

HOW THE PROCESS OF LEAVING A WORK UNFOLDS. . .

In the spring of 1977, Don and I were restless in our work at the Urban Life Center. The organization was on solid ground now, having earned a solid reputation among the colleges who sent us students. We had hired a couple to join us in the coming fall—Scott and Norene Chesebro. This left us free to imagine a new future for ourselves over time.

Together, we crafted the idea of taking a “mini-retreat” by going camping in central Wisconsin for several days. I decided that I would use the occasion as an experiment in silence—as much as possible. I could count on Don naturally gravitating to silence as he engages in his poetry writing.

It turned out that writing in my journal became the hallmark of this important time and in the summer months following. Reading these excerpts below unveil a sequential process that flowed as a result of the silence and near-solitude.

A Journey Into Silence

May 15, Sunday evening

I’ve been beginning my journey all day—a journey downward. Is it into my Self? I am sitting on a high bluff, with a soft wind making a noise in the oaks and hickory and pines around me. A river slumbers slowly by below, and a pink-red sun has slipped from sight.

Behind me Don sputters and swears and blows up an air mattress, bursting into my silence like a spoiled child, wanting someone to rescue him from every momentary pain—a stuck air valve, spilled yogurt, a tent about to topple over. How I hate this part of him. I’m surprised to be writing it, but it feels good. There is no one I can hurl this particular anger at, and it boils inside me often.

Along with the love of today’s short dialogue along the Swiss-like valleys just before we arrived at the campsite, and last night’s solid movement together.

Why am I doing this thing—his solitude—this “starvation”—this slowing down of my life? If it only makes me more tense, what the use? Will I indeed do it—whatever it is I am “supposed” to do?

And that *is* it. There is an “ought” lurking here somewhere. Some rules I “should” know. If I do it right, I’ll be rewarded.

With what? With a peak experience of some sort presumably.

Why must this puffing creature sit beside me so near? Don and his second air mattress. Already I am tuning myself in to both silence and solitude and I am irritated by intrusions.

Only the birds are in touch with me—and the wind. One frightened bird shrilling me from the area where her young are hid. The other are just singing for pure joy or murmuring a comforting territorial goodnight to their surroundings.

The hulk is back. Don at my side again. I don’t understand this sudden aversion to his presence. But I am recording it all right here—“chaff and grain together.”

And for whom, to whom, do I write? Several answers come to mind. For myself, of course. Or no—for God. And then—grandiosely, I think, I *know* for whom I write. For the *world!* For the admiring awestruck world.

Does every writer feel this egoistic surge?—this certainty that others will look in this mirror I hold up before (my) life?

Darkness comes. The page is so white. I could write for hours.

Strange, I wondered what I would write, what it would be about, if everything I wrote would be ponderous—and earth-shaking, coming from freshly spawned thoughts. Now that I am in the midst of it, the [pen feels very much like an extension of my hand, and that of my body and my brain, and even of my being and it is effortless to write. I was born for this hour. I have been preparing for ever so long.

The child has gone. The woman is here—ripened, seasoned. The words will tell the rest.

Good night.

Immersion in Nature

May 16, Monday

The birds are taking aural soundings this morning—the caw of the crow, the deep-throated gurgle of the robin, the raspy whirr of an unknown, and the liquid melody of some unseen species—they all mingle here on the lake front with the very clear persistent whine of a fly.

But the air is full of sound and territorial calls. What have I to do with all this?

The sun is baking me slowly. Not to melting heat yet. The wind brushes moisture softly away.

Humanoids pass by in their machines, voyeurs into my solitude. Even the boat on the lake is less of an intrusion than these spinning rockets of rubber and steel.

So what has this to do with me? The questions are the same forward and reverse. Am I expecting to weave a lifetime from this bit of thread of a few hours and days? My words are pretentious, I think. My thoughts are mundane: savoring the orange juice, worrying about safety, sunburn, grease on the paper.

I'm not using my eyes much. I close them a lot. They are usually over-used. I rely on other senses, by instinct.

Suddenly I am very tired again. I think I am tired of looking, of trying to *see* everything. Even bringing the camera may be a mistake. I thought I would take pictures of just one thing—the bit of driftwood by the water's edge. Now I see (aha!. . .still “seeing”) that I had already wanted to limit the sense of seeing in that way, quite instinctually again.

