

ROLE REVERSAL, A Guy's Story

a performance for one act, maybe two or three

July 5, 2012

It's the day after the fourth of July, a month before my birthday. Not a day of significance. I woke up this morning and went to the gym. Two hours later I got home and took a shower and noticed I was still a guy. A guy, what does that mean? Think about that. Mostly it's something you take for granted. Not that I'm sort of radical feminist type guy or a guy's guy. I'm just a guy. Nothing special, a guy. I was born a guy in 1951 in Camden Arkansas. I have a brother who is guy and a Dad who is a guy. I haven't seen my brother in 18 years. He moved to Australia and my Dad, I talk to about once a month if I remember to call him. My mom who is not a guy died in 1995. I said "died" not passed because I hate the word. It's about death not football. As a family we aren't close, separated by death and 10,000 miles. Not sure if it was always this way as memories get reinterpreted based upon where you are not where you have been. But there are some advantages to 19th century technologies. For example, the photograph. I can go back, open the scrap books passed on to me by my mother, carefully look at the pages and have my present day self make comments about my childhood and what it meant growing up to be a guy.

The day of my birth, August 6, 1951, the closest available weather station to **Camden, AR** (EL DORADO GOODWIN FIELD, AR), reported the following conditions:

High Temp: 98.1F

Low Temp: 64F

Average Temp: 80.8F

Dewpoint: 68.8F

Wind Speed: 3.9 Knots

Precipitation Amount: 0 Inches

Snow Depth: n/a

Observations: n/a

Camden, Arkansas, hot and humid, the languid south. Not so peaceful or easy if you happened to be black. We could take a historical tour of Arkansas and the so called “race wars” more accurately titled the history of ethnic cleansing and white terrorism of blacks in the post reconstruction south. Harsh you say, but true. Let’s not forget the civil rights movement’s biggest accomplishment was not about bus rides, lunch counters, bathrooms or schools. It was about ending white terrorism, plain and simple. White terrorism? Ok, since you asked. Post reconstruction in Arkansas, tolerable. And then it all came crashing down in a perfect storm that buried black folks. Urbanization and the Great Depression. Urbanization meant the development of a black middle class in Pine Bluff and Little Rock which was a threat to the agricultural elites. At the same time the lot of rural black and whites was disintegrating. Both whites and blacks were sharecroppers or participants in American feudalism. You worked somebody else land for a percentage of the crops in rent. You took the risk, as the costs were yours but the rent came off the top. You also got paid when they paid you. Late, shorted or whatever they could get away with. With the Great Depression of the 1890’s, nope not talking about the 1930’s. This was called the Great Depression before the Great Depression of the 30’s and before the Great Recession of 2008. Note they change the name to make you think it’s different but it’s the same shit different day. Speculation, boom, bust, bank failures, foreclosures. Unemployment in 1894, 18.4%. Sound familiar? What wasn’t familiar was that poor whites were being placed in the same economic circumstances as poor blacks. That was a problem for the elites. In order to divert attention from class and economic issues, time to set up the “old okey doke”. For those of you that don’t know, there’s okey doke meaning yes and the okey doke which means a con or be the one’s who’s being conned, the patsy. So if I say fan the flames of racial supremacy and pay no attention to that man behind the curtain, that’s the okey doke.

This is Arkansas during the Gilded Era. The Cotton Pickers Strike of 1891, the Hampton Race War of 1892, Canfield Race War of 1896, Little County Race War of 1899, Forest City Riot of 1899, Nevada County Race War of 1897, Plumerville Conflict, Bonanza Race War of 1904, St. Charles Lynching of 1904, Argenta Race Riot of 1906, El Dorado Race Riot of 1910, Walnut Ridge Race War of 1912, Elaine Race Riot of 1919. Details are different but the conflicts are rooted in blacks asserting their rights, attempting to organize for better conditions or defending their property and lives; whites responding under the pretext of some racial slight with intimidation, deadly force, and extra-judicial killings to eliminate labor competition or drive blacks from the area.

Pick one. The Elaine Race Massacre. On September 30, 1919, 100 black sharecroppers attended a meeting of the Progressive Farmers and Households Union of America in a church. Armed

guards were placed around the church to prevent disruptions by whites. With everyone exercising their second amendment rights, shoot outs happen. A white railroad security officer was killed and a deputy wounded. Next morning sheriff has a posse. One problem, blacks outnumbered whites almost ten to one in the area. While there was little resistance from the local populace, the fear of blacks led to a mob of 500 to 1,000 armed whites from other counties and from across the river in Mississippi descending upon the town. The Governor upon the request of County officials sent U.S. troops. The result, open season on Negroes. They called it an insurrection. I guess they knew of what they spoke but the Negroes just didn't understand. Conceptually, we thought we were Americans. Our stand should have been "when in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with anotherit is their right, it is their duty" to rebel. Rebellion can be costly. H. F. Smiddy, one of the white witnesses to the massacre, swore in an eye-witness account in 1921 that "several hundred of them... began to hunt negroes and shooting [*sic*] them as they came to them." In 1925, Sharpe Dunaway, an employee of the *Arkansas Gazette*, alleged that soldiers in Elaine had "committed one murder after another with all the calm deliberation in the world, either too heartless to realize the enormity of their crimes, or too drunk on moonshine to give a continental darn."

But this isn't a story about that, at least not directly, it's a story about a guy.

What is about Camden, Arkansas, why there? Because Dad who was a guy who operated a drugstore. My father was a pharmacist. A black professional who went to Delaware State on the GI Bill and then Xavier in New Orleans where he received his professional degree. Why he went to Camden, I don't know. Maybe it was because he couldn't take that government job he was offered. Let's see VA Hospital, Jackson, Mississippi, 1951, I think not. He has never said. Maybe I should ask him but he might not remember or not tell me the truth. He eventually got that government job and was a pharmacist for the VA Hospital in Fort Snelling Minnesota of Dred Scott fame for 30 years. But that's later in the story. Besides guys don't talk or if they do it's about sports, weather or current events. Back in my era, you never asked your father questions, not even "May I use the car?" It was yes sir, no sir.

Yes, Camden was where I was born, at home not in a hospital. They built a hospital in Camden but people who looked like my mother who wasn't a guy, weren't allowed. My brother always used to tease me by saying I was born on a couch. Not true. I could say this is the start of why we aren't close but it would be a lie of no small exaggeration and it's not necessary for this story.

What do I remember about Camden? I remember being a little guy. There was a cesspool at the end of the block where one day the chickens accidently fell in and turned blue. I remember my mother teaching in a school and a girl walking across a branch over a creek falling off and into the water. I remember Mrs. Shumpert (*sic*) with her turquoise and white Nash Metropolitan convertible with spare tire kit. I remember a heavy rain storm and watching King Kong, another allegory of a misunderstood black man and being afraid he was going to come out the TV and

get me. I ran home as we didn't own a TV, in the rain. I dropped my teddy bear and begged my mom to go get it. She wouldn't; thirty years later, she gave me one for Christmas so it came out ok in the end, I guess. I remember my brother falling out of the swing and breaking his arm. I could say I pushed him and that's another reason we aren't close but that would be a lie also.

