

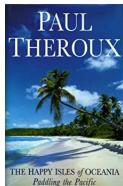
Striving #2

Miracle of grace?

Sometimes while lesson planning, I taunt myself by remembering a sheaf of notes that were not typed up as planned, in the fall of 1976...

Though that fall, extensive notes taken on a journey down the Gringo Trail remained on the table of my bed-setting room beside my electric typewriter. On unemployment benefits, I had the perfect opportunity to tackle them. I often wonder whether the faltering of the will to complete that project determined more than any other failing—the trajectory of my subsequent years...

Every night I would promise myself that the next day would be critical. I would not wake up and automatically turn on the radio nor reach for my bookshelf. Yet I could not break those habits of procrastination. Little wonder that to this day, the stomach sinks in the opening jingle of CBC morning shows...



As much as I bitterly acknowledge that the ship has long sailed, today I pulled out the remnants of those Gringo Trail notes. Even a quarter century too late, they demand some attention. Even in futility, a latter-day transcription might slightly lighten end-of-days regret...

On this first day of the upcoming month of vacation, I transcribed only a few pages. It was a dunk in nostalgia, somewhat interrupted by dog-back-to-vomit unease. If nothing else, the ongoing exercise might disabuse me of lingering fantasy about a missed career in travel writing. I can certainly use some consolation that there could have been worse fates than stuffing envelopes with cut up cartoons for Beginners' English practice...

Yet instead of carrying on the transcription into late afternoon, as planned—by mid-day I was on the sofa with Paul Theroux's '*Happy Isles of Oceania*'. It was sobering to note just how seamlessly a contemporary master of the travel writing genre, worked in personal narrative (his marriage breakup) with his reporting on his adventures in paradise...

Yet most noteworthy was his comment on the journals of the great cultural anthropologist, Malinowski. In failing to find much insight in the notes which Malinowski made while visiting the Trobriand islands, the cranky author writes:

'There was a general outcry when Malinowski's private diaries were published in 1966, but they were harmless enough—just trivia, ranting, loneliness, insecurity and self-pity.'

That dismissive comment struck a nerve. To what extent do my Gringo Trail notes avoid: '*... trivia, ranting, loneliness, insecurity and self-pity*'?

Still, rather than being discouraged from further transcription (and possible shaping) of the notes, I took Theroux's commentary as a warning. I resolved to be particularly attentive to subjectivity in editing the Gringo Trail notes. I need to be ever wary of the fuzzy line between reflection and whining...

Indeed, stumbling upon Theroux's comment at this moment seems like a touch of grace...

2000, February



fwf

A captivity challenged:

“Why are you such a pessimist? Why do you always try to think of the worst possible things?” MT said, on the return loop of our walk around Lefarge Lake. “You’re so depressing!”

My 15-year-old’s outburst came after I had remarked that if her mother and I are to separate, I would probably end up in a bed-setting room...

“That’s a worst-case scenario,” I said, “but I like to be prepared for the worst. Experience has taught me that the worst is always worse than one expects.”

Even as I snickered, I knew she was right. I cannot deny how jaundiced my outlook has become of late. Meanwhile, I grow ever more captive to petty annoyances.

I thought of a coffee cup received as a Christmas gift. The cup featured a depiction of the (supposed) landmark railroad station of my natal village. For over 6 months, I allowed myself to be annoyed by it. That was until last week, when I swooped up the cup from the sink and flung it out the back door. Only the meanest satisfaction was derived from the sound of it splintering on the outside cement steps... Then just this morning, a missing cassette tape cover unleashed a torrent of Tourette curses before my alarmed 8-year-old. Soon after, the misplacement of a water bottle scalded the Adam’s apple in squirts of bile...

“But when you expect the worst,” said my 15-year-old, “you’ll get the worst!”

Indeed, for all of her teen recklessness of late, my daughter has made a wise observation. I humbly take her point. Still, I cannot determine whether a turn from despair requires a pharmaceutical intervention or just a better understanding of karma...

2000, July



A nugget, tossed:

While TE attended a junior girls' soccer try-out session at Mundy Park this afternoon, I walked her mutt, Nikki, around the forest trail. Perhaps it was the muddy sawdust and fen-like gloom that intensified the taunting of lost opportunities (typical of middle age?). Slogging along behind the straining pooch, I remembered the anguish that roiled from the pages of the 1974 journal, leafed through in the morning... If only there were a bit of courage, self-confidence or tenacity in those weeks upon which the future turned!

