

I CARRY with me journals and pens, books and page markers—and whatever are the words, images, and contextual creations that turn over and over in my mind. They are simple things all these, and I am grateful for them, to have them to hold to, because the world we inhabit and so many people consider real is nothing but a foreign place to me. I think long ago I must have decided to build my own little world somewhere else—or at least to take up residence in a much different place— a place I know as home. This book, my loved ones, is a photograph of some of the places in that world.

I have many journals, and among their thousands of pages are the scribblings which say something about the place I call home—the place where I walk closest to God. But the irony is that all those words, in and of themselves, say nothing of this place—nothing of God—for God’s kingdom is far too beautiful for them. All these words, all these hours, minutes and moments in my mind are only pointers to home. One must understand this—it is not the words that matter, it is not the mind that matters—it is what they and it cannot speak that matters. It is the yearning of a soul, the burning of a heart, and the crying out of a spirit.

It is the purpose of art to help us see what it cannot itself show us. Words such as mine are voiced only to help one hear what the words themselves cannot say.

From the journals I never let anyone read, the level at which one must grasp this idea is perhaps not terribly intuitive. And so I hope that in this journal before you, it is a little more obvious. It is my gift to you this Christmas—the most personal gift I could think to give to you. If you see within it any clue of my gratitude to you and my love for you, and somehow know that as far as these words may go they are only a shadow, only a pointer to the depth of what I truly feel for you, then you will know something of what I mean by the above ideas.

I wanted this year to write to you girls, so that my memory—our memories—may always be a gift to you. And I wanted this year to give your mother a gift as well—a gift in an answer to a question with which she is all too familiar—What do I think about all the time?

I see everywhere a beauty that cannot be spoken, and I try to speak of it anyway. I think, perhaps, this is why I am here.

FIFTY WEEKS AGO, then, I began this journal for you. I want you to know I love you. I want you to know that when someday my body leaves this earth, what will have mattered most of all, perhaps the only thing at all, is simply that I loved you. Love is life’s only truth.



I do not believe man sees truth with his eyes.
I do not believe man knows truth by his intellect.
I believe man sees truth by intuition
and knows truth in his heart.

I believe in a truth
of which human language cannot speak.



Sometimes even the most usual, most common things of all can bring us a great peace and fulfillment. Today the four of us went to buy a few groceries at the big warehouse store down the street. It was wonderfully relaxing, being together without concern for whom we must meet when, what our dinner plans were supposed to be, and so on.

We concluded our shopping by eating our lunch there in the food court of the store. We repeated a little routine we have developed: We order three large hot dogs and a large soda. I split one hot dog between you two girls. One of you gets ketchup only, and the other gets ketchup and relish. On mom's hot dog goes ketchup, and on mine mustard and onions. And we sit and we talk and we share this simple meal together. It is very simple thing, a trivial thing.

But it is our thing. It is a little tradition of ours that we never even thought to call a tradition. It developed on its own, in a unique way that belongs only to us. Millions of people eat hot dogs every day, but no family sits and eats these particular hot dogs, in this particular place, in the particular way we eat them, with the particular way we share our lives, together.

Enjoy traditions you build for yourselves—even if you never call them traditions. Treasure them within you and enjoy them with a childlike innocence that finds them fun for reasons you may never stop to think about. Do not analyze them. Do not critique them. Do not question them. They do not need to be logical. You don't need to defend them in front of others. Just enjoy them because they are yours and you have made them.

Learn to enjoy your bowl of cereal in the morning. Make a tradition of it. Even when you are old, if you want to eat the sweet, cold breakfast cereal of your childhood, do so. Play with the little marshmallow shapes, recreating a story along the edge of your bowl that you invented when you were little. Spell "I love you" with the little letters you pick up with your spoon.

Enjoy your walk to classes, or your ride to work on a subway train. Find ways to make these mundane tasks your own. Create a little twenty-minute world, no matter how small, that you revisit each day. Create this little world of yours and know there is none like it, and see in it the beauty you have found in it.