Here's a photo of we three guys, my dad, my brother and me and my dad's 1954 Chevy. My dad always bought Chevy's. Every four years he would get a new one, a blue 1954 Custom, a blue and turquoise 1958 Biscayne, a blue 1962 Bel Aire, a maroon 1966 Impala, a green Caprice Classic 1970 with vinyl roof, a maroon 1974 Monte Carlo, your personal size luxury vehicle, a maroon 1978 Monte Carlo and then he did the unthinkable, he bought a Mercury Cougar. While it was a personal size luxury vehicle, it was a Ford product. He said he always wanted to own a Lincoln. So I said, "Why didn't you buy one?" as my brother and I were both long out of college. He eventually did but not until after he had acquired his third wife.

We are standing by a lake, posed with cowboy hats and holsters and guns. Posed by my father, while he didn't think of us as props, he thought of us as children. A belief he held on to that would cause many problems down the road. Notice the guns. I assume that this was my first pistol even though I can't be totally sure as I was three or four at the time. Since then I've owned many from water guns to ray guns to cap guns to an air rifle. I've only owned one adult gun meaning one that fired bullets, a .22 automatic. Bought it from a co-worker at the time; a woman who owned a blue 1965 Mustang fastback, rode a motorcycle and smoked cigarettes. She also worked in the construction industry back in the day when there weren't many women doing that. Guys used to try to play her for stupid but usually only once. I had it for a week until I came to my senses and decided that guns and I weren't good match after I almost pulled it out on some asshole who cut me off driving. Guns and that false sense of omnipotence. But in America and you have to assume that if you're packing, so is everyone else. In my opinion that unless you're hunting, it's best to avoid the situation where you think a gun gives you an advantage.

Even at three or four however, as a guy, it's never too early to learn the utility of violence. H. Rap Brown once said, "Violence is American as cherry pie". And Martin Luther King Junior said, "America is the largest purveyor of violence in the world today". That statement gets a lot less play than "I have a dream..." But if you consider that America spends as much on weaponry as the rest of the world combined, you'd have to agree.

What is it about violence that makes it so attractive? Admit it guys, we love it and we practice it religiously whether it's playing in the backyard as children, on the football field as immature adults, against other guys that we want to intimidate, against women, against our sons, daughters and our wives. We boast about it. We practice it overtly and in small subtle ways that undermines everything that we say is important to us. Sometimes we do it in jest without thinking; other times willfully and malevolently intended to injure and to give us control. All the while forgetting that to control is to be controlled by the very thing we seek power over.

My father left the South in 1955. The family headed north to Detroit, before it was Motown, it was the Paris of the Midwest, the architecture and landscapes, boulevards; it also boasted the largest number of black businesses in the United States; 1/6 of the country's jobs; all befitting the fourth largest city in the country. I don't remember much about the trip but I do remember our address, 1571 South Liebold Street. I remember Jeffers Elementary School. They changed the name to Mark Twain at some time after we had long gone. My mother said that I would have to learn the way home from school as she wouldn't be walking me home every day. I didn't believe her. One day she didn't come and I cried. The school safety patrol showed me the way home. Feeling like you've been abandoned, I never forgot that and the way home. Was that unnecessarily cruel? I don't know. Maybe it's in the same category as the lost teddy bear.

I don't remember any white families in our neighborhood but I do remember Timothy McDaniels and Aaron Milner. They were my best friends. Timothy lived across the street. He had a boxing ring in his back yard. He would regularly beat the crap out me. He was all arms, gloves and fury. I had no defense and didn't know how to run. I never got any better and learned to accept the beatings until I gave up boxing at age 8. There was a large field behind his house overgrown with trees, weeds, hills and rocks. Later they would build a warehouse and a freeway. But before that we used to make bows and arrows from the saplings and fold over bottle caps to make arrow heads and proceed to shoot them at each other. No one ever got killed from those games. In ten years, it would no longer be a game, the city burned and many died.

Aaron was different. He was in my class in the first grade. He lived down the block. I met him one day when the teacher gave me a star on a project. I was keen on taking it home to show my mother. He apparently didn't take kindly to that as he was used to being the star. On the way home, he knocked the paper from my hand proceeded to grind it into the ground, a judicious use of violence. I was apoplectic and called him every curse that a seven year could muster as I chased him home but I couldn't catch him as he was faster. To prove his point he broke into a skip and I still couldn't gain any ground. Now that the pecking order was firmly established, me on the bottom; we could all become friends. Aaron's house had a finished basement. There he had this huge set up of cowboys, Indians, and Fort Apache interspersed with WWII army men and a howitzer that would shoot wooden projectiles. When we played, he always got to keep the howitzers. Try as we might Timothy and I always came up on the short end as twentieth century technology trumps nineteenth century every time. As young boys we were becoming socialized to the effective use of superior firepower.

Here's another photo of my brother and I standing in front of our house. It's Easter Sunday in our new suits and hats. My grandfather said no gentleman is properly dressed unless he is wearing hat or something to that effect. We went to church and Sunday school every Sunday. I remember my first communion and later on I would win contests for memorizing the most bible verses. I haven't been to church other than for weddings or funerals since I left home for college. While now I would admit to being a confirmed atheist, I found in the bible interesting stories and allegories. While I can no longer quote scripture, I also find it amusing that those that do use it

as an end to an argument as opposed to the beginning of discussions on the nature of the world. But if you want to study violence and our cultural justification of it as a means of control, the King James Edition would be an enjoyable place to start.

I remember one evening they went out and left my brother and I home alone. By then we had achieved status and had a family TV, a Muntz. We were left watching a western, of course. The iconic American tribute film. It is amazing how much of our collective past has been viewed through the western. Funny thing is that from a commercial standpoint, westerns weren't all that successful. The highest grossing, adjusted to current ticket prices, western of all time is "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid", \$558 million released in 1969 compared to \$1.6 billion for "Gone With the Wind". These second highest grossing western? Guess! In a role reversal, it's the story of a black man and his white sidekick, "Blazing Saddles" released in 1974 with \$500 million in ticket sales. It ranks 49th all-time, just behind, "Bambi". The only other western in the top 200 movies is "Dances with Wolves" a revisionist western, with \$346 million in adjusted ticket sales and 128 overall. You say that's unfair because Hollywood didn't do summer blockbusters until more recently. Well, guess again, of the top 50 highest grossing movies of all time, 26 were released before 1974. I'll let you speculate as to why Hollywood used to crank out westerns like popcorn when objectively they weren't that popular. The frontier, the loner with an inherent sense of right and wrong comes to town, reluctantly takes up the gun and brings justice, rides off into the sunset, sometimes with the girl, sometimes not, always with the horse, though. It's a lovely myth and we're still living off it and paying the price. Iraq, cough, cough.