I stopped for a few moments to let Nikki sniff around a bench. Looking up into the skinny trees, I remembered a night I had planned to stay up and finish a term paper. I'd had the notes ready on the table along with a packet of caffeine pills. Yet by my hesitating in the bedroom doorway, that unfinished paper determined an 18-month delay in completion of the undergraduate degree. That moment of weakness determined that a few months later I would be loading books in the stacks of the Vancouver Public Library instead of starting graduate school. Of course, that was but one alternate history missed by a moment's faltering of the will...



By the time, Nikki and I had completed the dreary circuit of the Mundy Lake trail, TE was just finishing her try-out in the Mundy Park soccer field. Perhaps it was my sudden appearance on the sidelines that caused TE to lag behind the others on the field...

We drove home in silence. Since the answer seemed obvious, I did not ask whether she wanted to commit to the team. As soon as we stopped in the driveway, she ran quickly into the house. When I opened the door, she was half-way up the stairs with the torn-off soccer jersey in hand.

In a sudden pang, I called up to her. "I know how you're feeling, honey. Can I give you a few words of advice? Something that I wish someone had told me when I was your age?"

"Quick," she said turning with a scowl. "I got to call my friend."

"I've got stuff to do, too," I said, determined to cast my pearl. "Here's the summary version..."

I leaned down to pull off my muddy boots. "Most of the time, people are too wrapped up in themselves to notice much of anything going on around them. So if you ever feel ashamed by some little mistake you think you made—remind yourself that you are just needlessly tormenting yourself."

"Is that all?" tsked the new teen, just a week past her thirteenth birthday.

"Hey", I chuckled as she disappeared up the steps, "You missed a nugget of wisdom that could change your life. Whoops!"

One boot in hand, I staggered and almost fell backwards onto the linoleum.

2000, September

A shitload of driving karma:

“Well, this time ya passed.”

Still buckled up in the drivers’ seat in the parking lot, I took the news without blinking.

Yet only by the skin of my teeth, was I reprieved from the humiliation of driving with only a learner’s permit...

I had assumed that removing a mistaken limitation from my license would be a routine matter. The restriction of a steering knob had been mistakenly placed when I did my initial road test. At no point in the last seven years in which I have been licensed (including during the road test itself) have I ever used such an awkward device. Although the restriction was a clerical error—I was informed that another road test would be required for its lifting. However annoyed, I agreed to the retesting.

Two days ago, I took the retest with a tight-lipped examiner called Wayne. After the expected 20 minutes circuit of neighbourhood streets, we drove back into the Motor Vehicle Branch parking lot. Still scribbling into his clipboard, the examiner, curtly informed that I had failed.

He said that I had not stopped for the minimum required 3 seconds at a 4-way stop—an automatic failure. I felt certain that the failure had more to do with my attitude. He seemed miffed that I was not sufficiently nervous in his presence... Still, he granted me another test for today.

Devastated, I scarcely slept for the last two nights. I cursed my judgement in making the inquiry and initiating the retest... In the drive to and from work, I was in terror of a roadblock and license check... Yet the lifting of the 48-hour nightmare brought more uneasiness than relief.



“There’re few things I want to talk to you about.”

As I gritted teeth, Wayne, in the same mirrored sunglasses he wore two days ago, went on to tell me what a nice guy he was for overlooking my sloppy lane changes and hugging of the middle line.

Still this time I did not try to engage in banter or turn on the radio in a casual air... As long as he held the clipboard, I did not fail to defer to his ‘authority’.

“Gee, thanks Wayne, for the feedback. I really need it!”

“No problem,” he breezed, slipping down his sunglasses to reveal baggy eyes.

Driving out onto Lougheed Highway, I carefully did the right shoulder checks that I had almost ruinously missed. For at least a few weeks, that brusque instructor hiding behind his Ray-Bans will remain beside me in the seat—and I should be grateful for that. Considering all the sloppy

lane changes—all the heart in mouth misses over seven years—there is a shitload of driving karma to be atoned...



Still, a half hour later in the parking lot of Superstore, I was agitated. Why did I have to be treated like an old geezer dragged in for a retest by worried children? Quite probably Wayne was observing me for signs of Alzheimer's...