What part of my life will I pull up to view now?

To view. Why can't I get rid of that “first sense” of mine? I shall try seeing another way for a while now—to see (!) what happens. (I am remembering that already this morning, with my eyes

closed, I began to see my own retina and eyelids. It happens sometimes. How deeply ingrained is this seeing in me.)

But I will try.

Discovering the Solace of Writing

Writing may be a new found way to release my intensity. As a form of expression, it seems to flow from me with spontaneous force. I can feel it now. No defined idea of more than a word or phrase ahead of my pen. I am sure it is not always this way. I keep hearing about *discipline*. Yet if I cannot explode outward with *some* measure of release. . . I can't *stand* the discipline—the ground is too dry and hard. I must have fruit—something penetrating the soil.

(A gollolop in the water—a jumping fish? Or small animal? Instinctively I *look* to verify the sound. Why can't I just live through my hearing for this one hour? I have always said that being blind was not as much of a deprivation as being deaf.)

“I hear you.” That is the jargon of the day. It really refers to leaving *space* for the other person and his/her feelings and thoughts. But it gets misused—as a way of stopping the other person from continuing, so you can have space for yourself and say what you want to say.

Writing is not as tiring as I've always thought. I am getting freer and freer to flow, and not have to have every word count in some ultimate sense. I enjoy stringing the blue ink out on the page

Why write at all just now? The wind blowing the tamarack boughs is casting shadows of graceful needle clusters across this sunlit page. Exquisite beauty, with the sharp dark shadow of my pen point at the tip of every word, every line. I've captured it in a mental picture.

Periodically a fish (frog?) jumps in the water near the shore. I hear it, and regret not seeing it. What does it matter—that I heard the delightful watery plop and did not see what did it. I see the widening circles of water and that is all.

I do not know; only that it does make some difference, possibly in my feeling of control here. The “eyes have it,” I could say.

It occurs to me that listening is one of my “problems”. I find it hard, in all of life, just as I find it hard today. And so, too quickly, I say, “I *see* what you mean.”

Often, this is a tension between Don and me. Don doesn't get heard a lot. Why am I afraid to listen to him (and I think it is fear). What burden does that place on me if I hear him fully? Will he invade my space somehow? And will there be less air for me to breathe in? It is something like that.

There was a time of dullness and boredom back there a page ago. I let it happen and by listening to my own inner space past the boredom, I got in touch with a deeper insight.

“Got in touch with. . . “ That's a different sense. That's nice.

“A deeper insight.” Hearing better helps me see better. Insight.

And just now I saw the fish jump. No big deal.

Writing is not as tiring as I've always thought. I am getting freer and freer to flow, and not have to have every word count in some ultimate sense. I enjoy stringing the blue ink out on the page behind my pen point like some fluid remnant of me. It feels very powerful and beautiful. I don't feel like censoring.

A lot of my eating is out of boredom. It is something to do. If I get past the boredom of not eating, I wonder what will happen. Not seeing/looking so much. Not talking. Not eating.

Reading is visual. Writing, for me, is tactile and aural. It is more connected to my essence than talking because I censor less. I am less influenced by the complexity of the person listening to my voice. A thing I write may only be for me.

I am aware of an audience, simultaneously. I guess I am thinking of writing and publishing so that others may read.

But not so they will be my friends, or like me, as in talking. Maybe in one sense writing will be for me a working out of my relationship to the world, and thus a bit like talking.

I wonder, do I need to come to terms with the universe, or even just the world of people? There's something about my need for meaning in all this.

This park—600 billion years old in its rocks. Seven thousand in the history of man here. If this be so, what is my significance in the brief span of recorded literary time—when man wrote and symbolized about his existence?

The park bench here seems so unnecessary—so extra. And so real.

In the quiet before and after rain, the woods are ominous in their silence. The birds make no noise when they fly. Three lit on a tree nearby in the last few seconds—one a brilliantly colored orange and black bird, perhaps a Baltimore oriole, or some sort of warbler. Small, with a jet-black head, but much bright orange on neck, breast and wings, mingled with black. I will see it again, no doubt.

