–Amelia Phoenix Desertsong

Introduction

After decades of putting it off, I finally relented and published my first book, *The Only Child Of An Atomic Engineer*, which sold more copies than I could have ever possibly predicted or anticipated. Although the book itself was well received and read by many, in the end, it left many readers wanting to know more about my life.

I never thought that my life was interesting enough for a single book, let alone a follow-up publication. My first book in and of itself was an achievement of sorts, though I am resentful of the fact that while my father was portrayed through my writing as a father who wanted nothing but the best for me, he was far from perfect.

My father had a major problem with toxic masculinity, and his ego was dependent on me growing up to be a man, even while knowing full well that I was born as an intersex female.

Subsequent DNA testing, which I took voluntarily when I was a young adult, showed that my DNA was

entirely female. In light of this, my father continued to abuse me my entire life, and tried to force me to live my life as a male. Although I pretended to live this way whenever my father was present, a man is something I never was, and never will be. It wasn't until my father passed away when I was 35 years old that I was truly able to feel free living authentically, as myself.

Modern parlance is overly dependent on the perception of one's gender, which bears little or no correlation to one's genetic or physical sex. In addition, gender is void of any correlation to one's sexual orientation.

To those around me who are shocked to learn the truth of my troubled past, it appears as if I went through a gender transition. In reality, I simply moved from my home state of New York to my forever home in Vermont, and started living and dressing more authentically.

In fact, the greatest of my challenges was legally updating my gender marker and updating all of my official records and paperwork. This stemmed from my birth record originally reading *hermaphrodite*, changed by my father to *male*, and now to *female*.

Yet, I have lived my entire life as a female, though starting around age 11, when my parents sent me to summer camp, I had to present as a male for the first time. A few years later, at age 14, my parents sent me to

boarding school, at which time I was forced to present, again, as a male.

There is an obvious schism in gender, especially in academia and the written word. When someone of male gender writes, it often has the tone of egotism; whereas when someone of female gender writes, it is most often of self-reflection, taking an introspective and personal view of the writer's life and perspective.

The act of writing speaks of immortality, and in the right set of circumstances, one's words may live on long after the author dies. I am not laying claim to be a skilled and prolific writer, as that's subjective, and arguably borderline narcissistic. However, I have documented my life for many years in books of handwritten pages, in hopes that, one day, I might look back on my life and experiences anytime I needed the nostalgia or simply a reminder of how far I have come in life.

Whenever I read through old entries, I am reminded of the enormous adversities and obstacles I overcame. Although the past is never really far, mine is one that I appreciate, though oftentimes there are many parts I would rather forget. In my life, I have seen and experienced a multitude of unforgettable events which are permanently burned into my subconscious, the majority of which I think about at least five to ten minutes out of every day.

I remember the beginnings and the endings of every single important milestone in my life. I remember every high and every low, every triumph and every failure, falling in love, and feeling heartbreak. In fact, I remember all my life; snapshots like scattered photographs on the floor and memories that constantly play in my mind like flashbacks of movie clips from popular 1980's movies.

I still remember being small, and constantly climbing out of my crib, and my father interrupting his work to find something to pacify my attention. I remember battling imaginary dragons with plastic swords in the back yard. I remember all my days at summer camp, but especially the days when my parents would come and get me to send me back to the horrors of boarding school.



When I was a child, I used to worry about rain, and I used to be terrified of lightning. In my younger years, I believed that my entire life would be a total failure if I was not able to figure out a simple math problem in grade school.

But, the most difficult times in my life were when I put my heart and soul into something I was truly

passionate about, only for someone else to be rewarded with the accolades and the acknowledgments that I were truly deserving of for something much less remarkable.

My fire department career, which spanned some two decades, has remained the focal point of my existence. My career taught me responsibility, and of course because I was always on call, it had to be front and center; one can not expect anything less in such a position necessary to public safety.

My motivation for joining the fire department was my father's pressure for me to pursue a career in a male-dominated field. After pressuring me to pursue a career in business, he then suggested that I become a doctor. I instead studied Computer Science and English, eventually changing my college major to Emergency Medicine and was formerly trained as a Firefighter and Paramedic. A few years after being promoted to the rank of Firefighter Paramedic Lieutenant Specialist, I finally decided to leave and focus on my true passions: my writing and photography.

This book contains the highlights of my life experiences; it is a tell-all account of my mortal existence, most of which was derived from my canon of written words, salvaged from my archives, and some material remained previously unreleased until now.

I have been a writer all my life, yet until now, my thoughts and words were all too often dismissed as esoteric ramblings; muttered utterances of a madwoman, whose genius, instead of being revered and admired, was instead shunned and ridiculed.

My writing has centered around my life experiences, my relationships, and my daily fears. In recent years, I have learned that the most important things in life are love, understanding, and compassion. When you truly love someone, everything else seems so unimportant. Regardless of what one loses in life, when we are in love with someone who truly sees and loves us for who we really are, everything else truly is insignificant.

When one loses love, it feels as if one's heart is put on display for all the world to see, along with the remnants of their dreams and life plans tossed into threshers and all torn to pieces.

This lost love is a major contributor to the existence of this book. The title, *Only The Moon Understands The Beauty of Love* is based on the idea of a vibrant and compelling volume of forsaken words and fading memories. In writing this book, I envisioned it as a chronicle that would encapsulate the quintessence of expressions long abandoned by contemporary parlance, and giving them meaning by marrying them to my own experiences.

As I sifted through my journal entries to serve as the foundation for this volume, my mind raced with potential recollections. Perhaps I would indeed include chapters concerning my unrequited love for a girl unaware of the extent of my passions. But I also resolved to delve into the stories of my challenges and victories, aspirations and apprehensions. The opportunities were boundless for this book, and even in the very acquiescence to this project's title, I was invigorated by a newfound sense of purpose.

While making the final touches on this book, I thought back to a question a close friend once asked me, "if I could live my life all over again, would I?" The truth is, I don't know. I have witnessed the best and worst parts of life. I have delivered babies and held the hands of people during the last moments of their lives. I have met the absolute most wonderful and genuine people and have sat face-to-face with murderers.

I have personally witnessed the good, the bad, the fascinating and the mundane, and everything in between. I have experienced brilliance and frustration. If I had to live my life all over again, there is no doubt in my mind that I would have changed *everything*.

My hope is for the story of my life to be told, treasured, and preserved. For this reason, I have decided that with the days still left, I will devote the

remainder of my life to writing, photography, and love. Summer comes for everyone, and I am in the springtime of my life, where the best is still yet to come.

Although I have considered writing a novel, my wheelhouse is not in fiction. If it were, my writing would center around black forests and wolves, with characters all in half-costume, half-awake and half gone-to-seed. When I was younger, I would write in riddles and rhymes, whereas in recent years, I have started writing with old words which are so obscure that people falsely assume that they are simply made-up words. Yet I continue in this way, in the trademark reverent style that is uniquely mine.

I pledged to myself that I would pen this book, gathering those neglected words and elusive memories to immortalize them in ink. And perhaps, with a stroke of fortune, I would have the chance to share my creation with the world.

Of Lovers Lost

To a Lost Love:

I often find myself reluctant to take irreversible actions, apprehensive about leaving your side without beholding your captivating visage. I unknowingly still possessed an old photograph of us together when we were 16. The sight of your eyes brings me immense sorrow, as they serve as a reminder of the path I neglected to follow and the journey I failed to embark upon.

Nevertheless, deep within my thoughts, I envision a moment and place where fate guided us along an alternate trajectory. In this parallel existence, our love story unfolded effortlessly, unimpeded by obstacles or barriers. Maybe it was only within a dream or a distant past life that we experienced pure, unburdened bliss, far removed from the burdens of our present circumstances.

As I reflect on the decisions I've made and their outcomes, I can't help but speculate about the life I might have led if I had accompanied you, my enigmatic angel, along the unpredictable and perilous path we once envisioned. We could have lived a life that now lingers only in the shadows of our recollections – a life

that never materialized but the possibility of which will eternally occupy a haunting space in our hearts.

When the anguish and misfortune of our present reality eventually fade, leaving behind the remnants of what might have been, we are confronted with the realization that our choices define our existence. Every decision we make carries consequences – some we may rue, while others we will treasure. In the end, we must come to terms with the path we've selected and find solace in the understanding that we can still effect change with the time that remains.

Almost.

Almost. The quiet sentinel of uncharted realms, where wishes become like fireflies dancing in the twilight of our yearning, casting a glow upon the silhouettes of our unattained desires. It is a word that lingers, etched upon our hearts like the fading ink of a love letter never sent, a token of the times we dared to dream, but were held back by the gravity of reality.

In the gardens of life, “almost” grows like a vine, winding its way through the tangled branches of our aspirations. It seeks out the light of what could be, while casting shadows upon the blossoms of our achievements. It is in the quiet rustle of leaves, whispering of opportunities missed, and the gentle hum of bees quietly mourning the sweet nectar of potential never tasted.

When “almost” dances upon our tongues, it sings of ephemeral embraces, of sunsets that slipped away before we could share them with the ones we love, and of the unspoken words that gather, like dust, in the corners of our souls. It is a word that cradles the tears of unrequited love and the smiles of a future that never came to be, painting a portrait of dreams suspended in the limbo between longing and surrender.

As we traverse the landscape of our existence, the echoes of “almost” accompany us like a haunting refrain. They remind us of the fragile balance between the steps we took and those that never left a footprint in the sands of time. It is the lingering aroma of a banquet never savored, the faintest glimmer of a horizon never reached, and the unyielding specter of potential that drifts, like a phantom, through the chambers of our hearts.

And in the quiet hours, when we find ourselves adrift in the sea of our memories, we are visited by the wistful ghost of “almost,” the tender harbinger of the unfulfilled. It is then that we come to understand the paradoxical beauty of this bittersweet word, a reminder that even in the midst of our deepest regrets, there lies the promise of dreams yet to be realized, and the ever-lingering hope that one day, “almost” will give way to “finally.”

The Sun And Moon Pirouette In Eternal Harmony

In the grand mosaic of the cosmos, a delicate dance unfolds, as the sun and moon pirouette in eternal harmony. The sun is a luminous beacon, graciously bathing the moon in its radiant glow, asking for nothing in return. This celestial ballet paints the night sky with ethereal hues, a testament to the boundless beauty of nature's embrace.

This poignant union whispers to our very souls, urging us to weave threads of kindness and selflessness into the fabric of our own lives. For in this cosmic tale of light and shadow, we find an inspiring allegory, a call to cherish the delicate balance that breathes life into our relationships and to offer our warmth without seeking recompense.

The cosmic duet of sun and moon also imparts a profound message, a quiet, yet powerful, reminder that we too must embrace the delicate balance between giving and receiving, between the fire of our passions and the cool serenity of our inner peace. In this long-honored celestial love story, we find a mirror that reflects our own existence, reminding us to appreciate the connections that bind us to one another, but also to the earth and to the heavens themselves.

As we gaze upon the night sky, we must remind ourselves that like those great celestial bodies, we too are each unique threads woven into an intricate web of life. We are called upon to live with grace and humility, to dance our own steps, and to extend the warmth of our hearts to others, without expectation of reward or recognition.