Before turning back on the ignition, I tried to reassure myself. In the creep from middle to old age, there will likely be a succession of 'retests'—of which driving competence is but one. It was critical not to get so rattled. Indeed, nothing is more certain than more lightning bolts from the blue...

2000, October

fwf

Another tough choice:

Around 9:00 AM, after T. went to bed early, I came up from my basement lair to sit beside 9-year-old MH who lay on the sofa still recovering from flu. We stared together into the fireplace, until I broke the silence...

“So, if I take a job back in the UAE—will you consider coming with me?”

He did not answer.

Com’on, just be honest. I know you don’t want to leave your friends here and have to start in a new school again.”

“I’ll think about it,” he mumbled.

I sighed. “I know. I’ve always had a hard time with decisions. But I’ll give you a little advice, honey. When you make a careful decision—you gotta stick with it. If you always kick yourself when decisions don’t work out—you’ll never be happy.”

Propped up on elbow, he continued staring into the fire. I patted his hand, then rose and trudged back down to the basement...



I woke in the middle of the night, sweating in the Arctic sleeping bag.

What other 50-year-old with a union-protected job would think of throwing it over for a precarious job in the Middle East? Of course, I have yet to send back the forms to the American University of Sharjah. But I remain tempted...

Two years of *de facto* in-house separation and a failed mediation has been poisonous... Yet if the work environment were any less tense than that of the home, the situation could be more bearable... On a two year contract in Sharjah, I would at least be relieved of the late-minute scheduling and split shifts...

Still, I can imagine climbing the walls of some sterile apartment in the UAE, unable to get in touch with my fledglings half a world away. That would be a nightmare from the deepest darkness...

Even if I could persuade MH to accompany me—what about the girls? Could I bear abandoning them in their most vulnerable years? Coming to mind was the old adage that the right choice is almost always the tougher one... Isn’t staying on the tougher choice?

Looking towards the faint lines of streetlight in the slats of the window blinds, I resolved to make the decision before the end of the day—and above all—to be at peace with it...

A little lesson on Burke Mountain:

Keeping the promise to hike up Burke Mountain at the height of summer solstice, I loaded up a daypack. By 8:00 AM, I started the ascent on the trail above the Harper Road Gun Club along with MT's mutt, Nikki, off leash. By mid-morning we reached the remains of the torn down ski-lodge. Beyond it the trail petered out before a creek which was too risky to ford.

We doubled back, and found another trail leading upwards through mossy forest, until the patches of melting snow gave way to unbroken drifts...

Near noon, I squatted down and shared a peanut butter sandwich with the faithful Nikki who gobbled her earned half. I thought of the winter morning a few weeks before I moved out of the family home, when I accidentally locked her outside. 3 hours later, I drove frantically around the neighbourhood worried that she was picked up by the SPCA. I finally found her shivering in an alley. When I pulled her into the car, she whimpered in mute gratitude. It seems since then, she is more comfortable with me than she ever was when we shared a basement...



After I tooted '*Wild Mountain Thyme*' on my harmonica in acknowledgment of summer solstice, we started back down. At first, we seemed to be following our own footprints in the snow. Then reaching a fork with red trail markers, I assumed there was a more direct path which would avoid a long switchback. Despite the unbroken snow, I started along what I thought to be the shorter route. Yet a few minutes on, I lost sight of trail markers. We were amid thick tamarack, seemingly headed upwards through deepening drifts.

After several steps nearly sinking to the knees, I stopped. Should I go forward or backtrack? I took a deep breath. My heels were already blistering. Even though there were still more than eight hours of daylight and the weather mild, I was unprepared to spend a night in the snow. Nikki looked into my eyes, awaiting a decision...

At that moment, I remembered the lesson from open water diving. If the regulator fails or mask suddenly floods, one must react coolly and methodically. In that thought, I sucked back the trilling fear and pressed forward.

After a few minutes of heavy slogging, the gradient shifted downward and the path broke out of the thicker woods. The trail widened and the snow became shallower. Within a hundred meters, we emerged from the snow onto the main downward trail. There remained another 1 ½ hour hobble straight down the mountain.

Once gratefully back in the parked car, before belting in I gave Nikki the remaining dog-biscuit. However sore and blistered, it was a moment of deep satisfaction. I had avoided panic and stayed on the right trail.

Before the end of summer, may there be further such tests of tenacity...

2002 June

Avoiding the premature winding down?