The trees are not moving much now. An occasional wind sweeps through, but otherwise only the leaves in the lower branches flutter like waving hands—a comforting “take care, goodbye” to me before the storm?



Ah, the second bird was an enormous blue jay. And the third has reappeared and is a robin, scolding me a bit for intruding in his front yard.

Is it ritual and guilt that makes me keep to my silence, my semi-solitude, my “starvation”? Or is this the only way to stamp out timeworn custom—the pain of focusing on new behaviors?

My Life is Changing

I think little of the life I left behind me in Chicago. No need to mull over unsaid conversations, unfinished business. Because there was a kind of end to things this time—satisfaction in a job well done.

When I cried Thursday night, it was over then. I cried out of weariness and because it won't be the same again. It is something I know. An era is over. And we climaxed it—Don and I—with the crown of our full strength and skill and with success.

With the new era—and new staff at the Center—will flower new skills and strengths. I need not mourn the disappearance of the small family-style programs. But I shall cherish it, of course. It is a jewel I will wear. Can others see it? No mind.

Thea is a jewel I wear too. I'll never understand her simple unquestioning trust in me.

Sentimental thoughts are rising. Is it because I slept just now? The child in me awaking—and wanting a new day to begin?

My impulse is to leave these thoughts behind. I need them less than before. I used to fill my writing with these ego-feeding statements. Now I get more joy from the delicious egoism of words flowing from my pen.

Shall I go past the “breaking point”—the point where I don't want to go on in this? What impels me to stubbornly stick to what I have planned—to see it through?

Or is this stubbornness something else—a curiosity to know more about my limits? Do I want to test myself in a new way?

I'm no hero. This I know. But I'm not sure if I'm doing this whole thing for myself or for others—to say I have done it, to talk about it, to store it away in my own private museum of accomplishments.

The day has been short—actually. A late start, and a necessary trip for supplies before I could even count it begun. Then a morning in the sun, an afternoon of sleep and quiet in the threat of rain, an evening drive and rendezvous with lakes and mountains and birds—and here I sit—wondering about a campfire without food.

It is a bit like self-directed learning for the student: a time without books and soon I crave them. A time without speech, and I treasure it more than before. It makes me want to think again before I speak.

And I savor each swallow of juice in a way I wouldn't if it were part of a big repast.

How much can I trust the flowing? The flowing of words. . . is discipline essential? The flowing may be temporary, or superficial.

And the flowing of my body and psyche toward talk, toward food, toward books. Is there any virtue in denial of this flowing? Will it take me in another direction? How long do I “hold out” to see? Or is the attitude of *holding out* in itself a hindrance to new ways of flowing/becoming?

Before, when I didn't know how to use my time, I played Solitaire. I am now playing at solitude. How do they differ? If I'm playing, maybe there's no difference. It is where I am headed that matters. There is so much about myself that I don't know.

The Journey Within Beckons

Carefully now. . .but look at it. What do you miss, Eunice, in these hours of silence and solitude?

I miss the certainty of the next action. We're going to go to a movie. I am going to read a book. We're going for a ride I need to shop for some supplies. It is time to prepare lunch. I must build the fire. We will go for a walk.

All that is gone. All that is left is unlimited time without any punctuation marks. I don't even wait for punctuation to appear of its own accord. Waiting for enlightenment or passion. No. I'm not waiting *for* anything.

What else is missing? I miss the reassurance of others. Constantly, I get this reassurance in the rest of life. Others respond to me, affirm me, get what they need from me. A lot of my time is structured by others, in a sense. An appointment with Mark at 4. Meet Carol for lunch, Pick up Don at 1. Go to a meeting at 8. Get to the store before it closes. All of these demands come in part from the needs and structures of others, not totally from within me. Now I can spend a day as I will—what do I do? Well, I often wonder what Don will be doing next, for one thing.

I watch the passing of the sun across the sky, and somehow it comforts me. How cyclical and attached to the rhythms of earth I am. I could dig this life out here in nature, but I am pretty sure I would organize it, even so. Maybe the organization itself would be organic.

I wonder if that would be possible in the city. What rhythms exist that I might tune into?