I have often given of myself selflessly for decades, in tribute to this cosmic ballet. Through these sacrifices, I have learned many lessons in the power of love, generosity, and selflessness that transcend the boundaries of my own mortal existence. The greatest of these lessons I aim to put in print. My hope is that this hard-won wisdom echoes through the ages, to be as eternal and enduring as the sun and moon themselves.

So, as the sun and moon continue their celestial dance, let us too, take their lead. We must weave our own threads of kindness and compassion into the tapestry of our own lives. Whenever the times are dark and cold, we must allow our hearts to alight with the knowledge that we too, are part of an intricate, eternal mosaic.

Eventually, we must choose to finally step away from the expectations and obligations placed upon us by others. We will know this time well because our soul will scream out to us for it to be so. Eventually, we will all turn to dust, but in the interim, we must recognize and

cherish the infinite beauty of the cosmos from which we are all born.

The Misfit's Triumph

I have experienced life as both a misfit and someone who has received praise, traversing paths which at first seem to be at odds. In those moments when fortune's favor shone upon me, and praise was bestowed, I savored the elixir of achievement and the comforting embrace of validation. Meanwhile, as a pariah, I discovered the fortitude to stand firm in my convictions, an unyielding adaptability, and the courage to remain steadfastly true to my inner essence.

These seemingly discordant episodes have, like the harmonious interplay of light and shadow, refined my ability to empathize with souls navigating the labyrinth of varied circumstances. They have illuminated the path toward personal growth and bestowed upon me priceless jewels of wisdom. With an open heart, I cherish the teachings of these dual experiences, fashioning a more balanced and compassionate perspective.

Through these contrasting experiences, I developed unwavering resolve to remain authentic to my very core. They have helped me develop empathy for people in different situations while also providing me with opportunities for personal growth. I lovingly cradle these lessons, weaving them into the very fabric of my

being, resulting in a more balanced and enlightened personal outlook.

I understand now that life is a continuous journey, and each experience contributes to the person I become. My life experiences pave the way for my personal growth, bestowing upon me invaluable treasures of wisdom. With the clarity that comes from such profound understanding, I recognize the ceaseless nature of our own evolution. I remain an ever-changing masterpiece, a living testament to the transformative power of embracing the duality of my existence.

As I continue on my journey, I realize the importance of finding balance in my life. I have learned to appreciate my unique qualities, even when they don't align with the expectations of others. This has allowed me to develop a stronger sense of self and gain confidence in my own abilities and decisions.

Through my countless interactions with others, I have discovered that everyone has their own set of challenges and victories. This understanding has encouraged me to be more compassionate and supportive to those around me. I recognize that they, too, are on their own unique journeys.

I have also learned that seeking personal growth and self-improvement is a lifelong pursuit. As I evolve, I am better able to adapt to new situations, accept change,

and embrace the unknown. By staying curious and open-minded, I continue to learn from my experiences and those of others, further enriching my life and deepening my understanding of the world.

As I recognize the infinite nature of life's odyssey, I embrace the notion that each encounter shapes us in often yet to be realized ways. Steadfast in my resolve, my evolution continues, ever mindful of the profound truth that not only I am the sum of my experiences, but something more. I am deeply grateful for these convergent experiences, as they continue to influence my journey in the years to come.

It's Been Awhile Since I've Dreamed This Much

Today the sun came up, painted the landscape golden, and brought with it the brilliant light of morning as if Mother Nature herself had taken her paintbrush to create a breathtaking masterpiece. The vibrant hues of pink, lavender, and fiery orange melded together, each shade cascading like silk upon the horizon.

The morning light glistened upon the dew-kissed foliage, and the world seemed to shimmer and sparkle with a newfound energy. Leaves rustled softly, whispering secrets to the wind as they basked in the sun's warm embrace. The once somber hues of the sleeping landscape transformed, as if touched by a fairy's wand. The sun then emerged as a glorious reminder that each day is a gift, filled with the potential for love, laughter, and endless beauty.

Ironically, when I struggle to sleep much for days at a time, it is these times that I dream the most. I understood then that to imprison the very essence of a dream, a yearning, or a passion, within the gilded cage of fear and doubt, is to stifle the very breath of life that would allow it to bloom. To lock away that which we cherish, as if sealing it within a fragile crystal chalice, is

to suffocate the vibrant colors of possibility and potential, painting the world in shades of gray.

Emboldened by this epiphany, I vowed to set free the caged songbird within me, allowing her to soar on the wings of hope and love, embracing the boundless sky that beckoned her towards the unknown. And as her melodies mingled with the lilting laughter of the sirens, I understood what it took to truly see something thrive. We must nurture it with the tender love of the sun and the nourishing kiss of the rain, rather than imprisoning it within the cold confines of an unyielding cage.

The tender hues of dawn awaken my muse, as whispers of inspiration drift like iridescent petals upon the gentle breeze, glistening with the dewdrops of creativity.

As the sun ascends, the enchantment of my literary reverie begins to fade. The hours tiptoe past, unadorned and unassuming, their subtle shades gradually melting into the dim twilight of indecision. The once-fertile garden of my imagination grows barren, its once-vivid blossoms wilting under the weight of silence.

And as the artist within her soul awakens, a tender, resplendent bloom unfurling its petals to embrace the dawn, I find myself on the cusp of tears. An overwhelming wave of emotion surges through me, like

the ebb and flow of a cerulean sea, lapping against me. As I confront the transient nature of existence, I realize that I have spent an eternity cocooned in the comforting, yet stifling embrace of silence.

For far too long, I have remained a mere spectator in the grand theater of life, my gaze locked upon the world as if through a gossamer veil. I have wandered through the lustrous gardens of experience, my steps soft and hesitant, always at a distance from the vibrant hues that dance and intertwine before me.

No more shall I linger in the shadows, a silent muse, my voice swallowed by the endless void. As the sun spills its golden honey upon the horizon, I shall rise, casting off the cloak of quietude that has enshrouded me. My heart, once a timid bird caged within my breast, now beats with the fierce, wild passion of a thousand tempests.

Like the phoenix reborn from the ashes, I shall ascend, my wings outstretched to touch the heavens, adorned with the myriad colors of life. Each radiant feather shall tell a tale of a journey filled with love, laughter, and sorrow.

Desideratum

When I think of the places I used to know, the locations where keystone events in my life took place, I feel desideratum. I am swept away by the scent of nostalgia, a bittersweet yearning for those enchanting locales, almost as if there is a feeling of loss, or grief for something lost, as if in that moment I was part of something I cannot see.

These places, once teeming with life, now echo with the whispers of forgotten dreams, the tender ghosts of laughter and love that once filled my heart with a symphony of emotion. They cradle the silken memories of my youth, a time when I was yet to be kissed by the world's harsh realities, when innocence bloomed like a lush peony, unfurling its petals to the sun.

Now forever lost, though completely intangible and metaphysical at best, the heartbreaking reality is the knowledge that most of these places I might never see again. The cruel hands of time have snatched away the possibility of reunion with these sacred sanctuaries, the hidden gardens where my spirit once ran wild and free.

These places are lost to me now, slipping through my fingers like the sands of a golden hourglass, forever beyond my grasp. They helped raise me and will forever be an integral facet of my past, complete with memories

and still frames in my mind when I was still young and naive.

Each step we take, each breath we inhale, brings with it the subtle sting of heartache, the tender embrace of hope, and the unyielding test of our resolve. Our bodies and souls may be shattered, like fragile porcelain dolls dropped from a great height. But within us, there is an undying ember, a blazing, insatiable hunger for life that refuses to be extinguished.

In the whirlwind of our lives, we often find ourselves entangled in the strands of time, swept along by the current, drifting through a sea of moments we forget to savor. We are all guilty of not allowing ourselves the luxury of time, the sweet surrender to laughter that echoes through the corridors of our being, the jubilant celebration of victories won, and the cathartic release of tears that cleanse our weary souls.

It is in these fleeting moments, suspended between the tick and tock of life's clock, that we truly come alive. Our hearts, once encased in the cold armor of indifference, are set ablaze by the warm embrace of love and the searing kiss of pain. Our spirits, once tethered to the earthbound chains of complacency, are set free, soaring high above the mundane, basking in the glow of self-discovery.

My childhood days were painted with vibrant hues of unbridled imagination. An endless parade of plans danced their way across the canvas of my youthful aspirations, each one meticulously outlined with the precision of a master artist. Yet, as the sun sets and the colors fade, one cannot help but realize that so many of these whimsical creations never truly took flight, forever remaining frozen in the gallery of my mind.

Our minds, like the chameleons of the mental realm, continually shift and adapt, casting new shades of perception on the landscapes of our souls. The choices we make often feel as if they are guided by the unseen hand of chance, leaving us to wonder at the serendipity of our own existence.

In the warm embrace of retrospection, I can't help but marvel at the youthful exuberance that propelled me to map out my life with such unwavering certainty. My child's heart was so blissfully ignorant of the winds of change that would buffet and reshape the sails of my destiny. I was unaware how these forces would lead me to charting a course that was as unpredictable as it was beautiful.

My dreams, once confined within the rigid boundaries of expectation, have since been set free to roam the boundless skies, guided by the whims of fate and the knowledge that life, in all its resplendent glory, is never truly set in stone.

As the seasons of my existence unfold, I blossom into a vibrant enigma, a sage of arcane knowledge and esoteric wisdom. These gems of insight, often overlooked and left unexplored, reside within me like a lioness guarding her precious secrets. My heart beats with a yearning for the uncharted corners of the world, those magical realms where souls seldom wander and footprints rarely mar.

In the carousel of my daily existence, my spirit dances to the tune of elsewhere, forever longing for the embrace of far-off lands. I find myself ensnared in a conundrum as beguiling as the colors of the wind, tethered to the present while my dreams flit about in the ethereal realm. I am a wandering soul, a phantom adrift in the sea of my own life, seeking solace in the gossamer memories conjured by my vivid imagination.

Just like a vibrant watercolor memory, I recall the days when I was a budding blossom, frolicking with my cherished dinosaur companions amidst the sunlit sanctuary of my room. On those tranquil Sunday mornings, the world seemed to pause just for me.

My heart still holds dear the day my delicate fingers penned their first secret dance upon the pages of a journal, aged only eight. Nestled within the comforting embrace of my bedroom's forgotten walk-in closet, I fashioned a magical realm for my thoughts to roam free.

Oftentimes, I yearn to slip through the sands of time and steal a fleeting moment with that innocent, younger version of myself. If only I could whisper into her tender ear, assuring her that life's inevitable tempests will leave her with healed scars and a soul that blooms ever brighter.

Belong, Reprise

As daylight's moments unfurl into resplendent hours, time dances before us. Whenever I gaze upon the looking glass, a vision of my own feminine essence greets me; a whimsical whisper of self twirling gracefully upon the carousel's edge, wrapped in a riddle of endless wonder.

The Elegance Of Poetry And The Beauty Of Prose

In my pursuit of answers, I have always been one to actively seek them out rather than have them handed to me, neatly packaged and tied with a bow. The word *yes* may be easily uttered by some, but I've often found myself deliberating my options, evaluating my choices, and making decisions based on my personal values and beliefs.