Apart from the 45-minutes on the mucky trail around Sasamat Lake this morning— my only free day of the week was squandered in aimless web surfing, ostensibly downloading MP3 music files. Further frustrating was some glitch on Kazaa that slowed the downloads to a crawl...

When TE she took over the computer to play ‘*The Sims*’, I lay back on the sofa with the latest offering from the Coquitlam Library: ‘*Boltzmann’s Atom*.’

However hard going for a brain benumbed by the internet, I was touched by the tragedy of the brilliant early 20th century Austrian physicist who was a pioneer formulator on the nature of subatomic particles and molecular processes of entropy. Yet he was apparently too emotionally fragile to handle criticism from his contemporary scientists... Unfortunately, the vindication of his theoretical work was only to come after his death by suicide... I was chastened by the heroism of a life of authentic engagement. Yet tragically Boltzmann was denied awareness of his triumph.

With the library book on my chest, I stared up at the ceiling. Despite all my wasted years, I wondered whether it was not yet too late to find a tiny niche of expertise.

What of doctoral studies in philosophy of science or even biology? Realistically, a mere layman’s fascination in such disciplines would hardly get an old novice through the undergrad bootcamp. What of political involvement? Unfortunately, the experience of volunteering for an NDP candidate several years ago jaundiced that option. What of trying something totally off the wall— say, standup comedy? I could try to write a 20-minute set for a try-out on amateur night at Yuk-Yuks. But imagine no one listening!

I tossed the book onto the carpet. Still, nothing can be more soul-destroying than curling up like a dead moth in a desiccated cocoon... Whatever the obstacles— I need to get out— and get more engaged in the world...

I then thought of the old neighbour across the hallway. No less than 80, he never fails to give a cheery greeting. Often, I have seen him from the balcony, whistling as he shuffles his walker out the entranceway. He has certainly not succumbed to entropy. I can use his inspiration as much as that of Ludwig Boltzmann...

2002 November



Of the jogging high:

Pounding around Lefarge Lake at 7:00 AM, even as cold rain drove into the burka-like slit of my parka, I felt a surge of joy.

Even in the best of health there is always some resistance to exercise. Having had a bad night or feeling a cold coming on makes it more tempting to skip the routine. A lulling voice assures that missing just one morning won't matter. Yet a missed jog guarantees a demoralized day and a threat of losing the habit thereafter...

I thought of how the run almost always begins in resistance: weakness in legs, heart-pounding sweatiness—even shortness of breath. But then midway there usually comes the breakthrough—almost a hyperventilation high. On the best mornings, the run ends in a glow of strength...

I thought of on just how critical a sweaty morning jog is for the constitution. Overcoming the resistance—especially in rain or even in snow—is a tiny victory that sets the day's tenor. The dirtier the weather—the stiffer the resistance—the better prepared one will be for the knockabout...

2003, April



In mounting the stairs before work:

Bathed in sunrise at 7:00 AM with the car radio turned off—for once I enjoyed the half-hour drive to work. Also in a rare turn, I mounted the musty stairwell to the campus without a tightening of the stomach. Instead, the mind raced with the following novel thought:

'Why should we dread the smells of the corridors of our workplace? Why should we despise work routines? Why should we imagine that we might have been happier in a different place among different people?'

'Even though we be crew members in an allegorical vessel assigned by the cosmic lottery, surely every 'ship', can be no more or no less a microcosm than any other... Even though we may journey together on a Ship of Fools—we cannot deny our mysterious fellowship...'

'We ought to celebrate the uniqueness of our randomly selected fellow passengers... At the end of days, we may well miss them more tenderly than we can now imagine...'

*'Perhaps contentment lies in learning to love one's fate... We need to emphatically **reject** the Sartrean notion that hell is other people!'*

That final thought, accompanied by a toneless whistle, echoed in the concrete stairwell as I pushed open the fire door...

2003, September



JIn want of an ox-like constitution:

Cocooned by 8:00 PM with the latest *Guardian Weekly*, I was struck by the article about the hard-living Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones. His on-stage exuberance despite decades of drug and alcohol abuse is remarkable. As the author of the piece put it, his endurance (let alone his survival) must be due to: “*an ox-like constitution and genuine joy in being here*”...

In reading that phrase I shook closed the newspaper and tossed it on the floor. I snapped off the bedside lamp then turned over in a fetal curl...