But this isn't about westerns, at least not directly; it's the story of a guy from the Paris of the Midwest. Back to the movie. It's the final confrontation scene where the bad guy and the good guy are fighting on the edge of a cliff. The bad guy looks like he gets the drop, he misses, the good guy counters and the bad guy goes sprawling backwards over the cliff. My brother and I thought that looked cool so we thought we would re-enact it. What could go wrong? We stand on the sofa, he takes a Hollywood stunt man swing at me and I go helicoptering off. It was a wonderfully perfectly executed dive except for one thing. I forget to account for the coffee table, the one I carved a star into leg of, and I face planted on the edge. Blood everywhere. I could blame it on my brother and say that's why we aren't close but we were kids and he did take me to my bed and made me lie down until our parents got home. They were freaked. I wound up at the emergency room and had 8 stitches put in above my right eye.

No sibling conflict yet, but the conflict in the relationship between my mother and my father became noticeable. This occurred in-between bouts of affection. I remember shouting and screaming one evening after we had been sent to bed. I came downstairs to look and I saw my mother holding a knife and telling my father not to come any closer. I remember her making some comment about a bastard child and he should just move and go there. When they saw me, they stopped. I didn't know what the word meant at the time but to this day I wonder if I have a half brother or sister somewhere who I have never met. I supposed I could have asked as I got older but it would still be awkward to say, "Hey Pops, did you screw around on mom and knock

somebody up?” Or try to empathize and say “Did you do it because you were a guy and you could or were you missing something and you didn’t know what it was?” As I got older, I realized it wasn’t all Pops. Things didn’t get any better for the next 20 years and got worse on many occasions, got worse for all concerned.

My father was belligerent when he drank or became angry. He would walk around not saying anything to anybody and slamming doors to let you know he was upset. My brother and I used to cower when he was like that. He also used to dole out the punishment at the slightest perceived infraction of his understanding of the way things were supposed to be. He had a belt. He used to call it the “brown mule”. It wasn’t that we got a lot of whippings and they stopped when we got older but it was enough to make one repress the memories. Was this abuse? Objectively by today’s standards. Yes. Was my father a tyrant? Yes. Was it all that unusual for the era. No. In talking to friends and acquaintances over the years, many suffered through the same patterns of conflict and drinking. It’s those dirty little secrets of domestic violence and control in family life in the 1950’s. Everybody wasn’t Leave it to Beaver or Father Knows Best.

In 1960, we moved again to Minneapolis, Minnesota. My father accepted a position as a pharmacist at the Veteran’s Hospital at Fort Snelling. He stayed there for 40 years, unlike Dred Scott. Everyone knows of the Dred Scott decision from 11th grade history, right? The version we got was that his owner and he conspired to set up this test case on slavery and after it went against them, the owner freed him. Except, this is America and myth is more important than truth plus it’s easier. But the details that get glossed over are always fun and exciting and revealing. Scott, was born in Virginia into slavery as somebody’s property. Relocated to St Louis with the family and sold to a doctor in the US Army. Traveled with his owner, I deliberately choose owner not master. Their travels took them to Fort Snelling, there’s the connection, where the doctor was stationed for two years until he was transferred to Louisiana then back to Missouri. When the doctor died in 1842, Scott offered to purchase his and his family’s freedom. His widow refused, ruh, oh. Scott sued for his freedom in Missouri in 1847 based upon his in residence Minnesota as it was a free territory. Over a period of the next three years, the case wound its way through the legal system. In 1850, he won his and his family’s freedom based upon Missouri legal doctrine at time, “once free always free” because as slavery was illegal in Minnesota and he was a free man during his time there. This begs the question, “Dude, You were a free man, why did you go back to Missouri?” Misguided loyalty, family obligations? The decision was appealed to the Missouri Supreme Court. In 1852, the Missouri Supreme Court over ruled 28 years of precedence, and said “hey, times change” and slavery is “God’s will”. Nothing about precedence that can’t be changed to conform to your current political views. Sound familiar? Nothing about just calling “balls and strikes” or pretense of non-political impartiality. There is some evidence the Court knew there was a storm coming and there was no way to stop it, and so they decided, let’s be smart and punt it to the federal government. Cowardice or genius, you decide! Not being a man to give up so easily, Scott took the case to federal court where he lost in the lower court with the court probably and correctly

deciding that their ruling would be irrelevant no matter how it decided. Scott then appealed to the United States Supreme Court. The storm was about to hit with full fury. The Court in one of its most famous or infamous rulings with 8 of the 9 judges, all southerners please note, concurring, stated that “a black man had no rights that a white man was bound to respect”, blacks couldn’t be citizens and if blacks were property, then any of the laws or compromises prohibiting slavery in the territories or states were unconstitutional as you could not be deprived of your property. That is original construction, folks, the Constitution as a property rights document. The question put off for 70 years couldn’t be avoided anymore. Ruh oh. Game on, War on. If the decision had tragic implications for the country, in the end it didn’t have as much for the Scotts.

In the mean time, one of those role reversals, sex, ju ju kind of things, the good doctor’s widow had gotten remarried...to a staunch abolitionist... from Massachusetts... and a congressman. Hmm... how did this not come up during the courtship? Maybe, he didn’t consider that his wife to be had opinions or ideas that he needed to consider? I prefer to give him a little more credit as abolitionists and feminists were mutually supportive at the time but then again he was a “Know Nothing” and they hated immigrants and Catholics, before he became a Republican. However, I do understand that when it’s good, there ain’t a whole lot of conversating going on; just heavy breathing and “yeah, that’s it, that’s it, like that?”, “yeah baby, that’s it”. Turns out, he didn’t find out that he owned, (as at the time, convention and law was that his wife’s property was his), the most famous slave in America until a month before the Court’s decision. I wonder how that breakfast table conversation went down. “Honey, there is something I have to tell you.” “What dear?” he said peering over the newspaper. “You own slaves”. “Oh?” “Dred Scott”. “Oh fuck, there goes my career and my reputation. Better do something, quick.” Too late, he was criticized nationwide for his apparent hypocrisy. However, in the end, he did the right thing and in 1857, the Scotts were freed. Scott died in 1858, a free man but he didn’t live long enough to contemplate the storm he had brought.