What I am saying is, make art out of the little things in your life, and smile to yourself for the artist you are. Do this no matter how small or unnoticeable it may be to others. No one has to see your own art for it to truly be art, because art is always first and foremost between the artist and God. Understanding this is one of the tricks to staying sane in an often crazy world.



In the news this morning four American missionaries gunned down at a hospital in Yemen; three of them now dead. These acts of senseless violence make me sick, and now hundreds of people who needed a doctor will not have one. And I am sure the killer in his craziness thought he was doing all of them a favor. Of course the news stories are concluding this story with, “The gunman was identified only as a Muslim fundamentalist.”

My first thought was that such comments cannot help anything. They can only serve to incite more anger, more distrust, more hatred between people. Between the West and the Middle east. Between Christian and Muslim. Between humans and humans.

And later I was thinking about hatred itself. Where does hatred come from? We can hate a neighbor, another kid on the playground, the person who shares an office with us, even our own family. Worst of all we can hate people we have never met, all because enough people tell us we should. But then again, I’m not so sure about the kid on the playground. Young children do not know how to hate; not until they are a bit older and have learned how.

Hatred comes from fear. We fear what people can do to us, and we don’t know what to do with our fear, so we turn it into hatred. There is some weakness within us that causes us to fear, and then we become angry at our fear even if it is not conscious, and our anger turns to hatred. Hatred is something we feel we can do when we feel we must do something and are not creative enough to do anything else.

Love is the solution to hatred, but maybe not because they are opposites. Love solves hatred by getting rid of its source; by driving out fear. I am a person of many fears – so many things can and do scare me and I have learned I was simply born this way. Fear is quite innate to me. So I try to grow strong in my fears, knowing they are a path to courage – both the courage to face those fears and the courage to choose love in the face of them. Some people say it is harder to choose love than it is to choose hatred, but it is not. It is easier to choose love in the long run, and it is easier to choose love in the short run once you have learned how. Hatred will make you sick and kill you, but love will heal you and show you true life.

So when you find that you are beginning to hate a person or a people, ask yourself why you hate them. Why do they frighten you? What is it that you consider yours, that you fear they will take from you? How is it that they can harm you, cheat you, enslave you, convict you, or prove you a fool? These are the things that frighten you, and tempt you to respond with anger and hatred. But in the face of such things, instead of hating, seek a

love within yourself and God that proves to you there is no need to fear and so no need to hate. And then you may find that your enemy is just like you – afraid. Then you are at the right place to pray for them.



We all need to take pause one in a while and reflect back upon the year just passed, and look ahead to the possibilities of the one to come. I do this on my birthday and at Christmas, but whatever day we pick the importance of doing so is real. It is a good and useful thing to mark the passage of time in our lives. It keeps us grounded and reminds us we are here – that we are growing and learning and progressing and we might as well admit we're caught up in the ever-marching clock of the physical world.

Do not deprecate yourself when you look back and see mistakes, and do not become prideful when you see successes. Everybody makes mistakes and everybody has successes. In and of themselves, neither means anything. What matters is what you do in the face of them. What matters is that you learn from both, and handle each with humility, honesty, and dignity; for yourself and for others. If you can look back and honestly say you have learned something that can make you a better person, and you have taken that something and made it a part of who you are today, then you have done all that you can and need do. It is from all these things we call "good" and "bad" that we learn to love well and be loved well. Love is the meaning and value of all things.

Remember that each day, each and every moment brings forth a new year, a new beginning. Every day you awaken, and every night you lie down to sleep, know you can start fresh and new and whole on that day.

Finally, never forget to allow others this same opportunity in their lives, and never doubt that your faith in them may be the one thing they need for their own renewal to become real. We all have the ability to help others start over. We are instruments of God's Grace in their lives.