My search was not for paradise, but rather for a genuine human connection. I yearned for someone willing to listen to my stories and truly hear my voice.

Blessings and dreams often feel like blurred portraits, slightly mismatched with the person before you. So, it's an ongoing challenge to find meaning in a world that can appear so senseless at times.

I wonder why some expect change from me, when I feel so deeply connected to something unseen. This enigmatic connection transcends time and space, but it's difficult to articulate, and even harder for others to grasp.

Fame can be a cancer, and ego the seed, that grows into an invasive tumor. We may become entangled in our own self-importance, believing the world revolves around us. But, how many of us truly contemplate life's

deeper questions or extend our concerns beyond ourselves? This thought frequently lingers in my mind.

Salvation can be found in the elegance of poetry and the beauty of prose. We seek refuge in the written word, hidden within the sanctuary of our homes. It's in these moments that we discover meaning and purpose, connecting with something larger than ourselves.

Thus, I never sought accolades or fanfare. I certainly don't desire a trophy or any congratulatory gesture. All I yearn for is an empathetic listener, someone who would truly listen to my stories, and value them for what they represent: a unique reflection of my experiences and worldview.

A Girl With Abstract Dreams

Throughout my existence, I have danced as a girl with whimsical aspirations and cryptic allurements. I dwell in a vibrant world, yet slumber in monochrome, pen my thoughts in lyrical verses, while conversing through allegories. My life's canvas portrays the epitome of a liberated soul. To those acquainted with me, I remain a riddle.

Upon my arrival into this world, the wise healers christened me a hermaphrodite. As a youngling, mentors branded me a simpleton. Amidst my adolescent years, I grasped my distinctiveness, and it was then that the healers of the mind recognized me as a prodigious child.

Now, as a grown woman, it appears I seek to rekindle the emotions of my youth, simultaneously embracing and rebuffing the truth that genuine happiness and comfort had eluded me until this very moment.

Dreams are peculiar entities; they breathe, transform, and flourish, and at times our nebulous desires evolve into palpable actualities.

I have embraced the epiphany that every occurrence bears a purpose, though the motives often

remain veiled. Eventually, one grasps that life's instances are frequently ephemeral. Above all, we yearn for those in our orbit to truly understand our essence. On countless instances in my journey, a stranger, companion, or beloved inquired my identity, and my answers have solely hinged on the nature of our connection.

Throughout my existence, I have been characterized by both adjectives and labels. I labored fruitlessly to compile a lexicon of qualities to aptly depict my soul. Devoid of others' presence, these inscriptions are mere phantoms, and absolution for disregarding them as superfluous is no longer requisite.

My heart's deepest longing has been to blossom into a resplendent, content, accomplished, and cherished woman. These dreams have ultimately manifested, and I have never basked in such euphoria or well-being as I do now.

In Another Set Of Chances I'd Take The Ones I've Missed

I used to write in riddles, and I used to write in rhymes; my body ached to write the words, the prose is what kept me alive. I would write into the dark veil of the night, all the while reckoning that in another set of chances, I'd take the ones I've missed.

All the times in which I spoke into the silence, I wish I could take back. For whenever I do, it seems I don't speak, except to cry out and wait for an answer. I came into this world alone, even as my birth was marked by the constellations, and when all else is gone, I will still be here. There's a ceiling in the darkness, I am but a lifeless face that you'll soon forget.

There's a monster living under my bed who whispers words like thunderbolts of lightning, whenever the west wind moves. If I'm still breathing, then I suppose that I'm the lucky one. This is even though I breathe through corrupted lungs, setting fire to my insides. I watch myself burn like a midnight machine, until I catch daylight, and in the brilliant light of morning, it feels good to be alive.

If dreams were thunder and lightning was desire, I'd still live my life with reckless abandon like a displaced cosmonaut. I became accustomed to living life as if

always reaching for the light. The rest is in the details, like an image often seen on television, where all I need to know is that things are going to look up. Somewhere along the line, I must have slipped off track, like tattoos and memories pinned down in a photograph album.

Now unburdened and becoming the person I was supposed to be, I still don't know what forgiveness is. These are the tears I've cried while chasing our people's dreams. Now, my own dreams are the ones I'll dream instead.

I know I could have loved her, she is who is now my ex, but she would not let me. I wrapped my fears around me like a blanket with a shyness that is criminally vulgar. So, I chose to make a new beginning, traveling unfamiliar rivers and roads; it feels like boarding a downtown train that takes me to new and unfamiliar places where as writer I can live a thousand other lives. These voices in my head get loud, but thankfully, my wish was granted for someone who would save me from the nothing I'd become.

She said she wanted everything, so she took everything from me, pointing an angry finger, burdening me with the weight of feeling like I could never give her enough. Now, she is disappeared from my sight, and I now feel a different kind of weight, the burden of becoming someone brand new. The loveless fascination with all those yesterdays is the slaughter of the meek,

and I must discover a godlike technique to convey these ever present feelings of the heart.

I remember years ago when she told me not to go into the children's home. Regardless, I went ahead, if to do nothing more than to defy her. For that moment, I was clothed only in obscenities, rain soaked in the summer heat, and I could find no comfort in this world.

She told me many lies, and because of them, I missed miles and miles of roads I should have seen, even though the truth was plain to see. My underlying condition, the fault in my genetics, made her so angry, despite them being something which I could do nothing about.

Soon the writings in my journals devolved into the ramblings of a lunatic. While getting so much attention, I was drowning in the carnage of covering her up with affection. There were wolves in the house the whole time, and while I was hoping for the best, I was anticipating and expecting the worst.

As I wandered through my possibilities, like playing cards with all my chips on the table, to her I became the joke. Eventually, I lost myself, because it was the broken parts that I needed to see the most. How did this all fall apart? I waited for her to make good on her promises; all the while she stole my glory and tried to prevent my escape. I know the truth now, like echoes of

angels that won't return; is this the prize that I've waited for?

After I left, I asked her two questions. When was the last time that you felt good? Why was it that you only wished for the things that you didn't need? The long awaited answers never came.

All along, I was the unsuspecting victim whose soul crumbled like a pastry under softly spoken lies, when she gave my mind a new disease. Behind the scenes, I started threading the needle, my forgotten self a photograph on the dashboard of forgotten dreams. I kept thinking about how I grew up too fast, the thoughts from the big chair ever present even well into adulthood. This is never how I wanted life to be.

So, when I was ready to run away, I drove off in my car. Still, I needed some sort of closure. I asked myself: "Should I write her a letter and give her the secrets she requested?" But, I told myself, "Don't offer her a chance to ask any more questions."

I needed to retreat with my suitcase of memories, off to become the girl I needed to be since so long ago that I can no longer remember when, now trying to make up for lost time. She tried to tear my world apart with mindless filler, her esoteric words disguised as reverie. It was a means to an end to bring me down, and who knows to what ends?

I was a mere shadow of a man she selfishly wanted me to be, a man who never was, a man I never will be. When she tried to take me back, I was not there. In the end, it's the heart that matters more, and I am unable and unwilling to censor my tears. The things I wish I could have told her, a cautionary tale of how things are rarely as they could be, or should be.

Times have changed, and so has she. It's depressing that in unrequited love, my love is vengeance that is never free. How much more of this resentment could I put up with? I left behind the ghosts of empty promises where something's always wrong, and it was always my fault.

These are the words I've never said before, a page in a book that she'd never read. Now that I've moved on, these are the dreams I'll have instead.

I Chose To Walk Barefoot Through The Settled Stardust

In my younger years, I spent many summer evenings lying down in the grass watching the stars above. I knew many of their stories, but even then I dreamed of finding more. Now I find myself with my bare feet planted firmly on top of the planet's most glittering expanse – the skin of the Earth itself, a stardust serenade playing softly in my ears and the grass tickling my toes, just like it did all those years ago.

In my life, I chose to walk through the settled stardust, though in my mind, I live in a world of fantasies, surrounded by the possibilities and the beauty of what could be. Sometimes it's overwhelming, but other times it's freeing, like living in a movie or an alternate reality.

So, when I'm told it's finally my turn to walk barefoot through all the settled stardust, my answer was always an obvious yes. It may sound too good to be true at first, but there is something special about walking through the sky without shoes on your feet. And there is no one around to tell you that you're wrong for doing it.

When I was a child, the sky was always a dark navy and the wind was warm and gentle. I used to gaze up at the night sky just after the sun had set, and the stars

were just coming out. One by one, they appeared until their light shimmered across my skin, so bright and beautiful that I couldn't help but reach out to touch them. I dreamed many dreams of how my life and love would be, but, as my fingers glided through the sky, they disappeared.

Now as an adult, I gaze up into the cosmos on clear nights with no clouds in sight, at millions of stars, all shining brighter than usual. The stars look close enough to touch this time. But as soon as my fingers brushed against them, they disappear again like little shooting stars – a seemingly never ending dance of beauty and grace, in which what we desire most is that which we cannot fully grasp.

It's been two years now since the day I walked barefoot through all the settled stardust. In that time, my life has changed more than it ever did before. It's been one adventure after another, with new people and new places thrown into the mix as if it were some sort of cosmic recipe, one that I never could have predicted would yield such amazing results.

Sometimes when we're not looking, our lives become someone else's story. So, at some point we are forced to realize that things can't stay the same forever.

Now Is The Time To Let Go

Most of us live for cheap thrills. Whether it's diving into a plate of nachos or watching an action movie with our friends, it's easy to get sucked into the allure of fun that doesn't really matter to our lives in the long run. But at some point, cheap thrills fade away and we must start thinking about the bigger picture.

You can't make up for lost time or replace what is lost. Whether it be a relationship, an ambition, a skill, an opportunity or a moment in time, you'll never get it back. The highs don't stay high for long and the lows don't stay low forever. The circus ropes of my childhood became the ties that bind me to my past, ties that would never let me go.

Many people's idea of a good time involves getting a high without any responsibility or consequences. But, when those cheap thrills fade away, they have nothing to fall back on. They have no sense of self-worth, and they're left with no drive or desire to do anything other than what's easy. This is why it's so important to set goals for yourself, attainable yet challenging, and pursue them with vigor. Otherwise, you find yourself chasing down the same wanton desires endlessly without actually achieving anything in life.

I had an abusive father who dreamed of having a son. I was the only child, and he wanted a son to carry on his legacy. This son would be tough enough to handle anything, and could take care of the family if anything were to happen. That son would love him unconditionally and would always be there for him no matter what.

Yet, my father knew it deep down inside I would never be most of these things; although, under great trials and with many close calls, I did prove tough enough to survive. In my teenage years I started to resent him for not being my father in any way that mattered – I couldn't call him dad because it felt wrong saying that word with someone who never loved me like one should love their own child.

Ever since I was a little girl, I saw the world symbolically and metaphorically. My dad used to always say that the good times never stay, and the cheap thrills only fade away. But was it that he was old and feared the pain of death, or was it simply that he himself had failed to fully appreciate the joys of life? It was likely some combination of the two, but more likely it was the latter that ate away at him most.



I had a collection of childhood diaries, now all lost or thrown away. I remember writing my first diary entry when I was 10 years old and I was so excited to finally have my own diary. I wrote about everything that happened that day and what I wanted to do in the future. I think it's safe to say that the entries became less detailed over time as my life got busier, but they were still a huge part of my growth.