Back to Minnesota, we were lucky and we got out before Detroit crashed and burned. But going from 50% black population to less than 3% black population was a shock. Minnesotans were nice but were covert about their racism. Native Americans took most of the heat. Minneapolis at time had the highest percentage of urban Native Americans. They were treated like dogs, blacks were novelties. All in all, it was a homogeneous mix of Scandinavian, German, Lutheran with a Catholics thrown in. They didn’t pay much attention to Negroes until later. A family friend used to say that after the war (WWII), she literally knew almost every black person in town.

Minneapolis was a pleasant place to grow up but a few things stand out. There was a corridor in between Chicago Avenue to Nicollet Avenue down to the Parkway where blacks were informally redlined. The area was nice enough but if you were African American it was very hard if not impossible to buy a house outside that area. But the area had two of the better schools in the city. Our high school’s informal nick name, Marie Antoinette be damned, was the “Cake Eaters” and we acted like it. But stuff happens everywhere. I remember one summer I was attending a

program for smart kids. It was called “The Twin Cities Institute for Talented Youth” which is and sounds pretentious. Probably more accurate to say institute for kids who tested well or better on standardized tests. I was waiting for the bus at the end of the day on a busy street in downtown. I was fourteen at the time. I hear someone say, “What are you looking at, nigger?” I look up and there are three large scruffy dudes in a beat up car. One gets out and continues, “You’re lucky we don’t come over there and kick your ass!” I didn’t have a clue as to what to do as I had given up boxing at 8 but the part that has stuck with me was that at that moment, everyone turns and looks at me which makes me feel like I am the problem. I decided to do nothing, other than starting to cry and walking away to hide my tears. As a guy I would get much better at hiding my tears and my emotions.

And then there was an incident with one of my better friends who I am still in contact with. He had a girlfriend and sometimes we would go to her house after school with some of our other friends. The girlfriend’s father was old military...from the south. Ruh oh. You can see what’s coming, can’t you. One day my friend says to me that his girlfriend’s father said that it was ok for his daughter to be friends with me at school but he didn’t want me coming around their house. I was stunned. But to this day I wonder why she felt she couldn’t say that to me herself. Maybe she was embarrassed and I get that but maybe that’s the way she felt too. It altered the relationship between me and my friend and I never looked at her the same way again, either. Pretending to be hard isn’t any fun, either.

My brother and I started to slip apart during those formative middle and school years. My brother is/was a genius he scored perfect on his SATs back in the day when that meant something. No test prep courses, no taking multiple times, you just wake up Saturday morning, roll in and take it. He was tested as the child with the highest IQ in the City of Minneapolis. They wanted him to skip a couple of grades but my parents said no but they finally had to relent when it was obvious that his intellect surpassed his classmates considerably. As a result, while we are only 17 months apart in age, we were three years apart in school. Middle school’ers don’t hang out with grade school’ers and high school’ers don’t hang out with middle school’ers. We were doing different guy things under different sets of guy circumstances and rules. The other thing that drove us part was the comparison. Being the younger, everyone knew who my brother was and I couldn’t escape it. But the question that bothered me wasn’t “Are you as smart as your brother?” it was the negative, “You aren’t as smart as your brother, are you?” Talk about messing with a young guy’s head. As result I tried to succeed at everything he was successful at. I’m no dummy and I was in the 98th percentile in my SAT’s but when the standard is genius unless you are one of the chosen few, you are bound to fall short and I did. I thought of myself as a failure not as someone who was successful in their own right. You could reel off my accomplishments but to me they were never enough. I will give my parents credit, they never compared us which was the safe haven as far as that when.

I am pissed off about one thing however, I always wanted to learn how to play an instrument but even though we were middle class, my parents could only afford lessons for one of us, him as he

was the oldest. He tried saxophone and he was terrible. That brilliant mathematically mind sucked at music. I used to chuckle but it didn't get me the horn or the guitar which he tried later. I didn't get to take up music again until I went away to college. I bought a second hand flute for \$40 and took lessons. I learned that I didn't have to be the younger brother of a genius. I could be who I wanted to be. It was the beginning of this guy, me.

The safe haven from comparisons was not a safe haven from familial dysfunction. My brother took the worst of it. My father had to be in control of everything. I remember my brother trying to be open and honest and that caused him many problems. I remember my brother standing on our front lawn with his shirt torn and crying after he and my father had gotten into a dispute about his college choice or scholarship or something. I learned to lie. I said yes sir and no sir and then did what I was going to do anyway. You learn to hide in plain sight. I remember having this conversation with my father's third wife a few years ago who is the same age as I, 29 years his junior. He had told her that his sons could have never hung out at the hippie hangouts back in the day and she wanted to know that if it was true because she is no dummy and if you grew up in the sixties, you participated in some kind of shit, somewhere. When I didn't respond, she knew the answer and so did my father and he knew that he had been played. He didn't speak to me for the rest of the day. This is in response to events that had occurred over 40 years before. I thought to myself, WTF and "oh come on". Can a leopard change its spots? Some people say yes, but scientifically, the answer is no.

My brother went off to east coast Ivy League university at 16 in 1966 and basically never came home again. He was a professional student. Graduate degree at Berkeley; time at Stanford Research Institute, fellowships at Scripps Oceanographic, Woods Hole Oceanographic, Tufts, Brandeis and a certificate from Columbia. Along the way he turned down acceptances to Harvard and the University of Minnesota Medical Schools. He finally returned to Minnesota in 1981 to work for the Federal Reserve Bank. He drove up in a 1964 Lincoln, the car of father's desires, a Continental with suicide doors and Continental kit. You know with exterior mounted spare tire on above the bumper. He also had an original windsurfer strapped to the roof from his days in San Diego. The car was so long that you couldn't shut the door to my mother's garage where he parked it. And the windsurfers of the time were little more than a foam surfboard with keel and a sun fish sail stuck on it. He would take it out on Lake Harriet and people were duly impressed. He didn't stay in Minneapolis very long. Within the year, he had emigrated to Australia. He had gone there on a visit and told everyone he was going to move there. We all said, "sure". Three months later, he was gone. He has been back twice since. Once for our grandmother's 100th birthday and once to show off his new son. He didn't come back for mom's funeral. I was angry about that but I've let that one go. Funny if you look on a globe, you will notice that Australia is almost directly opposite from Minneapolis. You couldn't get any farther way if you tried. What that says, you'll have to ask him, I haven't.