As far as I have been able to tell, the people who bring calm and peace everywhere they go are people who are completely comfortable with themselves. They make no pretenses, they have nothing hidden from others or themselves, they are not trying to prove anything. They are simply who they are, and they know this is quite enough. They are humble.

As far as possible, pick these people as your friends. They will help you to find yourself, and to love what you find when you do. Pray for your humility, and desire it earnestly, and bind yourself to those who truly know what humility is. There is no finding God until you become in some measure humble, and the depth to which you will know him is directly dependent upon the depth of your humility.



It is better to understand that we have good days and bad days, and in either case we are still ourselves and other people are still themselves. Our moods are only our perceptions and they will change from time to time. This cannot be helped and there is nothing wrong with it.

What we must do, though, is not allow our perceptions to judge our principles and views in life, but rather to remain aware of our principles and let them judge our perceptions and color them correctly. For example, perhaps my principle in life is to bring God's mercy to other people. On a bad day I simply may not be rich in energy to do so. It is tempting to think that nobody I talk to today deserves mercy. But this is my mood overwhelming my principle. I must remain constantly aware of my principle and allow it to judge my mood. Perhaps today I am the one who needs to be given a bit of mercy myself, that I may enjoy a bit of rejuvenation and healing. And if I cannot show mercy to others today, it is not because they do not deserve it—it is because I cannot give it. The best thing for me is to be a bit detached and withdrawn and keep to myself so I do not injure another in my weakness. And if they lash out at me or judge me for my aloofness, then I simply remember today is my day to ask for mercy—even if the only place I can find it is from myself.

What I am saying is that some days the best way to love other people and show them mercy is to give yourself a break and love yourself and show yourself some mercy first.



Someday you will grow up and leave our house to start your own life, and in a way this will happen long before you are gone physically, and it is already happening as you grow and mature. Of course this is right and proper. But I will miss you when you are gone. I will miss your laughter and your tears. I will miss your smiles and your frowns. I will miss your claims of today and your questions of tomorrow. I will miss the way you walk and talk and play. I will miss sitting around the dinner table with you. I will miss our kisses and hugs and prayers at bed time. I will miss everything about you, and you will never be out of my heart nor out of my mind.

I wish all the best things for you as you build your own life and learn to live it. Live it well, and when you find a moment, please call me once in a while—if not because you miss me, then because I will be missing you. Call me and smile to yourself and say, "I thought maybe you were missing me today, daddy, so I called to talk for a while."

I know this is selfish of me, but I will miss you. You are beautiful, and I cannot help missing your beauty when it is not near me.



I am becoming more and more convinced that there is no meaning, no reason, no purpose for any resource we have—except for what it can do to reduce the suffering of other people.



Today you started first grade. Taking you to school today I felt myself five years old again. I remember how enormous my school seemed to me—so huge that the hallways might as well have been other lands somewhere far away.

And the playground on out into the fields for baseball must have been big enough surely for an entire city to assemble. I did not venture out that far—it was a journey too grand for a child like me. This morning I could smell again like it was yesterday the wax on giant fringed mops the janitors pushed—even more fresh than yesterday—as if your today was today for me as well. Have adults forgotten all this? Have they all forgotten how huge and frightening this is? Why do they not come and help us? Why do they not come stand beside us? Do they think we are strong, you and I? What is wrong with them?

And so I acted brave because I knew if I pretended you would pretend, and I walked away to leave you to march in line to class. But I returned a minute later to peek inside to see you there. And God, how proud I was of you. I do not know if others know what we know. I cannot say if they know what it is like to know only within yourself that you are being very brave and courageous today—for you have done what others can do. I do not know if they fathom the bravery required of us to simply make it through a day, and when asked how it was, to simply say, “It was good.”

This is what you do. I know this. I know because I did the same when I was five and six—and I do the same now that I am thirty-eight. And so with you I have another reason to be thankful for my life such as it is. If it were not lived in fear, I would not see the glory of your courageous heart. And that glory I would not trade for anything.