My diaries were filled with the typical dreams of an adolescent girl. I dreamed of meeting a beautiful princess and living happily ever after with her. I dreamed of being a famous ballerina, or a glamorous fashion designer, or the inventor of something really cool. But when it came down to it, all my girly aspirations boiled down to one simple goal: I simply wanted to be happy.

My diaries had pictures of fairies, unicorns, dolphins, and mermaids in the margins. Inside, I'd write about my crushes on girls in my school classes, or the weekend adventures I had. In my mind, I created picture-perfect maps of how my life and love would be. On paper, I was a lost girl in a lost world, who only documented and cataloged her pain, sorrows, and abuse.

On occasion, I would daydream and write about things I was fascinated by; a pattern emerged when I was

around sixteen years old and decided that my true calling in life was to become a writer. I wrote of fabulous places, creating an oasis in my mind where I could stand up as who I was and at the same time, feel completely safe. My dreams were metaphysical and rooted in fantasy, and often involved a curious combination of castles and queens, dolphins, and trains.

In particular, dolphins are a symbol of freedom, strength, and power. They represent being able to overcome any obstacle in life and finding the strength needed to keep going. I had dolphin figurines in my bedroom when I was younger, but they were much more than just something cute to put on display. I wanted them there so they could be the first thing I saw when I woke up every morning and remind me that anything is possible. Dolphins symbolize following your dreams no matter what – as long as I believed in myself and never give up, I knew that I could accomplish anything.

Freight trains represent sheer power and determination on an industrial scale. They're big, powerful, and always on time. There's a sense of immediacy about their arrival, something almost primal. You can feel it in the air as the train rumbles into town, hear it in the clatter of its wheels against the track as it slows to make its stop at the station. This strength compelled me to maintain a lifelong interest in this mode of transportation.

The ocean is a constant source of life. It moves, it breathes, it gives and takes with the changing of the tides. Yet the ocean in my dreams, both half awake and half asleep, blessed me with its seemingly limitless bounty of ideas and possibilities.

In my head, I can see the waves of thoughts crashing into me as if I were a ship at sea. I feel like a woman caught in the middle of a storm, with no way out. There are thoughts of failure, death, past memories that torment me, and more. It's as if all of my worries about the future came to life and engulfed me in their madness.

In some strange way, I wished for the ocean to cover over me, to wash away my incessant aching and make me feel clean again. Then I wished it could bury me in the sand and let me rest. I could pretend that I was finally at peace, my body free from the heavy weight of my head and heart. But all I did was curl up tighter and sob more heavily, letting the tears flow freely down my cheeks. There were no easy solutions for the hole inside of me, no salve for these wounds that would never heal.

I got my first tattoo—a dolphin on my left ankle, the summer after I graduated from high school. I still remember the feeling of sitting in that tattoo artist's chair, and looking down at my ankle while she was working. It was such an exhilarating experience to know

that this marked me as being different than other people who didn't have any tattoos.

But I also felt a sense of accomplishment when it was finished because now I had something special that only belonged to me—one more way to show off my personality through an image or pattern which is indelibly etched into my skin forever. I had found myself and knew exactly what type of person I wanted to be. And not just for others, but for myself as well.

As time went on, I marked my time around work, ignoring dates, holidays, fate or wisdom. I clocked in and out, keeping my head down and my feet moving. I foolishly believed that if I worked hard enough, they would always need me, and would want to keep me around. And if that didn't work, there was always a new door waiting for me to open, and make my way through. There were never any guarantees beyond the day that lay ahead of me.

Eventually, my troubles caught up to me, and I realized this wasn't the life I wanted anymore. Only through the good karma of my tireless efforts helping others did I finally save up enough to buy a house flat out in Vermont and meet my wife Amelia almost completely out of nowhere.



When we're kids, our parents are all-powerful and we are taught to believe that they know everything. As adults, we begin to realize that there are many things that they truly don't know and cannot control – some of which have a very definite impact on our lives.

Eventually, we learn how to take care of ourselves, making decisions and figuring out who we want to be without their help. It's natural for us to still want them around when we're making these changes, but it becomes easier with time as you find yourself becoming more independent than before.

An old friend recently called me and tried to tell me how I should feel. I don't know what they expected, exactly. Was it simply their intent for nothing more than, to hear that these past few years, I had been living in blissful joy? I told them that that the good times never stay. Sometimes our experiences make us better people; other times, it makes us difficult.

I told this person that I had been rejected by the group we once shared and wouldn't return. It was true. When you do everything for others and expect nothing in return, you're essentially pouring the essence of your being into a void. You may be able to maintain the illusion for a while, but eventually that energy will dissipate.

The time will often make it self known when you need to let go of any expectations of reciprocity, and just do things for the sake of doing them. When you do this there's no expectation for anything in return and it becomes much easier to give without feeling depleted or disappointed. It's not about what you get back; it's about what you put out there.

I've learned a lot from my experiences, but sometimes people fail to learn from the experiences they live through themselves. Some people need someone else's account of pain and struggle, or hardship to feel like their own is worth something, almost as if they are seeking external validation from a third party.

I've learned by mistake that the memories one make can't be undone. Sometimes, people aren't whom you once believed or hoped them to be. You get what you want when it's not yours to keep, and in return, you're left with nothing but empty promises. Everything I wanted when I was younger ended up driving me away, and for a long time in my life, I was lost.

I'd come back, only to feel left out, like two ships that pass in the night.

I'd come back, to see what it was like to be an outsider again. To see if it would hurt any less this time around.

I'd come back, to feel the ache of pseudo-inclusion that I never felt fulfilled, and to try and find the root of why I always felt incomplete.

I'd come back because of the people who claimed to be my friends when they asked me to give them another chance.

The last time I returned to my childhood camp, they said I needed to come so that they could get to know me again, as they knew themselves now. What it really was: to see if there was still something "worth salvaging." So, I returned, if only for a day. It's a bittersweet feeling when you come back; one moment I was the new kid on the block looking for somewhere where I could fit in, and then suddenly realizing that not much has changed at all, and that I had changed far too much.

It seems that I had grown up since last time I was there, more confident and successful than before, as things had finally started coming together for me. Yet, I still can't help but look at those old friendships with longing: wishing that maybe it would all just go back to how it used to be; before everyone got older and wiser and moved on from each other without so much as a goodbye.

Maybe

When I was a child, I thought that when I grew up, that all my picture-perfect maps and plans of the future would come true. Yet, very few of those plans I was certain and convinced would come true actually did. But what if things turned out differently? Maybe I would have been famous. Maybe I would have been successful. Maybe I would have chased dreams like those around me.

For a while, I thought that fame, success, and obsessing over the tiny details and materialistic things in life were what really mattered. That was the message instilled in my mind ever since I can remember. It took a considerable, almost unfathomable, amount of time for me to conclude that there are things in life that are paramount over everything else. These are doing good work, making time for friends and loved ones, and trying to make the world a better, more accepting place.

And yet, despite all that I have done to preach fairness and equality, it remains a very cruel, competitive, and unfair world. Still, very few people get what they deserve. Then, even if they are able to attain the things that they spent a lifetime to achieve, those rewards can be lost forever at a moment's notice. Successful lives can be upturned and fortunes reversed

through an act of natural disaster, but more often it's as a result of the selfish actions of others.

It seems that my own life has been an uphill battle ever since I was a child. Roadblocks always seemed to get in the way of the things I should have achieved or could have achieved. Other times, I would weather trials and tribulations, only to realize that the prize was no longer worth the time and effort, and abandoned those pursuits altogether.

There have been many times in my life when I felt as if I was at a dead end, at a point of no return, when I was faced with a crossroads. I would spend far too long on my decision for which path in life I wished to take next. Yet, after I finally made those countless decisions in my life as to the next path or course I wished to embark upon, I constantly second-guessed those choices.

This second-guessing is a symptom of the unnecessary amount of judgment, comparison, and competition in modern society; and it is unhealthy. I have and will continue to dream of a world where all people are allowed the same opportunities and given fair and equal treatment. It seems modern society has not learned from its turbulent past; same as it was a millennia ago, we still are able to somehow morally and socially justify a reason to find differences in others, then use those differences against one another through

discrimination and prejudice to advance ourselves unfairly.

My experience teaches me that regardless of what laws, regulations, and standards are progressed, upheld, and enforced, there is just no changing the already made-up minds of a few who seek to turn back the clock to an earlier, more oppressive time.

I wish that growing up I had been taught the true value of happiness. If one cannot be happy with the way things are, the intrinsic worth of their possessions, and time spent with loved ones, then what really is the value of one's life? I wish that I was taught that I should make time to deal with the mixed emotions of adulthood, and to make time to experience, express, and cherish those emotions, both good and bad. I wish someone had told me we must make time to laugh, to cry, and to appreciate and cherish the things we have and the people whom we love, and perhaps more importantly, those who love us.

Modern society in and of itself is in a chaotic downward spiral where possessions are being loved and cherished, instead of people, meanwhile, people are being used, taken for granted, and treated poorly. It seems that every day there is another person who has turned to violence because they felt as if they were not being heard.

There are a multitude of times in my life when I tried to speak out, but it seemed as if no one could hear me. But instead of turning to violence, as others often do, I turned to writing. Speech is often futile and fleeting, while the written word can last much longer and often gets through eventually in such a way to fulfill the need.

A Little Ghost For The Offering

When my parents moved me to our second house, I was instantly drawn towards a hundred year old maple tree in the back yard. As the years went by, the tree became my inspiration, my childhood joy, and the one spot I would always run to whenever I needed a good cry. I would often imagine being hugged and comforted by its sheltering arms, an imaginary comfort throughout all the times I felt alone.

On various occasions, I would talk to the tree, entrusting it with my deepest and darkest secrets, my hopes, my dreams, and my fears. It was a trusted confidant and the ideal listener, a faithful friend that can't run away. My tree was a connection that I assumed would always be there, patiently waiting, almost anticipating, if not lovingly commanding my return.

The inspiration the tree selflessly gave me eventually lead me to refer to it as my dreaming tree. As I grew, I would lay in the grass beneath the tree and gaze up into its lofty branches. I would dream of how my life and love would be. Sometimes for just a few precious moments, on other occasions, for hours at a time.

As the years went by, I would take shelter from the hot summer sun sitting at the base of the tree and write in my notebook. When I couldn't get the words to come

out, I would take a break from my writing to stand upon the cluster of roots. Sometimes, I would walk in circles around the tree, my hand gently dragging against the aged and weathered bark.

As I grew, my childhood dreams were no longer hollow; I fell in love and though I found my purpose. So, I went away in hopes of turning my dreams into reality.

I will never forget the day my mom called me on the phone to let me know that my dreaming tree had died. It needed to be taken down. I begged her to at least leave the stump behind so that I would remember the exact spot where my dreaming tree once stood.

I returned as soon as I could, after the tree was removed, and said to myself, here stood my dreaming tree, staring at the ground covered in fresh sawdust and the lifeless stump surrounded by thriving green grass. Once again I tried to comprehend and visualize what it would look like if it were still there. I was overcome with emotion as I imagined how the tree had leaned over as it died as if its sheltering arms were reaching out in sadness and sorrow that the young girl had grown and left it behind. The dreaming tree had died and all that was left was nothing more than a figment of my imagination that it was still standing, much like a little ghost for the offering.