Notice I said my mother's garage. By then my mother and father were divorced and she got the house. None too soon in my estimation. After my brother left 1966, I was there with for another

three years of high school and four years of college summers until I got a job after graduation and could afford to move out. It was not pretty at times. I remember my father throwing all of my mother's stuff out of their bedroom and she started sleeping in a different room. I remember my father locking the screen door so I couldn't get in if I wasn't in before he went to bed even though he knew I was out. This is in college, not high school. I would have to creep around and bang on my mother's window and she would have to get up and let me in. I remember my father banging doors and being sullen. I spent as little time home as possible. The incident I remember most is when I'm about 15 or so and my brother is now gone. I hear a commotion and fighting. I go downstairs as my room now is upstairs in the finished attic as my mother took my room downstairs. I see my father sitting on top of my mother choking her. I pause, then run over and start pounding on my father's back and screaming, "Leave my mother alone". He turns around and gives me this "who the fuck do you think you are, this ain't your business look". I run back upstairs, heart pounding and hide under the covers of my bed. I think about it and decide that whatever happens I wasn't going to take it and come out from under the covers. I hear footsteps but it's my mother coming up the stairs as my father had driven off in his car. She says to me something to the effect of "the next time don't do use your hands, pick up something and hit him, meaning my father, with it". Talk about emotional confusion, wrap a guy's head around that one. You've just witnessed your father presumably trying to kill your mother and your mother's response is that if it happens again, you should try to kill your father. Uhh...can you say mind fuck boys and girls? Luckily for all of us they weren't successful and they got that divorce, it just took them another 10 years to do it.

In 1969, I went off to college, my criteria being somewhere away from there. I discovered sex, drugs, rock and roll. I also discovered the things I liked to do as opposed to the things I thought I was supposed to like to do. I rediscovered art, poetry and music. I guess I got the art gene and my brother got the math gene. See, I'm still comparing.

I had sufficient sex and smoked a lot of weed at college but I didn't fall in love until 1973 in architecture school. Love? What is love? Not to get all technical and scientific but recent studies have said that love and sex are located in linked but different parts of the forebrain. Sex activates a part that deals with things that are inherently pleasurable like potato chips and chocolate, beer and orgasms, not necessarily in that order. Love activates the parts that associate pleasure with reward. So a lot of good sex could turn into that love thing. Also the part that is associated with love is closely related to the brain part associated with addiction. Sex equals reward equals love. So Bryan Ferry got it right, love is a drug. When that shit happens, forget it. You think pot over the last 40 years has gotten stronger because it's cultivated? Sex has been cultivating your brain for 10,000 years or more.

Back to the story. Great sex thought I was in love. Probably was. I was planning on where to buy a house, how many kids to have while she was planning on when to get her next fix. Silly me. She gets pregnant, I think great; she says no, not really. Her choice but the thought of it... I wanted to die as they say the first cut is the deepest. The only time in my life I ever seriously

contemplated suicide. Minnesota, wintertime, driving down I35W; it's the 46th street exit and I say I'm just going to drive my car into the abutment, you know because life isn't worth living, blah, blah, blah; I was headed straight for it at about 70 miles per hour. Then you know how everything slows down, I thought this is kinda stupid and headed up the off ramp to visit my mom. The full impact of that decision didn't occur to me until about a week later. It's still winter of course and winter in Minnesota means snow, lots of it. They have to plow the street and sidewalks and over the course of winter, it builds up into piles of dirty snow and ice that surround the corners and crosswalks like the Fort Apache in Aaron Milner's basement. These mounds get to be about three feet high with the melting and freezing and snowing. They usually have a little path carved so you can walk through that's about two to three feet wide. I'm in hurry and there's people going through the path and I don't want to wait. Problem? Nada. Solution! I'm young, I'm athletic, I'm cool so I'm just going to one step on the top and leap over and be on my way, suckers. However, as has happened previously in my life, it was a wonderfully perfectly executed leap, first step on the snow and the second step.... I forgot to account for my wardrobe. Wardrobe, you say? Well, footwear to be more specific. This is 1974 and platform shoes were in vogue for a young fashionista of the soon to be disco era. Fashion forward always for this cowboy. This is Minnesota, wintertime, ice and snow and I'm wearing three inch platform shoes, black with square toes. Right foot on top... left foot in the air... ass on the ground. Lucky for me it was dry. I lay for a second, jumped up and acted, hah, meant to do that headed back to the office. Later, I'm thinking metaphor, that's how life is; you fall down, you get up; it's that simple. Never thought about suicide again. Now that's not saying others haven't wanted to take me out, there was incident about six months later with my first new car, a Chevy Vega, my father's brand, a woman named Violet Porter, a 4000 pound Ford Torino wagon, a one way street, a third vehicle and a lamp post, a small town in Wisconsin, an uninsured motorist, arson and a 68 year old fugitive female but that's another story.

So what did I learn from this? I learned others had choices and they wouldn't always coincide with your desires. I also learned to become callous and indifferent. For some guys it takes a while and others grow into it unnaturally. I was somewhere in between becoming an asshole and becoming a flaming asshole. But I was good looking or so I was told, so I could get away with it. I also took up running. I needed to prove to myself that I was worth something and that I, this guy could do something. What better way to run away from who you are than by running.

It was the same late winter/early spring and I was at my mom's house. The house where I grew up was one block off Minnehaha Parkway. I was bored and I didn't want to listen to my mom. I put on my sneakers and said I was going to run down to the lake, about a mile there and a mile back. It was in the afternoon, warmish about 45 degrees and I started running and as I get to the lake, some kid asks me how far am I running? For some macho reason I said around the lake and back which was about five miles. I don't know why I said as I had never run that far in my life. He said, "You'll never make it". I took that as a challenge and on the way back I saw the kid and yelled, "I made it!" After that, I started to run a little more regularly. When I was

outside, I would fantasize about running in the Boston Marathon. Up and over Heartbreak Hill and into the chutes with the cheering crowd every step of the way. I didn't have a clue how to do it. Until I ran into a guy named Larry whose last name I don't recall now. I used to work out at the YMCA and play the city game. I would also run around the track that circled the gym overhead. I used to see Larry and he would wear this t-shirt that said Grandma's Marathon. I looked at him and thought, I'm in way better shape than him but he had done it and I hadn't. So the guy in me takes that as a challenge. I asked him and he said it was easy and on one level he was right but I had my sights set higher than on one level. This was the summer of 1976, an Olympic year and by now I'm into running. It's the start of the running boom. I'm watching the marathon and Frank Shorter who's the reigning gold medalist is getting dusted by Waldemar Cierpinski. Cierpinski hits the stadium and he does his victory lap at the same pace as his race and I say that's the guy I want to be. Turns out he wasn't being cool, he said later he didn't know how many laps of the stadium he needed to complete, so just to be safe he kept running because he didn't want to be caught. He finished 50 seconds ahead of Shorter about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a lap at their pace. East German, was he doping? Who knows? He still has the gold medal. Now he ran it a five minute per mile pace. So I thought to myself if he could run five I could run a six minute pace. I had no clue how difficult that really is. I also said I wanted to win at least one race. I was 25 and I had my work cut out for me. Running, the perfect metaphor.