Wrapped in my fleece liner, I shuddered. What ‘joy’ can I claim in being here? It was plain that the gloom of late has wreaked far more damage to my constitution than all the needles that the 60-year-old Keith Richards has ever jabbed in his arms...

I tried to think of pleasures experienced in last few years. It is not that pleasures were unavailable but that the very capacity to enjoy them has diminished... Bookstores no more entice me of late than do liquor stores. Even exotic travel (unaffordable, in any case) is losing its allure. Of course, there is natural beauty, appreciation of music, curiosity in science—but is that enough? Can I possibly make it through a (minimal) eight year slog towards retirement with such fleeting ‘joys’—and *without* an ox-like constitution?

Meanwhile, counting days—whether to retirement, to the vacation month or to the weekend—is no less pitiable than ‘X-ing’ off the days on the calendar of a prison cell...

In shivering self-reproach, I rolled over to catch the dim streetlight through the half-open drapes.

2003 November



Defiance on the lost highway:

A half hour before class, I was working at one of the computers in the resource room when a bombshell burst at my back.

“I don’t like to worry you,” said Assistant Dept. Head, on his way out of his office door, “but I got some rather disturbing news from this afternoon’s Education Council meeting. Apparently, the college wants to reduce the International Education program from 19 to 11 classes. The aim is to shut down the International Education Centre altogether, once they can wiggle out of the lease.”

“What a Christmas present,” I croaked.

“Well, it definitely will affect the lower seniority people who work in this department.” His avoidance of ‘*our* department’ was a little added twist.

Too bad you aren’t old enough to retire,” he said.

“Or my kids weren’t so young.”

“Well,” he forced a smile, “we just have to soldier on.”

“Soldier on—that’s exactly it.” Giving a comic salute, I turned back to the screen.



Bravado aside, through the rest of the evening the sinuses pounded in the prospect of ‘bumping’ if not shift cutbacks added to the tribulations of divorce negotiations...

In descending the echoing stairwell at 10:00 PM, I was singing to myself the country gospel number, ‘*Lost Highway*’ popularized by Hank Williams... Hunching out into December bluster towards the parked car a block away, I speculated about what might come next April, when the expected cutbacks take effect:

If lucky, I will be clinging to a part-time job but with a dog’s breakfast of assignments. I might well end up in the Community English Department, scrambling between church basements on a deadly split shift. Likely confined to teaching beginners, the 60-year-old will have to jump around the class miming the pushing of a shopping cart. That could be my fate for eight more years—if I can endure that long.

*‘I’m a rolling stone all alone and lost
...for a life of sin, I have paid the cost...’*

Before starting the engine, I was close to submitting to the old self-torment. If I’d gone back for further studies instead of ‘escaping’ to Dubai, I would have had more options! How dearly I paid for the brief sojourn away from the north!

Sitting in the dark at the wheel, I recalled the precise thoughts of a moment just a month before leaving. I was snorkeling near a pier off Jumeirah Beach, finning over bleaching coral wherein a few clownfish were hovering...

'If this sublime moment is being purchased on credit,' I wondered, *'if it is to be paid for in declining years of dreariness—will it have been worthwhile?*

I slapped the wheel. For once let the Calvinistic spirit be defied. Emphatically, yes— it *was* worthwhile!

2003, December

fwf

Of species loyalty:

The cockroach on the wall outside the apartment this afternoon, was not the first one seen in the hallway. Unforgettable was the scaly-tailed rat seen a few weeks ago, zipping under the basement dumpster...

I thought of reporting the sighting to Janusch, the apartment manager, but was chary of worse contamination from a fumigation. It seemed easier just to accept sharing the cheaper rent with a few fellow scavengers... In some perverse way, I might have even taken some pleasure in the confirmation of just deserts...

Still, the cockroach today was especially taunting. Halfway down the wall, it stopped crawling and twitched its antennae—almost defiantly...

Watching it, I recalled that cockroaches have existed on this planet millions of years before mammals... The revulsion felt for them might be an instinctive reaction to a rival species that may well inherit the earth after our disappearance...

Waving my hand, I stepped closer. The cockroach skittered down into the baseboard. My shiver of disgust was oddly reassuring. Despite the misanthropic speculations so often entertained of late—my species loyalty apparently remains intact...