I often still think of the child who grew up an outcast, the girl who was always a little bit different, who would daydream beneath her own special tree. I still recall those visions of castles and queens in fabulous places far away. That child would ultimately go on to be extremely successful at life, in her own way, still daydreaming and outcast from others. The dreaming tree has died, but the child still lives, as her dreams still find revival in the words she still writes.

Summer Comes For Everyone

I was lost inside a daydream and I was rehearsing a dialogue inside my head. In my dreams, it is always raining and in shades of black and white. The rain wraps fears around me like a blanket, making me feel short of stable, and then finally, it washes me away. These are the days I will remember all my life, the precious and often fleeting moments when there's a story to be told, Amelia takes my hand in an empty room as adventure awaits. Summer comes for everyone; today is the springtime of my life.

Social media became one drink too many and a joke gone too far; the storm that was coming my way was always on the horizon, distant yet forever prevalent and ominous and I knew I was not magnificent. I was born a long time ago, and I know that someday I will die, while the time between is mine. Yet, I foolishly invested too much of my self-worth in what other people think of me. Social media became an unnecessarily large part of my life. Slowly, more and more people sought revenge against me in response to my successes.

Mine became a broken heart forbade to fly, looking at things through tear-filled eyes, contemplating the way things could have been, should have been, and never will be again, then learning to say goodbye. Summer comes for everyone, and the pain I am receiving is a

reminder that in my life, and all the things I have done have been done with grace and compassion.

I need to know that things are going to look up; my thoughts come to me at night as the world sleeps and the sky is starlit, by morning I am rising tired like the smoldering smoke of a fire that has been left to coals. I write my words of wisdom in the shadow of hope that someone will find insight in them, a signal to the noise like an image often seen on television.

From the life I once lived, patiently yet reluctantly, I turned and ran away. I ended up in a place where nobody knows me. I found love, the sheer magnitude of which was beyond my own comprehension. Now I'm here and I don't know why.

I asked Amelia if she would stay with me, would she be my love. Now I'm something much more than I was before. On the occasions where she and I are apart, our souls speak from across the miles. Now as our lives are intertwined, our flames burn as one. I am galvanized by her presence, nothing else matters and I want to write her name in the sky.

I Can Leave Behind A Heart

The older I get, the more it seems that I lose. I have lost people near and dear, my possessions, and arguably, my faith.

All I ever wanted my entire life was to feel comfortable in my own skin. To belong. To live authentically. To be free.

I put the entire essence of my being into my work as a firefighter; a hero, a friend, a person whom others could count on in times of need. Sometimes I felt as if I were always on call. Years and years I roamed, through futile attempts to run away from myself. Finally, I ran out of places to run to.

If these are life lessons, I have learned that I too, can leave behind a heart.

The Fake Idols Of Plastic

Everything in life begins, and ends, yet it is always the ending that I always think about. People who I thought would be my forever friends; those whom I've known and admired since childhood like teenage film stars and superstars in magazines. The checkmarks of pseudo-verification have become the fake idols of plastic.

I have spent a lifetime caring about people I truly believed were my friends. Now, most of them have all but abandoned me in pursuit of their own selfish and self-absorbed nirvana. Yet I held onto the firm belief in the idea that we could change ourselves, and the past might be undone. But I cannot rewind, as I've gone too far ahead. I thought somewhere along the line, I must have slipped off track, but it was only I who stayed on the track I chose.

All of my life, personal achievements were ignored, as if anything I accomplished was perceived as insignificant and mundane. My depression came and finally became too much to bear after many years of trying to be somebody on social media. No matter what, it seems that I was never popular enough to succeed, at least in the ways people thought mattered.

My accomplishments still go mostly unnoticed, unappreciated, and unacknowledged. This is while the majority of people I've known since childhood have all received gratuitous praise over even the smallest or most insignificant accomplishments.

Social media, as I came to learn, is nothing more than an artificial electronic hyper-representation of life in which there exists a schism within every single facet of our lives. It seems that everyone on social media is photographed surrounded by their circle of friends, yet as for me, it seems that I'm never included in such social gatherings.

I have a nasty little habit of looking back on my life as I revel in all the little details. In my mind, my perception is such that my childhood years were the best days of my life, though one's perspectives on life only changes when the observer allows them to do so.

The good old days weren't really that good as I look back and realize that I was often the brunt of everyone's jokes. But now in my adulthood, I've finally got a second chance, and a beautiful brain, though my head is filled with racing thoughts, often fleeting inside an ever-changing mind, like a bird of every color.

Now it's far too late for those I once called friends to call me back. I've all but disappeared down a one-way track, finding my own way.

Caught Daylight

Some mornings I catch daylight much too soon, then as I lay awake, I stare out the window with nothing to say aside from the thoughts circling within my mind.

It seems that winter comes earlier and earlier with each passing year, bringing with it the promise of snow filled days spent inside thinking about the year. The wintertime gives me plenty of time to wonder about what I want to do with the rest of my life, and with each passing year, I know that I'm getting older, too. Time itself means nothing, yet through space and time, there exists a common denominator in which as humans we perpetually need more of both.

Amelia's is the last face I see when I go to sleep in the evening, and the first face I see when I wake in the morning. Some days hers is the only face I wish to see; her eyes speak of everlasting and unconditional love, for they belong to my best friend, my lover, and the center of my universe. Morning usually comes quickly, and I am always the first one to wake in the morning as I watch the way that light attaches itself to the trees, as night slowly gives way to daylight.

As the brilliant sunlight eventually makes its way through the trees and into our bedroom, it brings with it

a promise of a brand new day as I lie awake until she opens her eyes to look at me. It is at that moment that I choose to speak into the silence, speaking of her beauty and professing, once more, my endearing love for her.

Our lives are entwined, for whenever I go to sleep, Amelia and I are the main characters in every dream I have, equal partners in a mystery, like a unicorn in a jungle, it's all in my mind where reality meets fantasy.

When it comes to heart of matters, it is the heart that matters more.

The Weight Of Being So Much More

I have always been a little different my entire life: reserved, grounded, wise, intelligent, and overwhelmingly female. I had a favorite tree in my parents' back yard, and under it I would sit and write in my notebooks, often for hours at a time. And on many occasions, I would sit under the tree whenever I needed a good cry.

And yet, life, as in time, is linear and perpetual; our decisions are based on taking chances. My family spent their lives telling me that I was perpetually making bad decisions and that I would amount to nothing. This is awful advice, as one learns most through making bad decisions, and mastery is inevitable given enough life experience.

My father and his side of the family could never accept the fact that I was genetically female, despite the numerous reports from the doctors involved in my care. The DNA testing that followed only made them even more enraged. While my mother and her side of the family was frustratingly apathetic, my father used violence as a means of ridding me of this female curse that was, as he put it, deposited upon him by his widow.

My family maintained that I would never be successful in life, yet I clearly am. I own my dream property outright and don't owe anything to anyone. And what do I get for my hard work and dedication? I get ridicule and disassociation from those who once stood by my side.

Still, perhaps I get my own revenge, vicariously through the knowledge that my resilience and acts of defiance, coupled with the weight of being so much more, the pressures of achievement, was in fact, the key to my success.

Fame Itself Is A Cancer And Ego Its Seed

No matter what I do, it seems that it seldom works out. On the rare occasion when it does, my triumph and success results in the jealousy of others who then seek to undermine and destroy that which I have accomplished.

When I was a child, I was told that being different in some ways was a gift; I however, was different in every single way. I had my own unique way of doing things, especially when it came to writing. I was influenced by Allen Ginsberg, who mentored me, and inspired me to write in such a way that combined poetry and prose. Decades later, this is how I still write to this day, notwithstanding modern education with its own bland academia style of written nomenclature.

The years of my childhood went by, as I dealt with the emotional trauma of numerous teachers who tried to convince me to lower my intellect to the level of my peers. When I refused, I was met with ultimatums such as being expelled from school. I am an auto-didactic learner whose experience with education was a traumatic one; at this point in my life, going back to college would be an enormous waste of time and resources.

Being expelled from school would arguably have been the best possible outcome for me when I was a child. Instead, my parents decided to bounce me between different schools, citing my teachers' ridiculous accusations of arrogance, as if I needed to take personal responsibility for the crime of simply being intelligent.

My depression came when my father ultimately decided to send me to an all-male boarding school, and for the very first time in my life, I had to live full-time as a boy. Playing this role for the greater part of my childhood and early adult life became an exhausting act that left me in pain; it was the end product of my father's narcissism, toxic masculinity, and abuse.

One particular sleepless night, after several futile attempts to stay asleep, I elected to read *The Demon-Haunted World* by Carl Sagan. Sagan was known to my father, and when I was a small child, my father was once presented with an opportunity for me to meet Sagan in person, though my father ultimately decided against it. I often wonder what Sagan may have said to me, and how it may have changed all that came after.

Whenever morning comes too soon, as I lay awake in bed, I often resort to thinking about my life; a common habit and pastime of mine when daydreaming has lost its luster. I keep a pen and a notebook at my bedside, opening it up to a fresh new page any time an irreplaceable and priceless thought floats into my mind.

In the morning when I wake, I am gifted with the promise of a brand new day in which to dream and to create.

All my life, I have believed in things unseen, rejecting a lot of the teachings that were presented to me under the guise of elitism, while those around me would foolishly hang onto every single word they said. While we, as humans, use science to explain everyday phenomena, there exists a schism between the scientific method and things that are metaphysical. Humans often still use religion to explain the things that cannot be repeatedly proven scientifically. And while I have never claimed modern religion, if I had to classify my beliefs, I would ultimately gravitate towards Paganism. I prefer a more natural explanation over the super-natural, the latter which often only leads to ignorance and violence.

As I progressed into adulthood, my parents feared that I would never be successful because I never finished college. Like most parents, mine were convinced that because I was ill-equipped to succeed in modern academia, that I would be a failure in life and would never get the opportunity to attain fame or success. My father, especially, who had become famous, albeit unintentionally, through his work, and as such, he held the same expectation for me.

The emotional weight and the exuberance of desire of one day becoming so much more than anyone

could have anticipated, or imagined, which ultimately manifested as the catalyst of my unwavering desire to succeed at life. Although I was wildly successful in life, my achievements are often viewed as insignificant. While I was never considered famous, through my work, I thought I was known and respected by many. It turned out that all they wanted from me was what I had to offer them, and nothing more.

Coming to this stark and brutal realization in 2020, I finally risked it all to disappear. I took a risk to finally meet the girl who would soon become my wife, in person for the very first time. I told her of my plans to start a brand new life in Vermont, where I would buy a retired farm. It would be the perfect property for me, as a river ran around it like a moat, and I would own both sides of the water.

This was a sign to me that I'd finally found my true forever home. All my life, I have been inexplicably drawn to water, and I have always loved the rain. I always had my own special tree, wherever I lived, which would be my happy place to run to when the world became overwhelming or unbearable. As soon as Amelia and I set foot on the old farm together, she immediately pointed out a tall birch tree, which immediately became our new dreaming tree.

