November 9, 2024

It's no secret that I have kept a journal off and on since 1979 with the occasional retro entry dating even further back, to 1977, back to my college crush on Teri Brison at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. To date, the total number of journal volumes, in a variety of sizes, styles, and lengths numbered over 40 at one time, but then I irresolutely trashed about ten or twelve of those volumes a few years ago in a hazy-brained attempt to make some incriminating information disappear. Never mind what I was trying to hide. There was no crime, no evidence tampering, and the journal entries themselves, though detailed, were hardly the stuff of embarrassment or incrimination.

Recently, I've found myself going back and rereading some of my journals. Many names and events I had packed away so far back in the dank moldy corners of my memory it was unlikely they were ever going to see the light of my waking consciousness again, were suddenly awakened as I read entries from the 1980s, 90s, and the early 2000s. I was astonished to have been able to retrieve some of these memories at all. Of those I *was* able to rescue, most, I came to discover, I had remembered incorrectly or fragmentally.

Anyway, I recently finished reading Richard Matheson's book, *Musings*, in which he resolved to keep a journal with the intention of writing an entry a day beginning on November 8 of 1994 (apparently). As happens all too often with even the most resolute promises we make to ourselves, Matheson did not hold fast to his mission. Furthermore, he does not seem to have had any hard and fast rule about what to write. He says in the Introduction that if the events of the day warranted an entry, he would include them. That's always been my approach, too. However, his overall objective was to tag as many souvenir memories as possible, going back as far as possible, and try to capture the elusive gnomes of recall in chronological order and thus attain the closest thing to an autobiography he was ever going to write. He wanted to keep his life in its proper linear order, yet he remained unconcerned if unexpected non-sequitur and/or random recollections dropped out of the sky from time to time and diverted him from his planned journey along Memory Lane.

Thus, I've decided to try my own hand at an autobiographical slant by gathering as many puzzle pieces of my own early days as possible. This is for my sons Brooks and Clay, really, no one else . . . except maybe me, because my mind is forever bubbling with arbitrary vignettes from so long ago, constantly bringing to the forefront faces and places that have remained with me for 70 years.

To wit: Have you ever been doing something in the middle of the day- some mundane activity, for instance, like walking the dog or mowing the grass -and out of nowhere a thought from the distant past seeps into your awareness, and for just that one moment you're transported back to a time long forgotten? A classmate from the 1st grade whose name you can't believe you remember; a bee sting you got at summer camp one year when you were picking honeysuckle; the first time you held a girl's hand. Tiny, seemingly inconsequential people, places, and events that have always been along for the ride though you were completely unaware of them, riding your soul like pilot fish on a shark.

That's what this book is all about. Tortoises of thought that swim in the dark depths of my subconscious being given a chance to come up for air, if only for a few brief minutes.

Like Matheson, I'll do my best to follow a reasonable timeline, but don't let your toupee blow off if I wind up stopping in mid-thought and reminiscing about non sequitur events in order to fit new and unexpected pieces into the puzzle. It's inevitable that as I write about one memory another will sprout, and I'll feel compelled to reveal that one as well, and quickly, before it dives back into the cerebral abyss never to be conjured again. To hold that face or fragrance or whatever triggered the memory up to the light a second or third time and examine it more thoroughly as I might study an old faded photograph from different angles. Of course, I hope I'll be more faithful to my task than Matheson was to his, but if, like him, I wind up skipping around a lot, so what? Herein will lie the answers to questions no one ever thought to ask.

Many of my most enduring and impactful memories have been recounted, either truthfully or fictionally, in my thirteen (so far) books. The earthquake that Brenda's death was to me emotionally

and psychologically in 1986 has been triggering random aftershocks ever since, which serve as yearly reminders that you never get past grief. Grief never ends. You just learn to turn it off. Her spirit, no surprise then, wends its way throughout much of my writing. I freely admit it. But it's the many, many snippets from day-to-day life that created the person known as Heath (in this incarnation anyway), some of them truly strange, some of them embarrassing even more so. Still, I feel that in order for this inspected life to be fully and honestly disclosed I have to swing the Super Trouper around and train it on every element of my past, to illuminate every dark cobwebbed corner. Let the cockroaches scatter where they may. This was me, boys.

It may well be that time itself is a fabrication, an illusion. Past, present, and future— our terms, our perceived reality —occur concurrently. There is no linear time; there is no past, present or future. What "happened" years ago is still happening, and what is yet to happen has already happened and is happening now. Think of it in terms of consciousness. Can you not, in an instant, snap your fingers and simultaneously recall an incident from the past, be alert to the now, and foresee an event that has yet to occur? Is it not a simple and factual matter that they blend into one, each as real and present as the others?

Think of yourself at age ten, say. Do you see yourself as you were? Can you remember what you looked like, sounded like? How you felt? Now look at yourself today, in this moment. Do you look and sound the same? If you place a photograph of yourself at ten next to a photograph of yourself as you are now, do the two people in the pictures look alike? Are they the same height? Do they have the same physical features? Do they feel and believe and know the same things? No! You are, in every way, two entirely different people. Only your consciousness remains unaltered— expanding, yes, ever learning —but still the essential vibrant *you*. So then, I ask you, where is the ten-year-old you today? Does that kid still exist, and if not, what became of him or her? More to the point, where will the you of today, right now, be twenty years from this moment? Surely the two of you are not the same person but for the continuum that is your essence, your mind, your awareness. Your spirit. I tell you, the thread of memory that runs from the embryonic you to the fully grown you who is reading these words in the here and now is what holds your life together and makes it make sense.

One last note before I set out on this nostalgic journey: I'm going to write as the words come to me, sometimes in chips and shards, sometimes in whole chunks. It will have as much to do with what time of day or night it is when I sit down to write, what the memory is, and perhaps most important, how much detail I recall. I'll try to address at least one memory a day for the next calendar year, but don't get out the pitchforks and torches if I come up three hundred days short. That said . . .

. . . here we go.