I started...read a few books...and did everything wrong. I injured myself running indoors. I got a stress fracture in my third metatarsal. The doctor said he hadn't seen one of those since his Army days. I reinjured myself. The only thing that eventually saved me from serious damage was that I fell down a flight of stairs and broke my nose. I had to stop for a while because I couldn't breathe. When I healed, I started training seriously. I would run twice day, lift weights, run when it was below zero, run when it was 90. I had a course that would circumnavigate south Minneapolis. There were 12 lakes inside the city limits, this run would encompass eight of them and the parkways that connected them. I would average 85 to 95 miles per week at the height of my training. I was a fiend.

In the end, I achieved my running goals I ran a 2:50, a 2:50, a 2:37, a 2:36 and a 2:44 marathon. I also had a first place finish, not in a marathon, a third in class in a marathon and an 8th overall in a marathon, a second, a 10th and assorted other relatively high place finishes in other distance events that ranged from five miles to the marathon.

Then I stopped. Why? It was the comparison tape that played in my head. In a marathon, a six minute pace puts you five miles behind the winner. You're not even in the same race. What I didn't do and contemplate was look behind and see that the bulk of the race was behind me. Only the forward mattered. Even though at the time I was in the top 1% of all marathoners in the USA, I couldn't accept the achievement on its own merits. If I couldn't finish first or close it was no achievement. It was that negative, you aren't as good as the guy ahead of you. A valid assessment but not the only interpretation and it's an assessment that leads to self destructive

competitiveness. As a guy, this is something you learn. Something that is expected or you're a loser.

So what does this have to do with guys and anything and all that? Well over the next 17 years, I was the father of seven abortions. Are they related? Yes, because when you run away from a thing, no matter how far and relatively how fast, shit happens. What do guys run from? What did I run from?

After discovering falling in love, I was consistent in attaching myself to emotionally unavailable women then rebounding with women where I was emotionally unavailable.

ACT TWO Musical Interlude

I call it a musical interlude but someone else is required or will need to add the musical components. It could be me, or maybe a famous rapper will turn it into an opera. Four songs, four questions. Where they fit in the story can be your decision.

she is like water

hello is just a long goodbye
yesterday
both hands on the table
palms up
left
right
lines etched spread
deepened by bars and sweat
covered by gloves and cold
matched and unread
try as you will
they reveal nothing
turning them over

wrinkles on the back of my left hand
aligned
35 years played
not cared or considered
of no
consequences
one after the other
stretching from sea to coast
and back
the pool beckons
today
you are swallowed
there is no turning around
no graceful exit
recognition
that you cannot continue

what is lost cannot be found here
there are rules
to break them is to leave
to leave is to love
to live there
you must pretend or forget what it was like elsewhere

you cannot bring what is there here
you may try
at the speed of light
the sun rises
mass becomes infinite
you cannot carry it
it falls to your feet
you may step around
or remain behind with it

she is like water
cup your hands and sip
today
cooling remembrance
hits the back of the palate
another sip
no
wetness
slipped through your fingers
inspecting the back of your right hand
hoping to discover
where it has gone
you cannot hold what cannot be held

you are who you choose to be
i would not wish to change anything
wishing to change a circumstance is to deny
its prior existence
negation seeks to control
control is to discount the desires of others
it is to become what i despise
to look down upon the other
to shame
to marginalize
all for their advantage
i will not be like them
though i loathe many of the things that i have done
my shoes belong to me
they will not fill your footsteps
obscured by our moon
they will disappear
when the curtains are drawn

Never Ask the Question

Walking stairways to a quiet room

Dragging expectations
Riding cowboy boots to someone
Sixty something is still sixty something
Cold beer and a cold shower
Stranded uptown
Wandering the streets
Looking out dirty windows
Wipers smearing bugs
Asphalt yellow lines
White lines caging bicyclists
Slow down don't stop
Until tires hit the concrete

Plastic white patio chairs
Faded stacked leaning
Hiding behind motel fences
Unfilled swimming pools waiting for chronically late landscapers
Families on cheap vacations
Anyone everywhere
Left overnight on the table under a Costco umbrella
Reflected in a pair of Raybans
Caught you out the corner of my eye
You said move along
I might see you in a while
Woke up fell asleep dreaming
You were said to be quite the show
Reading reviews wondered where you'd gone

Use me
Lose me
Give me an answer even though I already know
No chance for tomorrow
In the hustle and the flow
No chance for tomorrow
With the hookers and the blow
Yesterday can't leave behind
It's the only reason to go on

Is a win is a win
Or a zero sum game

When the Benjamins burn out
You've lost self control
Brain chemistry overload
Major malfunction
Not what it was supposed to be
Withdrawal headed your way
Cold turkey right behind
Was it fun while I lasted
I was mostly blasted
Forget today
It was all a perfect moment
Gone between the pages

Use me
Lose me
Give me an answer even though I already know
No chance for tomorrow
In the hustle and the flow
No chance for tomorrow
With the hookers and the blow
Yesterday can't leave behind
It's the only reason to go on

Lose me
Use me
You were the best
Use me
Lose me
You were the best

romance in an inflationary universe

Part I
romance in an inflationary universe
is a cycle a circle
would a circle change its shape of its own volition
or does god need to exhale
if they are right about the higgs-boson,
god may have left for other venues
challenges are always necessary
a number which is the precise value

that makes our universe possible
ours is the universe that we know
knowing is what we perceive
we perceive that we know
circular but expanding
what would happen if we could move the lever a little bit to the right
or a little bit to the left
would it create a universe without light
one without mass
without charm
without attraction
a place where we are not compelled
to obey the laws of any physics
our universe has chosen to organize itself in specific fashion
we are well tailored and exist here

we can't wear brown shoes with a black suit
we can only if you choose to return to the seventies
wear orange shirts with balloon sleeves
ridiculous collars
encrusted with starlight from the crab nebula
everything is fair game
if we are redesigning the universe
a universe with no light, mass, charm, force or charge
what would it look like?

II.