Like me, Amelia never cared about famous. She just wanted to find happiness in whatever form it came

to her. Fame is something I will never understand; it is the godlike technique that leads the slaughter of the meek. The masses raise our leaders and celebrities onto pedestals, only to pick them apart, as if there is a fault in their stars for simply being human.

Fame itself is a cancer, and ego its seed. While I have never deluded myself with conceptions of fame, I suffer from a different sort of cancer that is in constant battle with my intellect. This is the constant visceral feeling that I am mostly surrounded by idiots wooed by the popular parlance that shuns genius, and instead, celebrates ignorance.

I choose to resist the dumbing down and conversational style prevalent in today's media. Part of me still wants to write down every random thought that I have, but it is the better part of my intellect that censors the most inane, preventing me from writing down all but the most poignant ideas.

But if Amelia has taught me just one thing that took my writing to another level, it is that it is important to write down one's ideas, even those that fall short of your expectations. Within even the seemingly most trivial of thoughts, often lie ideas which could serve as seedlings for yet undiscovered flowers.

Amelia has attempted to break my bad habit of self-censoring, especially through my words and photos,

my most common means of self-expression. In doing so, I previously missed miles and miles of roads I should have seen, and have lost so many memories and written narratives of past days' events. There are so many things I wish I had said, many more that I wished I had written down. While I am forever haunted by the ghosts of lost opportunities, at least some seeds remain to still grow in my forever home's garden.

My Photography Style Was Inspired By The Feelings Of Abandonment

When I was eight years old, my family moved from New York City to a small town in Upstate New York. At first, I hated living in this small town and all the changes that came with it. But as I got older, I began to love my new life there, especially the quiet and the abundance of open space.

My interest in photography spawned from my fascination with abandoned buildings and urban exploration. A lot of people often wonder why someone would want to go into a creepy old building, but they're missing the point – I don't go there to be scared, I go because I like the way it makes me feel; it's an art form. Abandoned places are like walking into a beautiful painting – there are so many details and variations that you'll never see them all in one visit, and the next time you come back, everything might be completely different.

Many people wonder why I choose to shoot abandoned locations. Some even ask me if it is an attempt to somehow expose those who are unable to care for or maintain these structures. The simple answer is no, I'm not doing either of those things. There is

something about a building that has seen better days that pulls me in and sparks my creativity. This makes sense when you consider that many abandoned buildings are snapshots of a certain time period or culture – as such, they can give us insight into our history and who we were as a society during those times. It's hard to resist being inspired when there is so much beauty in decay.

It wasn't until much later in my life that I realized that my inspiration was a coping mechanism of sorts as a result of my life long struggles with feeling abandoned since early childhood. At night when I was tucked into bed, my parents promised me that they would always take care of me, and that in life I would never have anything to worry about.

As soon as I turned ten, my parents sent me away to summer camp for the first time, which I despised. The camp itself ended up being a cover for a religious cult. The following year, they sent me to a different summer camp, which I ended up falling in love with.

At age 15, my parents sent me away to a boarding school in Western New York, in addition to summer camp. I suffered through almost constant abuse in boarding school, and constantly being away from my nest left me with an overwhelming feeling of abandonment from such an early age. This feeling

continues to haunt me today and has ultimately inspired my artistic style in photography.

My interest in abandonment photography came about unexpectedly. While in college, there was an abandoned medical center on the university campus. The building was massive, and a lot of medical equipment was left behind, but unfortunately, gaining access to the facility was impossible. My friend at the time grew up nearby and he would introduce me to a multitude of interesting characters, and I was able to visit some seedy locations that had a very vintage abandonment appeal.

From natural decay to man-made ruins, a peculiar beauty emerges as surroundings fall apart and return to nature. Such decay is even more captivating when juxtaposed with vibrant colors or unique architecture. Accordingly, I set out to capture a photographic style that reflects my fascination with both abandoned places and vintage aesthetics, a visual concept fueled by nostalgia for things once thought beautiful – and still alive in our memories. By merging derelict locations and discarded objects from around America, my goal is to create pictures that document not only those forgotten places but also time itself.

Although I wouldn't say that sadness is my favorite emotion, it has served me in a very positive way. The longer I look at images, either my own or those of other

photographers, that aren't emotional, I often get bored. Photography allows one to capture emotion with their mind and their camera. There are many types of emotions that can be captured and utilized in a single image. This includes beauty, fear, anger, joy, or any combination thereof. It all depends on your photographic style and vision as an artist but also ones life experiences.

I love to shoot in abandoned or run-down locations, but I don't think of them as deteriorated – instead, I see their run-down state as an opportunity for photographing things that wouldn't normally be seen. The reason is simple: In these places, you're often seeing something only a very small fraction of people have ever seen before. These are places that people don't often think about, and of course, never have the desire or opportunity to visit. As far as photography is concerned, I find this fact to be very exciting. It means I'm able to create truly unique photos with angles and viewpoints no one else can get because they don't know about these places yet.

What's on a property that could inspire such a feeling? Why is it so interesting to me? Is it because I'm drawn to a certain aesthetic, or is there something deeper at play? I've never been able to nail down a definitive answer, and maybe that's okay. For now, I just want to continue seeking out these forgotten places for as long as possible. The more I photograph them,

though, the more certain elements begin to emerge from each shot—in what seems like a playful yet eerie way. It's both charming and creepy all at once.

There are many great websites to find abandoned locations. Google Earth has also been very helpful at pointing out geographical features such as mountains, bridges, caves, waterfalls, etc. which can make for interesting shots later on. There are also websites that let you type in your zip code and will tell you about old hospitals or military bases nearby that have been closed down. They aren't always up-to-date with information, though, and sometimes the information isn't factual, so it's best to check yourself before heading out if possible!

Most people love being in new or remodeled places, surrounded by common things they recognize, whereas I'm not one of those people. I feel most comfortable when I am outside exploring and finding new places to see and photograph. Taking pictures of abandoned and forgotten locations helped me to find beauty in places and things that were discarded and forgotten which other people couldn't care less about. These days, whenever I step into an abandoned building, a new world is revealed to me—one that's full of mystique and wonder.



To this day, I continue to find abandoned places oddly beautiful. As a photographer, my job is to capture that beauty I see so that others may understand it. Whether an old building is left to rot for decades or just for a few weeks, there are always things to see if you look carefully enough to understand.

Spend enough time and you can begin to imagine what its past inhabitants were thinking and feeling before they abandoned the structure. From there, you can attempt to recreate those feelings within your own imagination as you create photographs of your own surroundings.

The unique allure of abandoned buildings, it seems, is an acquired taste. With crumbling walls, shattered windows, and decaying fixtures, most people are repulsed by their shabby appearance. But, with just a bit of perspective, it's easy to picture what they were like when people did occupy them. All the nooks and crannies make an abandoned house or industrial complex a fantastic photo subject for those willing to look past the dirt, dust, and debris.

When I photograph an abandoned building, it's more than just taking a simple picture. My work is about experiencing a place, learning its history, and getting inside of its character. Even if the buildings are ugly as

they now stand, we must still respect the place they once meant in the community. Taking photos of these structures allows me to be a part of the ever-changing landscape and to preserve it in both time and space.

Most importantly, photographing abandoned buildings serves as a form of preservation, as the photographs themselves can document what existed at that moment, an entropic version of what once was, and in many cases, what might never be again.

Recently, my photography style has taken a dramatic turn. Much of my early abandoned photography had an emphasis on decay and damage – dark tones that would reflect these structures being reclaimed by nature. My later and more recent work is significantly different. It has a softer look than my previous photographs, and much of this is simply due to acquiring better equipment and greater skill. I have also grown older and as such, I am no longer taking enormous risks to my personal safety.

I love being behind a camera, but unlike those who love the control of posing and backdropping, I prefer to let my subjects just be themselves and capture candid moments of their lives. This is part of why abandoned properties are so attractive to me as subjects; they simply are there and always a willing participant.

I have traveled to many abandoned places around the Northeastern United States. Whether they were due to fire or met financial hardships, some areas, including entire towns, just fall off of the grid. Some of the most memorable locations include The Hotel Adler in Sharon Springs New York, and its sister property, Imperial Baths, which sits adjacent to the hotel. The entrances to these locations were still filled with signs promoting its own glory. Yet after walking inside, you are faced with empty rooms, some with beds and dilapidated furniture; many with old television sets and broken mirrors.

I will never forget photographing Letchworth Village Asylum in Thiells, New York. There were small patient rooms, mostly empty aside from a single bed, chair, and perhaps a small sink. The bath tubs had canvas coverings with stainless steel attachments for hydrotherapy treatments, which were common at the time. There were also rooms with outdated electroshock therapy equipment. I found a medical office strewn with patient records.

Seeing scenes such as these, and then photographing them makes me think about how far we have come as humans, or perhaps not as far as one might assume.

One day, I stumbled upon an abandoned warehouse in Amsterdam, New York, and found it strangely beautiful. The pictures I took that day stuck

with me for a long time after that. It wasn't until much later, though, that I realized what it was about those photographs that grabbed my attention so tightly. Aesthetically, they looked like any other set of photos taken at a location you might find on a list of spooky places in your area. In many ways, they even look like post-apocalyptic scenes—an image rarely considered beautiful when we think about our future on Earth.

Today, abandoned places are common subjects for photographers of all skill levels. From dilapidated buildings to uninhabited islands, there is a seemingly endless supply of photography subjects available. Sadly, the proliferation of “ruin porn” has cheapened the intrinsic value of abandonment photography somewhat. Property owners who have abandoned structures have taken greater care to deter potential photo takers, sometimes even renting the grounds out for grazing land, or worse, the structures themselves as AirBnB's that probably shouldn't exist due to health and safety concerns.

Still, in my opinion, no subject inspires adventure photographers like an abandoned structure does. Whether it's a crumbling old house or even an entire abandoned ghost town, I find myself drawn to these places as if there is something about them that can't be found anywhere else.

I Was An Underestimated And Impatient Little Girl

I was an underestimated and impatient little girl growing up, which led to me being misunderstood and even bullied. I felt like I wasn't good enough to hang out with the popular kids in school because I didn't play sports or try out for school plays; I just liked reading stories and writing about my dreams, which eventually made me realize that I wanted to become a full-time writer when I grew up.

I was always a pretty happy kid, but I wasn't particularly confident. I didn't know what I was good at, even though my mother told me to be proud of my accomplishments. No matter how many achievements I had, though, it never seemed like enough for me.

I was also impatient. I didn't want to go to school. I perceived modern education as a means of simply delaying and postponing the experiences of life. This made my parents anxious because they wanted me to go to college and earn my degree.

The hardest part of growing up is knowing that we can't always have what we want. I realized as a little girl, there were many things I wanted but my parents told me I couldn't have it. Not only was I disappointed that

things didn't turn out how I planned them to be, but also how impatient I was.

It wasn't until later on in life did I realize that patience is something you learn throughout life; not everyone is gifted with their best trait from birth. Patience isn't something you're born with; it's a quality that's grown within you over time – and practice makes perfect.