A fear lurks here in this. Right now it is a concrete fear attached to a group of us anticipating buying a building in South Shore and feeling very anxious about being able to do it—to find the house, make an acceptable offer, obtain a loan, and begin to be responsible for All That Whatever-It-Is.

But the underlying fear is that of being left with too big a burden to carry alone, and somehow *having to carry it*.

An image comes to mind with that—and it is an image of a little girl Eunice having to be stronger than she was in order to take on a burden for her family.

I don't know much about sharing burdens. I know a lot about carrying them. . .and complaining or feeling self-pity.

Sharing burdens is closely related to delegating responsibility. . .and that is hard too. This is my task now as I lead into fall and "our new era." If I can somehow find out *how to do it*. . .it will be a great accomplishment in all of my life, not just my work.

How much can I get from me before I turn to others—like books, or Don? The evening still lies before me and I don't know all the ways to use it. Such simple stuff. I even find writing a "task" to do and though very enjoyable, it fills space in a familiar way. I am so deep down inside—it is so far to come out. I am used to pulls from others to make it come. . . H—E—L—P.

*Crystal genocide yoking the shores
Peace nicht wholly knit
Of blue brae and mince need
Loose your hold on that gun.*

Tuesday, May 17

I can see why people in concentration camps write—to keep track of time. It is a measure to treasure—the passing of each day and night. I am more aware of the sun's movement in the sky than usual. The times the birds sing. The changes in the clouds. The way the water looks.

I am writing more slowly this morning. All my processes seem slowed down. I am dulled, boring. Yesterday I had to deal with a boredom that seemed outside of myself—in the lack of structure, plan, activity. Today the boredom is deep inside me, it seems.

I ask—how can so vital, so dynamic—indeed, so hysterical a person contain such boredom? How is the boredom connected to the deep stillness—the rocklike stability I know to be part of me? The vitality—is it only ripples on the surface?

Why do I sometimes love monotony? Solitaire, the same food, the same rituals for dressing and going to bed?

I'm grinding down my life to some inner core that is unmovable, unmoved. It also seems connected to my occasional passivity in the face of tears, a certain stolidness when the rest of the world shakes. It is the part of me that goes calm when Don explodes in irritation at trivial trials.

We said I am like rock, and Don like water. But I am like water too. Ocean, more than river. Surface upheavals, foam, and spray. But deep underneath, slow, slow calm.

Lots of pressure in an ocean.

I am holding back in my writing. Is it lethargy? Or fear? Or simply the dullness of a slowed down existence?

I have a feeling that I'll stop this period of silence and solitude and starvation at the point of breakthrough—before I have to move to another phase. It doesn't seem the time to do it—and yet without experiencing the rewards, what will induce me to try it again for a longer period of time?

This is so far from my life—up here on the shores of a lake with only the birds and wind. (I am beginning to count only the things that make sounds, in my environment!) And yet I feel so close to the city me. I bring it with me here. The two parts of me fit so closely together. I am comforted in the city and sometimes afraid here, as well as the reverse—something most people experience.

The world is still over my head—the airplanes. And the highway drones on laden with trucks in the distance.

It's a little like being drunk—this slowed down feeling. I am not as defensive, nor as alert.

By a brook—sound takes on new meaning. Now everything is swallowed up in sound, it is so present, so demanding of attention. Tumbling over rocks, it has more variety than the lake—until after a while, its roar and foam seem the same.

Wednesday, May 18

How quickly I externalize. A trip to Madison for a Woody Allen movie.

But it's all so sweet—this contact with Don and leisurely enjoyment of life. Maybe the slowed down time worked a change in my inner rhythms. Going to Mineral Point today doesn't seem a way of erasing boredom, but a friendly adventure—the sort we are capable of enjoying fully.

I am wondering if I will write about it—for pay (and if that will erase any of the pleasure, or enhance it. . .). Last year's write-up of our trip to Eureka Springs was so effortless. And paid for the trip, in part.

Thursday, May 19

I would like to keep up my writing when I return to the city but already I can see how important the silent space is for developing the flow of thoughts/words.

Dreams—Revealing Part of Me in Disguise

This morning another source of reflection intrudes—this colorful dream life I am experiencing. Both of these last two nights have been terror-filled for me, part of the time. Ugly images and feelings surfaced.