Mass makes the universe inherently clumpy
Mass holds us together
a dense mud with pockets of nothing
Randomly placed in between
A chocolate cake batter with walnuts
Or marshmallows melting when it is cooked
Goey then solidifying
In a pattern that is too large for any of us to comprehend
Occupying our imaginations
Without mass would everything fall apart
No gravity to hold us back
Or do we not move at all
In lieu of falling together or falling apart
We stay where we are placed
Never moving
Rooted but bound by nothing
As there is no attraction
We can see maybe
But cannot get from here to there

Too have never been here
Too leave nothing behind
Not a foot print
Not a smile
Nothing
To be not remembered
Too have nothing said at a memorial that will never happen
To be so infinitesimal small as to pass through the universe undetected
To exist as nothing
How small is this thing
The aggregator of the universe
With the dial turned to one hundred fifteen we cease to exist
To choose that no one finds you
Is it pure ego to think that you matter one iota
Will the universe care
Depending upon your demise it may
Well not care but be changed as if the dial was moved again
While we cannot move the dial
An alternate will take its place
A new hole where others fall
Constantly

post father's day lamentations

My father is an angry man
Not because he is old
Not because he is ill and fading
He has always been angry
He has never said
Why
I have never discovered
Why
Was it the war
Was it growing up in the Arkansas people wish to forget
And reminisce only of mint juleps, porches and sweet potato pie
Strange fruit
What did he see hear feel
Why
Was it three sisters
Or three wives
I will never know
Why
I do not need to know
Why
I can make arbitrary pronouncements

They would pale under the glare of the sacrifices that remain hidden
My son is a man now
I have given him twenty years
There will come years that I will not be able to give to him
Or his sons or daughters
I have given him opportunities that I never had
As my father gave me opportunities that he did not
He is already better than I
It will be his choice as to how to move forward from here
If I fall ill it will be my time
I do not wish to live too long
I do not wish to be cut, patched, fixed, medicated
Propped up sent out for another ten twenty years
Dying is part of living
Gracefully is within our choices
I do not wish for my son to know an angry father

Maybe Act Three

It's been a while but I'm taking up the story again. It's the story of the Higgs-Boson. You spend your entire life looking for something. Something a theory says should exist but you can't find it. You build larger and larger conveyances looking for smaller and smaller parts of what makes "you" you. After years of therapy, wailing, gnashing of teeth, renting of garments, psychotropic drugs and any other devices/crutches you can get your hands on. You find something but you're not sure of what it is but it's something. As you examine the data, it's a number, not 1.116, not 3.8, not 22. It's a number that says you exist. But why you? If the universe is a discrete number that constructs reality as we know it, what would happen if I could move the dial, let the air out of my tires. Would I become someone or something else? Would "I" ever have existed? Would this other person just look like me but due to changed circumstances be someone else? Instead of my brother's keeper, would I be my brother? Each one of us is a storm wrought large and smaller; a swarm of particles reducible to nothingness and a consciousness expansive enough to contain the universe. I have tried to address my universe but it cannot be found by reduction. I have unleashed a storm that I will not see the results ever. I have set things in motion totally unaware of the consequences or even aware that they have been moved maybe not mountains but moved none the less.

I met a girl 50 years ago in junior high school; Miss Neuhart's American history class. The sanitized version of American history that you teach to young impressionable minds of 13 years of age who don't know any better and won't for another 5 to 10 years and some never. I also met two other friends whom I've stayed in contact with over fifty years. A lawyer, fish farmer/biology teacher and a college professor. I view myself as the least accomplished as that goes back to being this guy caught in his storm. So you can say the class taught me the value of friendship regardless of the value of the history lesson. Anyway, the college professor was in town and we invited her over for dinner as I'm a cheap skate and cooking is way more fun than restaurants. You can drink on the deck and watch the sun go down over Mount Tam; be rowdy, disturb your neighbors but only moderately so and occupy a table for as long as you wish. And there is no tipping; only the requisite complements to the chef. On the menu tonight, grilled asparagus and baby carrots fresh from the farmer's market with house made spicy aioli accompanied by the season's first strawberries wet, juicy and delicious, grilled shrimp and scallops kebobs, mixed greens with grapefruit and candied walnuts, apple pie with berries with a corn meal crust. I told you I could cook. After copious amounts of wine followed by cognac, coffee and whiskey, she revealed that I was the first boy she had ever kissed. I thought this was an odd admission over the dinner table with the spouse at one end and two other couples across the table. She also revealed the when and where and I immediately recalled the specifics. I just had never thought about that particular moment in 50 years or so. I'm glad she didn't reveal the circumstances of other coming and goings that happened about 10 years later. Nothing to be

ashamed of but some histories are best left unstated considering the situation. But to the point of reflections returning; I had never considered the implications or the potential significance of that one kiss, one time, one place, one moment. I had not thought about it at all. It's not like we hadn't had conversations over the preceding 50 years but she had never mentioned it before but now there was this ripple that I couldn't ignore. It had never occurred to me the significance of that moment. No, I don't plan on reviewing all the girls/women I've kissed and tracking them down to asking them if I was their first kiss. Nope, my life is not a Hollywood movie stunt even though this has been the basis of many movies, nor would I want it to be. One day I will ask her of why, when, there and then. Until then, I am will contemplate it as a single solitary irreducible act. A point on the dial that if changed would have not set something in motion that could not have been.

I moved to California in 1988 with a girl friend, a dog and my most important possessions stuffed into a 1984 Toyota Tercel wagon. You could say I was running away but how could you run from a place that you never left or from a place where you never were. It has to be one or the other or maybe neither, maybe both. Had a job working for a lunatic. What doesn't kill you doesn't make you stronger, it just makes you crazy and you forget why you are there and why. An earthquake and a fire doesn't help either but you do your job and survive. But it wasn't as easy as that. There were these two women and I couldn't decide. I became Violet Porter crashing my car into the unsuspecting victims and causing unintended consequences. I became a fugitive, the elusive particle of indeterminate mass sliding through walls windows and doors appearing and disappearing as times called for. A cipher for oneself. We all think we are the center of the universe but no one is looking and nobody cares except the ones upon which we inflict our pain and suffering. And why? Because we can and they care and because we are all little sadists. Pain tells we are alive and nurtures our insecurities. Ask the messiahs about that one.

Why did I ever come to California? The gold rush was over and the real estate was expensive. I was always an east coast guy or so I thought. In Minnesota we thought Californians were soft. They couldn't stand up to the climate with their printed shirts and pastels shoes. Pretenders. Well, I came to the Bay Area for a job interview; met my friend from 7th grade, the then fish farmer for a few days and went to Yosemite. It was a full moon. Left and headed to Calistoga for a mud bath and the wine country. Valley of the Moon was one of the appropriately named wineries. Came back across the Golden Gate and seriously reconsidered my attitude about California. About fifteen years later after having moved here, I was visiting the fish farmer now high school biology teacher. The fish farm didn't work out so well. He had made a slight miscalculation and purchased land on the wrong side of the valley and the water quality wasn't the best and so bye-bye fish. But this is California and we all get to reinvent ourselves at least twice. The farm that was on the wrong side of the valley for farming happened to be on the right side of the valley for real estate and within commute distance to Silicon Valley. California is about nothing if not water and real estate and the 2000's were jumping in the real estate market.

Water

“Whiskey is for drinking, water is for fighting”, Samuel Clements. Owens Valley; the first public land survey conducted by A.W. Von Schmidt from 1855 to 1856 Von Schmidt reported that the valley’s soil was not good for agriculture except for the land near streams, and stated that the "Owens Valley [was] worthless to the White Man. Oh, how wrong he was. Largest source of toxic dust in the nation. In the end, the Los Angeles aqueduct wasn’t about water, it was a real estate deal.