Every so often, someone in a position of authority gives me permission to do something I'm working on. It's usually a special or exciting moment that changes everything – it's literally how I became a professional writer. The thing is, I never actually stopped looking for gatekeepers or other people who might give me permission to go ahead with something I want to do. Now, if I don't receive permission - which happens frequently - it might mean that perhaps my idea isn't interesting enough yet. More likely, there are obstacles or roadblocks in my way from realizing that idea; it just hasn't taken its true shape just yet.

Those of us who are underestimated are stronger than we look; we know what it's like to prove people wrong, so we won't take no for an answer. It also helps us to get more out of life – to enjoy every moment because our time here is limited. We have little tolerance for excuses, even when they aren't our own. We live in

pursuit of big dreams, knowing that only through hard work and perseverance can they become reality.

Whatever your dream, there's something to be said for turning your longings into action. No one is going to hold your hand. No one is going to do it for you. You have to put in your time, effort, and energy into what you want in life.

Nothing will be handed to you on a silver platter. So, when you decide what it is that you want, there's no room for excuses because you can't change other people. Put in your time, give your best effort, and take responsibility for yourself.

Life is short. It's also unpredictable, and nobody knows that better than kids. An 8-year-old can't possibly imagine a world in which she'll be middle-aged one day—and she probably doesn't have a lot of patience for adults who try to make her wait. Even though it might not seem like it sometimes, kids know that time goes by quickly. So, remember to live in today – because it's all we have.

I Prefer To Avoid The Trappings Of Modern Life

I don't have cable television, a radio, or a newspaper subscription. You might say that I'm living in the past, but I'm actually living in the present. I'm not avoiding modern day life, I'm simply choosing not to partake in some of its trappings.

The world has changed since the time of my youth and for better or worse, it is changing faster now than ever before. As such, if I want to maintain my sanity and stay grounded in reality I need to take responsibility for what's important and spend my time on those things rather than everything else.

My goal is to live mindfully by focusing on what really matters while ignoring what doesn't. I have made a conscious effort to spend less time watching streaming TV programs and surfing the internet, reading newspapers and magazines, listening to podcasts, and watching mindless videos on YouTube. I intend to spend more time in nature, maintaining our property, and spending more quality time with Amelia instead of checking email and other things I can't control.

One might say that I am rejecting modernity but they would be wrong; I am not rejecting anything

because as far as I can tell we are all embracing this new era, in one way or another, whether we like it or not.

In a world where we are constantly inundated with notifications, dings, and beeps, it can be easy to forget the simple joys of a handwritten letter. I have a penchant for the lost art writing and receiving letters from pen pals, one that I refuse to let die. There's something about taking the time to sit down and put pen to paper that feels much more personal than firing off a text or an email.

When someone takes the time to write you a letter, they're telling you that they want to share what they're thinking and feeling in the moment. We don't need any other distractions – just one another. There is nothing like reading a letter in the morning while having my bagel with lox and cream cheese and dark roast coffee.

In this fast-paced, constantly-connected world, it's easy to forget how to slow down and have a conversation. We've lost the art of effective communication, and as a result, we often miss out on important opportunities to connect with others in meaningful ways. In turn, we feel lonely, even when having a long list of followers and Facebook friends. It's time to remember that human connection, one-on-one and in small groups, is one of the most important needs for real happiness.

I remember my high school English teacher who always encouraged me to be mindful and focus on my goals. I wrote down a list of what I wanted to achieve and talked about it with him regularly. This really helped me stay on track and avoid getting caught up in things that didn't matter. As I've gotten older, I've continued to do this and it's really helped me live a more fulfilling life.

One thing I used to worry about was how society constantly tells us how we should act or look. There are so many messages coming at us through media, advertisements, social media – there's no way for us not to be influenced by them! To avoid all these messages from seeping into our lives too much, I try to limit my time online as much as possible. It can feel impossible sometimes but it's worth it for me because I want to keep feeling like myself rather than someone else's idea of who they think I should be.

I wanted to retire by age 40, buy a farm, and I deeply wanted to get married to a woman who shared similar interests as me. I set out to achieve these goals, and for years and years, I saved money; eventually I bought a farm, met Amelia, and eventually we married.

But, avoiding the trappings of modern day life was harder than I thought. I had to learn to live without cable TV, and because we live in Vermont, also with limited cellphone coverage. It was tough at first, but eventually I got used to it. Now, I'm happier and

healthier because of it. I spend more time outside with my wife and friends, read more books (some from the library), listen to music on vinyl instead of the radio, sleep better, eat healthier, and write almost every morning. For me, avoiding the trappings of modern day life is a necessity in order to stay sane in today's society.

In a world constantly trying to sell us things we don't need and telling us we're not good enough, it's important to focus on ourselves. When we devote time to things that truly matter, we learn what truly matters, and what doesn't. For me, that means spending time with my wife, getting lost in a good book, and taking care of my mental and physical health. If we can focus on ourselves, we can be happy and content despite what the world tells us. We will feel more grounded and find success much easier.

I started to feel like I was getting lost in the shuffle of everyday life. I was letting my phone dictate how I spent my free time, and I wasn't really living in the moment. That's when my wife suggested we start journaling our thoughts and feelings. We write in Moleskine notebooks and use computers to write our blogs. This has helped us to stay present and connect with our thoughts and emotions.

The act of journaling also made me realize how some days I lose connection to who I am as a person. It feels like there is a big void sometimes within myself. But

now, I can look back on what we've written since we've been together, and see how much progress we've made both as individuals and as a couple. We're learning more about ourselves every day, and it makes me happy to know that I'm not alone in this struggle for authenticity.

I used to be a habitual multi-tasker. I would have several tabs open on my computer, I'd be talking on the phone, and I'd be working on a project all at the same time. I eventually realized that this wasn't sustainable, as I was never really focusing on any one thing, and I was instead getting scattered.

Realizing this, my wife and I decided to adopt a minimalist lifestyle. We decluttered our home and got rid of anything that we weren't using. Now, we focus on doing one thing at a time. We have the things we enjoy, such as books and toy trains, and other collectables, and minimal furniture. This has helped us to be more productive and to enjoy every moment more. We find that as soon as we are done with one task, we can move onto another without being interrupted. It also helps us to spend less money because instead of buying things for one purpose, we buy things for many different purposes.

My cameras are my prized possessions because they help me keep track of my life in a way that nothing else can. I love my cameras because they allow me to capture memories and moments that I would otherwise miss. I can document my life and the lives of those

around me with ease, and I never have to worry about losing a photo or having it stolen. I take a lot of pictures here at our farm. The skies continue to shine down upon us, gracing the landscape with beautiful blue cloudscaped skies that complete the rural landscape.

I used to drive to a park almost everyday. I would walk around, admiring the scenery and getting some exercise. This too became unsustainable and unnecessary; fortunately, our farm became our own private park. As such, I started spending more time outside, maintaining and enjoying the property. I found that I didn't miss public parks at all, as I feel happier and more connected to nature here on our own property.

I still make time to get out into nature, but I also prioritize spending time with my wife and close friends. I find that these relationships are more fulfilling and provide me with the support I need to avoid the traps of modern day life. Weather permitting, I can go fully naked on my property anytime without restrictions. The absence of clothes keeps me mindful and present in the moment. I also prefer to go barefoot as much as possible, as this helps me feel more grounded and connected to the earth.

The reality is that we live in a hyper-connected world where people spend too much time indoors or on their phones. That's why it's important to disconnect

once in awhile—to reconnect with ones true self and the environment around us.

I was always insecure and cared about what other people thought when I was younger. I would constantly second-guess myself and my decisions. It wasn't until I realized that no one's opinion matters but my own that I started living my life for myself. Aside from the opinion of my wife, I couldn't care less about what other people think. I know what I want and I simply go after it. What other people think is their problem, not mine.

Instead of simply getting caught up in the trap of modern day life, I instead stay focused on my goals. I write down my goals, then discuss them with my wife. If my wife and I conclude that they're worthwhile, I pursue them.

I don't follow a schedule or routine anymore; instead, my wife and I spend the day doing whatever we want to, staying connected and grounded in the moment, and we go to bed when we feel tired, and wake up in the morning when we feel refreshed. Others are often skeptical of our lifestyle, but we wouldn't have it any other way.

Girl.

Bedroom

Almost 4 AM on a Thursday

Content

Half crazy, half awake

Half my life spent in half costume never really living

I can be a hero

I can be a friend

I can be a lover

I can hide the pain, feature the triumphs, and forget the failures

I married a girl

I dress girl

I live girl

I am girl

Authentic.

Rehearse a dialog

Write a poem

Write all night

Watch the sunrise

I like you, I love you, I adore every facet of you.

I've seen your highs, your lows, every emotion of you.

Together and apart.

I know you.

I see the real you.

Look, the sky, the ground, the river, the sun, the moon.

Girl, girl, girl, girl, girl, girl, girl, girl, girl.

Naked, and girl.

Being with you. Love, lust, passion, trust. Door open.
Freedom to drift. Drift away into now.
This is me, this is who I am, and I am thrilled to be
alive.

I lay awake.
Cannot sleep.
Naked and girl.

I've Lived My Life As A Prelude To A Mystery

I've lived my life as a prelude to a mystery, and the only clues I have are the feelings that are evoked in my heart by what I know about it so far. I've wondered whether or not things in my life were ever what they appeared to be, and even today, I still have my own doubts. Maybe it was never supposed to happen, but it's here now, and here I will stand, forevermore because of what I've created out of sheer will, determination, and love.

I woke like a creature of the waiting sun; another sleepless night. I climbed out of bed and stumbled into the living room, yawning. I retrieved my books from my desk and crawled back into bed, and began reading one of them. The words were like little drops of rain slipping in through the window screen. They mixed with the sounds outside until all I could hear was a watery echo inside my head.

I felt I was being pulled away from myself by the sentence I wanted to write down: I longed for it to be something precious. Waves of melancholy rise up in me again and wash over me, just when I think that they are finally gone for good. Still, these waves always return, each stronger than ever before. It's as if they have no place else to go, being here inside of me. Yet, there must

be some way to set them free. I often seek to relieve the pressure through the expression of words, ferrying strong emotions out to the great ocean of entropy that lies beyond in the realms of thoughts finally let go into the great beyond.

Still, there are other things about me that no one knows. These are the secrets that others might not be able to fully comprehend, and for now, they are only for me. I do not speak of them, as I know not only am I yet ready to reveal any of them, but these things know their own time to show themselves. They require more time before they can truly be born into expressible form. In the meanwhile, I continue traveling farther into myself than ever before, discovering more unknown mysteries within myself that lie in wait behind doors marked private.

The trials I continue to face on the daily each leave behind signposts, guiding me down a life-path bent on traveling on roads no one else has yet traveled. Yet, these future paths still only exist as potential futures, awaiting me to arrive so they can begin taking shape and in due time assume their actual forms.

Sometimes when I open my eyes at night and look out through my bedroom window up into those vast fields of cosmic radiation, with their billions of separate unconnected points like fractal branches extending into infinity. It is only when I'm lying in bed at night staring

at this incredible miracle of universal harmony that I recognize my own relative insignificance; only then, do things truly become real in my mind.

Summer Nights And Electric Twilight

What makes you feel alive? What makes you feel like you're vibrating in tune with the universe? I personally associate these sensations with warm summer nights and gorgeous electric twilight. But, why are they so important to our sense of well-being? Is it purely nostalgia, or does this phenomenon have an objective basis?