They picked up threads from my past in Pioneer Girls, and in the present Urban Life Center. Lots of mother images too, always the shame-guilt-scolding part.

I find myself censoring words here. Why? Writing is a release. . . What to forget—what to surface. What is denial? What is healthy forgetting or putting behind me?

Which me is the Annie me? The tall stable mature intelligent wife of an artist, who puts up with his idiosyncrasies and aberrations with surface calm. The person who carries the burdens of others, and seeks to counsel them, and asks little for herself. The woman who sews cleverly and enjoys doing little things for the home to make it unique and comfortable. The cluttery person. The money manager. The sometimes easily hurt person who keeps it in.

I'm liking a lot of this part of me. What I don't like about Annie is the martyrdom, the intense suffering that breaks out only in private, the lack of public anger, in spite of strong negative feelings, and her getting stuck in some places instead of growing deeper, her going into counseling as a field without having undergone deep therapy herself. There's a bit of superficiality in her in this regard. Easy spiritual answers.

What part of me is in this? Certainly the martyrdom. My anger is beginning to show more now. And I tend not to get stuck; though there is some shallowness about me even in the way I am pursuing my new chosen career.

Perhaps one important gift for me in all this is to seek ways to enter into this career with *more* depth. I would like to do that.

And the more I can experience the *immediacy* of my feeling reactions, including anger, the less intense and suffering and surface polite I will be.

Two great “ahas” from one unpleasant (I thought) dream image.

I turn to the dream about my life at the Urban Life Center with several female characters occupying central roles. I can identify with a part of me, personified by a colleague, that is critical and demanding—a stance I have deliberately made as a conscious change from tearing down to building up. Another dream figure appears as a hurt little girl responding to those critical demands. I am aware that some of those demands have not been justified because they question my intent and integrity—the more important part of my person. The hurt little girl figure in me is also the person seeking out solace and affirmation from someone she loves and trusts.

Another related scene placed me in the bathroom showing a student sweeping up a room I had supposedly cleaned or been responsible for getting cleaned—and my failure was obvious. My feelings in the dream were of embarrassment at my shoddy taking of responsibility.

The theme of criticism was there throughout, making me take a second look at my patterns of relating—permissively, and critically—and my increasing insistence on “seeing the other person’s side—something that mitigates the criticism.

I realize that I used to confront less, but kept my criticisms and demands inside and they built up a pressure that created a barrier between me and the person I was failing to confront. So—oddly enough—when I was less confrontive, I was more critical.

So if I can confront more readily—with *immediacy*, again—and do it in my own way, with caring and respect for the other person, I will be less critical in a rejecting pressuring way.

How can I translate this learning about myself into my position of leadership with the staff at my work?

Oh, this is a different kind of writing. . . it leads to task-oriented conclusions. That’s o.k., but I recognize it as different and that it has a different feel to it—and has a different effect on me. I like both kinds of writing, being able to do both.

Don said, “How are you going to put together life planning and body therapy (bioenergetics)?” At first, I discounted the idea. Then later and especially as I read on in Alexander Lowen’s book (*Bioenergetics*), it made sense. I am not sure how to work it out on a personal level yet. I don’t want to become a bioenergetics therapist.

Coming Face to Face with God

Saturday, June 4—after the retreat into silence

I want to think out the place of God and religion in my life. I also feel resistant to it and old fears and rebellions crop up. The guilt trip.

More like it—I want to *feel* out the situation, although I know I won’t be able to avoid thinking.

There is a good deal of anger at a God who doesn’t explain Himself or do things *for* me. It feels most like a deep, deep frustration. Like clawing at Him. Having a tantrum. Kicking and screaming. God, what a child-to-parent reaction! I am amazed.

The connection with church remains. And that leaves me with a feeling of dullness, boredom, tiredness, monotony, and. . .exasperation. I felt guilty yesterday telling people I had no church

ties. Angry too that it seems to matter to me. I think it is their opinion that matters, not the fact of no church ties.

Is this tied to a notion of worthwhileness of my life?