Fish versus people. Agribusiness versus sustainable fishing.

Real Estate

“Buy land, they’re not making it any more”, Samuel Clements

Back to my friend; being the practical Minnesotan that he was, his farming days were over. I tell this story as one day in March or April we were sitting around his pool and he said, “Remember when we thought Californians were soft?” I said yes and he said, “Well soft isn’t so bad”. We laughed and sipped on another margarita. The universe reduced to a numerical quality that could be measured in parts per million, of measurable consequences for fish and measurable miles for commuters. I had taken out my tape measure and unloaded my slide rule but the number could not yet be determined.

July 16, 1969, it was raining and the high was 88 degrees Fahrenheit with equal humidity. Fairly typical for Minneapolis in July. I had just graduated from high school and one of the defining moments of the decade, human history, invention and the culmination of efforts to prove, my dick’s bigger than yours and to bring back rocks from 249,0000 miles away was underway. Yep, "Man is going to the moon" to quote. The greatest achievement, maybe? But given the circumstances, time frame and context, the Great Pyramids and the Great Wall are mighty impressive. Well it may sound like I am cynical about technology and the race to the moon, I am not. It was an amazing feat of engineering design and manufacturing without integrated circuits and microprocessors; done with pencils, papers and slide rules and very rudimentary computers.

The phone I have in my pocket is more powerful than the computers they took to the moon. The Apollo Guidance Computer ran at 2 MHz with 2k of memory. The thing was made from 4,000 logic gates hard wired and wrapped in plastic resin. The Apple A6 chips which powers the iPhone and Pad is dual core runs at 1.4 GHz, has a separate 4 core graphic processor with 1GB of memory. It goes to show, you can do a whole lot with just a little and a common purpose. Think of all the other good stuff from the space program velcro, the refinement of carbon fiber, fly by wire and drive by wire systems but most importantly Tang.

I've read where they are bringing the F-1 engines back to life for a new heavy launch system. The F1's were the most powerful rocket engines ever produced. Five of them powered the first stage of the Saturn V rocket. They were lots of rumors about the plans being destroyed but they weren't. There were just no as-builts. Back in the day, stuff was over-engineered because computer modeling was non-existent and redesigning was done on the fly by trial and error in the manufacturing and testing process. All those changes couldn't be and weren't recorded. No CAD or computer controlled tools and all that good design manufacturing stuff we take for granted today.

The engines were beasts. You needed a gas turbine pump that was run by the rocket exhaust (like the turbocharger on my Audi) just to feed the engine fuel at a high enough rate to keep the combustion chamber operating at specification. The fuel pumps alone developed the equivalent of 55,000 horsepower. That's one hell of a turbocharger. The five main engines strapped together, using the term loosely, developed 32 million horsepower. Thirty-two million just for the first stage. You had two more stages with the J-2 engine. Five in the second stage, and one in the third stage. The J-2 was the predecessor of the engines used for Space Shuttle. Just go to You Tub and watch the lift off of that bad boy, amazing. Well, ok, it's a guy thing, large, loud, lots of smoke and thunder but none the less, quite the achievement. Quite the achievement for a government program. These days, it's privatize everything because you know, private industry is so much more innovative and cost effective.

Well, here's a little secret. Orbital Science Corporation is an American company designing satellites and launch systems. Their new rocket is called the Antares and is designed as a resupply vehicle for the International Space Station. It is powered by two Aerojet AJ-26 engines. The engine is a modified NK43 variant, which was government designed and produced. Not our government, however, as Aerojet bought 36 of these engines in the 1990's and acquired the manufacturing license to continue producing them from the Russian space program, that's the Russian space program. Hello! I guess some governments can do things right.

You ask why this diversion? It's about the third schoolmate. Well, he is an attorney in Seattle, a land use attorney and part time lecturer at University of Washington law school.

July 20, 1969, was a little cooler, only 84 degrees but no rain and I watched the first moon landing at his parent's house in Minneapolis. We all pretended to be Neil Armstrong and played lunar leap frog on his front lawn. I was stopped by the police walking home for WWB, walking while black.

That wasn't the biggest irony of that night, a night where humanity together was in awe of something that reached beyond us individually and was a collective achievement that included all of us. All of us. But a couple of hours later, I was just another black boy on the wrong side of Nicollet Avenue. Nope, the biggest irony wouldn't be revealed until 40 years later. As Neil Armstrong stood on the moon, he received a call from the President of these United States of

America, Richard M. Nixon, the architect and creator of the "southern strategy". A strategy designed to divide and conquer, a strategy of let's you and him fight, a strategy to preserve and expand the power of the few at the expense of the many. The outcome of which was to return us, 40 years later, to the "Gilded Age". A direct line can be drawn from Nixon to where we are today. Small, inwardly focused being slowly squeezed by greedy charlatans who have corrupted the temple, stolen everything that could not be nailed down and have come back for more. Trying to convince you that it is your neighbors fault and something should be done about them. Meanwhile, it's "Hey, everything is cool, let's just keep doing what we're doing". Doing everything in their power to destroy the idea of our collective stewardship of each other. That's the irony, the man giving the speech on the night that demonstrated what can be done if we work together with common purpose is in a large part responsible for its destruction and taking a wrecking ball to our house.

"A small step for man and a giant step for mankind," wasn't the first thing that was said when we landed on the moon. No, it was "Houston, Tranquility base, the eagle has landed." Nothing forced, nothing ceremonially written for the occasion, just a statement that we are here. Humans, humans attempting to evolve; evolve into something better. A higher purpose, a chance to create something that will unite us and separate us from our past and create a future where old ways and our old selves do not exist; a chance to become the god that we so fervently seek. To become the being that is within us that needs the nurturing of knowledge to flower. We are infants but we have that chance. Will we accept it? Will we stay here? Will we evolve? Will we become something other than petty tyrants with inflated expectations of self, cruel to ourselves and each other, the planet and the universe in general? Will the universe allow us to stay? Does the final number include a place for us? Somewhere the answer may be hidden within the Higgs-Boson or out among the stars and the dust of the universe from where we came. Possibly. If we keep, searching, we may find it.

Why did I call this role reversal? My original idea was to tell my story and have it counterpointed by a woman telling her story. What does life, love and violence and history look like from a woman's perspective? That's not something I can talk about because I'm a guy. As I wrote, I realized that the contrivance wasn't necessary and we all could each tell our stories separately. I shouldn't try to arrange someone else's story to fit the patterns of my life. That was a lesson that I've had to learn repeatedly the hard way, the very hard way. What I needed to do was to honestly answer the questions about a guy, me. Why I did the things I did. Why I do the things I do. What makes a guy a guy? Why makes me? Why I'm still hiding? In the end, did I do that? I don't know because I'm just this guy who's still looking.