Electric twilight is more intense than your average sunset. You can't describe the sensation of twilight in terms of light. So, what is it about that time of day that makes us feel so passionate? The answer lies not with our sight but rather with our moods, in particular, how an electric twilight can pull out deep emotions from within us.

As the evening sets in, you'll notice that colors have all but disappeared from your surroundings, leaving only shades of grey behind. While this might not seem like a lot on its own, these shades evoke a feeling which some say is somehow related to longing or mystery. The sky has turned dark, so the horizon is less visible and in turn one's thoughts drift off into the unknown.

Imagine being stuck on a deserted island by yourself; there's nothing around except for your lonesome self-reflection. Now imagine you were stranded at dusk; while waiting for help would be difficult enough during daylight hours, darkness amplifies feelings of desperation and abandonment. A different type of loneliness settles over you because no matter where you look there's not another soul around.

To this day I am confounded with feelings of electric twilight - intense yet fleeting - which resonate long after their passing. Every person who experiences it will have their own unique interpretation. Some believe it reminds them of childhood summers when they had plenty of time to explore without any worries or responsibility. Others find it brings them peace and tranquility knowing that the sun has set and things will finally slow down soon. Whatever may come tomorrow, tonight we revel in the present moment!

With a swift breeze whispering through the leaves and skies stretching across the world, even someone surrounded by people can feel alone. Yet something lingers at night which electrifies those sensations of solitude. They create moments full of reverie when, no matter how high-strung you were earlier in the day, everything suddenly feels calming and peaceful. It seems if anything has value at night it's experience itself and not tangible material goods.

These emotions bring me back to my days at summer camp when I was convinced life was about following my heart first then figuring out what to do later. Back then, it felt good to feel, even if it was at the expense of logic. The only problem with this mentality is eventually you do need to figure out what you want to do with your life. The sooner you can figure that out, the better.

This is where twilight becomes problematic. What once gave us a sense of direction has now become a vague hope that gets us nowhere. Suddenly it's not that freeing anymore and doesn't provide us with what we need to take control of our lives. This is often when frustration creeps in and leads to anger, which leads to regret. Sure, it's nice when you're lost in thought and oblivious to the hustle and bustle happening around you, but this doesn't last forever either.

Once the night falls and there's not a single sign of life around you, your inner demons start to rise up. The truth is that no matter how much you think you've mastered time and conquered your insecurities, they'll still have a way of resurfacing when least expected. That's what I've found at least, but it doesn't mean I'm giving up. No matter how many times I get my hopes up only to be disappointed, I can't stop trying again. After all, what else is there left for me to do? My sights are set on the future and whether or not my efforts are fruitful remains to be seen. But, in the meantime I am going to

continue chasing after this elusive feeling of electric twilight.

Electric twilight is not a connection, but moreover a confirmation of one's rumored desires. Twilight is found in the crevice of people, often written into the confluence of our veins. It's a withered reminder that life is a long work in progress. Throughout the twilight, I push to do something with myself. With my hands, I grasp the first draft of my ambitions with vigor, through twilight I fill an old jar with honey and ginger tea and drink it at dawn, as if too numb to carry any poison to morning.

The wine I share becomes watered down when frost crawls over riverbanks and feels just right under my toes before it crumbles into crystal shards below me as night rushes out from her kingdom's edge at dusk. I have never felt more connected than during these precious moments. I am no longer alone, but rather feeling, contented, wanting more. I bask in the light of evening until it washes away like sand slipping between my fingers.

As darkness descends, I lay back and close my eyes against the sky, holding onto every detail. It will all be gone soon enough, as I'm reminded that there is always a new day waiting for us. The sun has barely set on a garden where yellow flowers are swaying against green leaves in silent hues of golds and oranges. Swirls of mist

form and dissipate around them, invisible kisses exchanged by fairies. Above them, black branches frame the horizon until everything disappears into darkness again.

I Have So Many Thoughts, But Have Lost My Breath To Say The Words I Need To Speak

I have so many thoughts, but have lost my breath to say the words I need to speak. I'm left with only the pressured space between my ears to push them out through my mouth and into the open air of the world around me. My mind is an unstoppable machine, constantly churning out ideas which spill out of the sides of my cranium onto every square inch of my brain matter. But, I can't find it in myself to give these things form and substance through articulation of thought and word.

It's hard enough being a loner. Suddenly, after moving to Vermont, all of my life's problems seemed to pile on top of me. This only gets harder when, aside from Amelia, I feel like there's nobody around to listen or care about what I'm going through. It's frustrating when all I want is someone to listen or talk to, and while Amelia serves this job better than anyone else ever has, it would still be nice to have another voice involved.

It feels like no matter how much I try, there is always something blocking my voice from coming out. So, I spend my days writing down my thoughts, trying to take down the things in my head that need attention. I

lost all of my friends from my New York days, and I feel as if nobody truly understands what I'm going through. Only Amelia seems to fully understand everything about my situation, and I'm eternally grateful that she still cares and loves me.

It's a feeling that's very difficult to describe – it feels like something is in my throat and I can't breathe because of it. Of course, I'm not actually choking on anything; it's the result of an overabundance of thoughts and memories resurfacing when I least expect them. These moments of overwhelming remembrance make me feel nervous and anxious all day long, unable to focus on anything else other than the scenes in my own mind.

My heart is heavy with pain and sorrow. I know I am not alone in my sadness, as Amelia constantly reminds me, and it's not a sign of weakness if I inevitably reach out for help from others. She constantly reminds me that it's okay to take care of myself first before taking care of everyone else around me. I have to constantly remind myself that life is a marathon, not a sprint. Still, it takes time to turn things around again after going through hard times like these.

A Sense Of Introspection And Reflection

As I sit down to write about my life, I am filled with a sense of introspection and reflection. It is a task that requires not only a steady hand but also a sharp mind and a fluent pen. I am drawn to the idea of exploring my past, of understanding how I have arrived at this moment in time.

My mind wanders back to the early days of my childhood, to memories of playing in the park and chasing after butterflies. These innocent moments were the seeds from which my curiosity and creativity grew. As I grew older, I found myself drawn to books, to the stories and ideas that lay within their pages. I read voraciously, immersing myself in new worlds and perspectives, seeking knowledge and understanding.

As I write about my life now, I am struck by the many twists and turns that have brought me to this point. There have been moments of joy and moments of sadness, moments of triumph and moments of defeat. But through it all, I have remained steadfast in my pursuit of understanding, of seeking out the truths that lay beneath the surface of everyday life.

So, I write not only to understand my past but also to chart a course for my future. It helps me reflect on the choices I have made and the paths I have taken, and to find within them the seeds of possibility for the years to come. Life is a journey, and I am grateful for the chance to be the author of my own story.

Nostalgia And The Loss Of Childhood Memories

When I reflect upon the evanescence of my childhood memories, I am engulfed in a maelstrom of complex emotions. I'm still seeking to navigate the ebb and flow of sentiments that crash upon my consciousness, like waves upon the shore of an ever-changing sea.

In this moment of contemplation, I find myself consumed by a bittersweet feeling, born of the realization that my childhood memories are slipping through my grasp like grains of sand in an hourglass. The pangs of loss that assail me are keen and poignant, as I attempt to cling to the vestiges of my past, even as they elude me.

As I sit and meditate on the ephemeral nature of memory, I am struck by a deep-seated sense of melancholy. The cherished recollections that once defined me are now dissipating like smoke in the wind, leaving behind a void that is both haunting, and bewildering.

What does it mean, I wonder, to lose a part of oneself that was once so intrinsic to our being? As I struggle to make sense of this loss, I am forced to confront the reality that I am no longer the same person

that I was in those halcyon days of youth. The very essence of who I am is in a state of perpetual flux, shaped and molded by the passage of time and the inevitable march of progress.

Yet, even as I grieve for the memories that are slipping away from me, I cannot help but be awed by the sheer beauty and transience of life. The ephemeral nature of our experiences, the fleeting moments that we share with loved ones, and the ever-shifting sands of our identities are all part of the exquisite cosmos of existence.

In this moment, I am struck by a profound sense of gratitude for the memories that I still possess, and for the experiences that have shaped me into the person I am today. I am reminded that our past is not a fixed entity, but rather a fluid and ever-changing narrative, and that our memories are but a small part of the larger tapestry of life.

And so, even as I mourn the loss of joy from my childhood memories, I vow to live fully in the present, to seize the moments that life presents to me, and to create new memories that will sustain me in the years to come. For in the end, it is not the memories that define us, but the spirit of resilience, creativity, and joy that allows us to navigate the ever-changing landscape of life.

A Love Letter I Wrote To Amelia

My Dearest Love,

As I sit here, the thoughts of you meandering through the rivulets of my mind, I find myself reflecting on the true essence of love. Who needs a comfortable love when we have something so much deeper and meaningful? Ours is a love that transcends the boundaries of what is comfortable, mundane or ordinary. Ours is a love that soars to the highest peaks and plunges into the deepest valleys, embracing the raw and the real, the beautiful and the broken.

(Sparkle barn with Thomas and Amelia)

In your arms, I have found a sanctuary. A haven where I can bare my soul and share the deepest parts of my being. I want to hear about your heartbreaks and your struggles because they're a part of who you are, and I love every single part of you. I love to wrap my arms around you, and envelop you in the warmth of my love, soothing away the pain and the scars etched upon your heart.

Your struggles have molded you into the person you are today, and I cherish the resilience and fortitude that I see in your eyes. Your eyes are those that sparkle

with a fire that ignites the passion within me. A passion that burns fiercely, unyielding and unapologetic. Your heart, a magnificent kaleidoscope of love, wisdom, and vulnerability, enthralls me and has become the compass guiding my soul.

Let us not shy away from our own stories, my love, for they have shaped us into the extraordinary beings that we are. The tapestry of our lives, woven with threads of joy and sorrow, is richer and more vibrant than any comfortable love could ever be. And it is in this tapestry that I have found my home, nestled between the stitches, embroidered with your love.

Our journey together, paved with trials and triumphs, has led us to a place where our love blossoms with each passing day. Like a resplendent phoenix, our love rises from the ashes, renewed and reborn, more radiant and resilient than before. I vow to stand by your side, my beloved, as we continue to traverse this breathtaking odyssey, hand in hand, hearts intertwined.

With all my love,
Thomas

About the Author

Thomas Slatin was born and raised in New York City. She started writing and taking photos at the age of eight. In 1996, Thomas designed and published her first personal website, and TomSlatin.com was established in July 1998. He has been employed as a freelance writer, photographer, and website designer in various capacities since age 18.

In July 1998, Thomas was certified as an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT). Then, in 2001, she became a certified Firefighter. She served 22 years in the fire service, while also pursuing writing, photography, and website design part-time, shortly after being promoted to the rank of Fire & EMS Lieutenant Specialist, Thomas left the Fire and EMS service to pursue her lifelong dream of being a self-employed writer and photographer.

In 2020, Thomas moved to her forever home in Middletown Springs, Vermont, with her partner Amelia Phoenix Desertson. They travel, write, and photograph together, like equal partners in a mystery.