The feeling that's missing in the God thing is the joy and celebration of life. That element is lacking right now and I somehow connect this with worship. Holy joy. There's some envy stirring around here. If I poke the fires, what emerges are images of Mennonite Reba Place types lifting hands up and looking holy and beautiful and joyful. Are their lives really that way or is that simply the way a photographer caught them?

I remember my own joy. Right now I'm too angry and tired to feel my own, but I recognize I've had it, thought I am not sure whether to label it holy joy or just natural effervescence.

It *seems* self-developed, not supernatural. Old teachings about ignoring feelings and trusting God instead of feelings come to mind.

Suppose I can't develop one way or another, this holy joy? Can I call this other Me good? —the anger, the rebellion, the frustration, the tiredness?

Right now, no. I'm too used to being happy. How close is happiness to joy? What is the missing ingredient that turns one to the other?

It might be forgiveness—something linked with grace and humility, and a sense of humor. I am almost too stubborn to give in to this. Pride probably stands in the way and for me that is perilously close to self-respect. I think it's the sense of humor that makes the ultimate difference.

Monday, July 4

There is an eagerness to write and a resistance. The eagerness is that I'm sometimes finding "answers" in writing. New insights come, and just the *release* of writing helps me let go of knots. The resistance is that I wonder what good it will be to have an insight when *experience* is what I crave—rocking, stabbing, pulsating, searing, exhilarating experience.

If I don't monitor my words, what will come?

Integrity-and self-respect are key words—to believe in myself. Crisis of faith—in myself is occurring. To be able to call me *good* at the core.

Words. I vomit them. They sound jargon. What is *real*?

I look down at my naked body here on the bed—light tan, pink and smooth, well-formed. This is a *reality*. It's me. It's the only me I can see, or others.

What is meant when others see my love or hate, anger or fear—feel my vibes. It comes through this *body*. This warm lovely lithe body.

My head feels uglier than my body. The disconnection occurs at the neck. My head—face—eyes—need the healing. I wonder if the ears are a cue. Listening—the *taking in* part of me, which is weak sometimes.

I've not much time to write today so I leap quickly for a saving cue. I grab at it. My ears. "I'll work on that today"—really hearing people.

Well, it may be quick salvation, but I'm drowning and if that's a straw, I'll take it, and inflate it into a *life raft*; damn it!

Sunday, August 7

I cry a lot right now—about myself. And then I hate that and can't stop. I reach out for comfort and find a stone. I want to scream, to pound my fists (I almost wrote "my little fists")—to insist on being heard—and held.

I am tired. That is one explanation. Or old and emotional. I hate those reasons. I am tired of reasons. I just want to scream at life. Why should I have to struggle so hard to keep seeing myself in a positive light? And yet I do. The anger in this is that I *do* see myself positively, but have some need for reward/comfort/support—I am not getting enough of in quarters where it counts to me.

I can rationalize it all away. After all, I am ultimately the only person who can really give myself support and reward in the final analysis. What is this need for others' responsiveness? And of course as soon as I feel most needy, the less apt I am to get it from others. No one likes a hurt whimpering child.

So quickly I turn to giving to others, reaching out with loving support for them (because I feel my own need so keenly).

But at home with Don, and sometimes with very familiar friends, the need seems Too Big.

The easiest solution seems to me to be in giving thus. I feel good when I do this and usually I am well rewarded when I do. And I feel strong and good right now about doing that.

But a tiny piece of my *mind* wonders if it is healthy to give up my need by meeting others'—self-denial, it's called. Or perhaps it's subtle exploitation.

I can't worry about that now. I'll give. It's a way I know to beat my own game.

And I will give to myself as well—perhaps by thinking about our coming vacation, by fully enjoying the next few days, and by not trying so hard to have everything turn out perfectly. And by focusing on friends who love me and feel good around me.

It is so hard when I feel like a person who's made a bad mistake, or who has hurt or embarrassed someone, or who is feeling sorry for herself in public. Yuk. It seems like it would take so little at that moment for a person to say, "You've really held up under a tough year wonderfully, Eunice."

The *only* thing I can do is to begin saying that sort of thing to others. I can call Jim tomorrow and start with him. I may even be able to do that with Phyllis, though that is somehow harder for me. But I think she needs praise *fully* as much as I do.

I feel much better. Maybe this has been a prayer.

If so, *thanks, God.*