2003, December



Stripped down:

This morning I stopped on the wild north side trail of Minnekhada. Before the wonder of a cedar growing from a nurse stump, I thought of just how resigned I have become of late not only to frugalities but to limited horizons...

I can now live with the possibility of never again visiting a tropical clime or ever swimming again in tropical waters. I am even coming to accept that the possibility of female companionship is faint... I could even survive (for a while) without much physical desire... I can even *almost* accept that there will be little aesthetic pleasure, apart from these hikes and bike rides...

The key question is: whether stripped down by poverty or infirmity—what would be *unacceptable*?

Catching the faint ferment of dead leaves in cold air, I knew the answer. What would be unendurable would be the loss of the capacity to reflect. The best hope (while such agency remains) is that is that anguish of such a loss would fade away before the light itself went out...

I made a mental note to further explore that thought before resuming the upward hike along the slippery rocks...

2004, February



A celebratory gesture?

On the drive to work this morning, I checked off the conditions set back in 2001 for the gradual loosening up on frugality.

The budget squeeze was precipitated by dumb parking accidents adding to the hemorrhaging from (failed) mediation and separation expenses. Among the penalties self-imposed thereafter, was a complete abstinence from alcohol. This prohibition was not expected to save much money (I have never spent much on drink) but rather to withheld a modest pleasure as self-punishment...

Yet now the arterial bleeds are almost staunched. There have been no fender-benders since reversing into the concrete pillar in the Superstore underground parkade on Christmas Eve, '02. With the recent agreement of T. to terms of a final settlement, by the end of this summer the final divorce papers can be signed...

Through innumerable sleepless nights, I convinced myself that such a breakthrough was hopeless. Yet a new day is breaking.

The truth of the Nietzschean adage (however trivialized as a slogan on coffee cups), has surely been borne out: '*what does not kill me strengthens me*'... Whatever my bumbling, I have never flinched from hard reckoning. Indeed, the 'power of negative thinking' is not to be underestimated...

So why not a bottle of Spanish *cava* on Friday night?

2004 April



An evolutionary experiment?

Stopping at Superstore on the way home from work, I took notice of an old couple in the grocery aisle. The manner in which they touched elbows and leaned to hear one another's mumbles was touching...

Unfortunately, moments later in the checkout, the sentimentality curdled. A google-eyed woman was whispering to her little boy, who was staring at my fake hand. As he suddenly turned his head, she drew him in patting his shoulder. By her look, she could well have been shielding him from Freddy Kruger. I scowled and pulled out my wallet.

Until that moment, I had almost forgotten that I was coming down with a cold. Yet there were still three work days before the weekend— still full-days of lesson planning to begin immediately after putting away the groceries...

Swallowing against a sore throat, I filled the yellow plastic bag. I scuttled away, marveling as always at the inventiveness of what sometimes seems an evolutionary experiment in self-torment...

2004, May



Of the illusion of ownership:

Killing a half hour before the evening class, I took a stroll east of the college on Glen Drive.

During the brief walk, I recalled visits to the same neighbourhood thirty years ago. As a member of a make-work project team, I cleaned, painted and bought groceries for poor white pensioners soon to be trundled into rest homes. Their old 'Vancouver special' houses, originally built for the labouring classes, were first sold cheap. Yet that was in the mid-'70s, before the trickle of non-European immigrants grew to a stream...

In the late '70s, some of those immigrants were students in my first English classes in East Vancouver. Many put their nest eggs into down payments, worked in sweat shops but pooled family income to meet mortgage payments.

3½ decades later, they sit on enormous golden eggs. No matter how modest their retirement incomes, their shrewdness in acquiring an early grubstake in Vancouver real estate has made them multi-millionaires...

As for those who blithely ignored such opportunities—in their retirement they might find themselves renting a studio apartment out in Surrey—if not a pad in a trailer park further east...

Flinching against a sting of bitterness, I whispered one of my old mantras: '*Nothing can really be 'owned'. Even the ownership of one's own body is an illusion...*'

I stopped at the curb, groping for further consolation... If, at the end of days, I possess nothing except a shrunken body—at least I hope for the assurance that it is not violated by some creepy mortician. In a shiver of dread, I reminded myself that in oblivion, it makes no difference whatsoever whether one's body ends up in a pyramid or in a trash heap...

Checking my watch, I then jolted around towards the college two blocks down the hill. I had but ten minutes to go before the start of class.

2004, August