Sabbatical Trip, 2022

Dale Easley

We believe that life's greatest moments and deepest connections exist outside your comfort zone.
I believe that underneath the discomfort holding us back, there's fear. The trick is to feel that fear, and do it anyway.

Yes Theory, *Talk to Strangers*

On August 13th, 2022, I threw my good leg over the saddle of my Honda Africa Twin and headed west, setting out from my home in Dubuque, Iowa, on what became a 5177-mile, 6.5-week quest. It wasn't a religious journey like walking the Camino de Santiago, though I was in search of something missing in my life, nor was it a buddy trip like *On the Road*, as I traveled alone. I was looking for something, but I couldn't name it, and my biggest fear was returning unchanged, just drifting through my final years into death or, worse, senility.

1: The entry to Badlands National Park. It was 104 degrees when I arrived, but a brief rainstorm soon cooled things off into the 80s, decent for camping in an arid climate.

2: Riding across the Wall. I camped in view of it on the lower side. From above, a dry prairie stretched out before suddenly dropping away.

In recording my impressions of the natural scene I have striven above all for accuracy, since I believe that there is a kind of poetry, even a kind of truth, in simple fact. But the desert is a vast world, an oceanic world, as deep in its way and complex and various as the sea. Language makes a mighty loose net with which to go fishing for simple facts, when facts are infinite.

Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness*

When I was 19 years old and had just finished my freshman year of college, I took a month-long geology course, backpacking and camping, washing off under hand pumps, showering once a week. We started from North Carolina, crossing the Mississippi River on our second day, progressing towards the Badlands. This was a time before the internet and cell phones. Instead, we had journals and a box of books. In the evenings after setting up camp, cooking, and eating, we had time to write about the day's events, our thoughts, and the beauty we observed. And we had time to read.

One of the books I read on the trip was *Desert Solitaire* by Edward Abbey. The solitude he found and his reflections inspired me at that time when I was on the cusp of adulthood, trying to determine how I wanted my future to unfold. Though it has taken me decades to realize that I was more a misfit than an introvert, taking off alone on a motorcycle adventure was my own solitary time of reflection.

In my sabbatical proposal that enabled the trip, I had stated that I wanted to revisit places from my youth and write about how climate change had affected them. However, I was approaching major transitions in my own life—the marriage of my daughter, advancing arthritis, retirement, and age at which my father died. Perhaps for the last time, I wanted to seize the day.

3: A bighorn sheep near the road in Badlands National Park. Food was a lot easier to come by for me than him.

4: The view back from near the top of the pass going over the Bighorn Mountains on my way to Cody, Wyoming.

The biggest hindrance to learning is fear of showing one's self a fool.
William Least Heat-Moon, *Blue Highways*

When William Least Heat-Moon headed out to circumnavigate the U.S. on lesser-used two-lane highways—blue on the old Rand McNally Road Atlas—his marriage was dissolving and his teaching career had ended. As part Osage, he faced not fitting in wherever he went. And yet, he went. He set off on his journey in 1978 in a Ford van and traveled 13,000 miles during four months, far more than I was to. But we shared a desire to understand how humans and the environment interact and change each other.

On that first geology trip when I was 19, we camped near the Shoshone River between Cody WY and Yellowstone National Park. The campsite had large evergreens, little underbrush, and a view of the river. Decades later, all those trees have been cut down, victims of the pine beetle. Winters aren't as cold as they once were, and the beetles' range has expanded.

But when I first camped, there were no bear boxes either. The grizzly bear was in danger of extinction. This time, the campground host told me that she had seen multiple signs of bears at nearby Forest Service campgrounds. All food, cooking gear—even propane—had to be stored in those bear boxes to avoid attracting the bears to my camp.

So, we've had some successes with conservation.

5: Statue of Buffalo Bill Cody at the eponymous Wyoming State Museum in Cody, Wyoming.

6: My campsite in the Shoshone National Forest between Cody and Yellowstone National Park. The brown metal box is for storage of food and toiletries away from bears.

Ozymandias
By Percy Bysshe Shelley

I met a traveller from an antique land,
Who said—"Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal, these words appear:
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away."

While in Montana, I dropped by to see my nephew who taught at Montana State University. He has three kids and lives in a two-bedroom apartment, paying over $3000 per month. Yet Montana has the 48th smallest economy among states. My daughter is in grad school in Idaho, ranked 39theconomically, and the month of her wedding, her apartment rent was raised over 50%. What's going on?

The West is not new to boom-and-bust cycles. Extraction industries—mining and logging—boom, strip what they can, then leave town, usually leaving their mess behind. But today's boom is different, driven by outside money plus remote workers. During the pandemic, we rapidly improved the possibilities for doing many jobs from anywhere there's an internet connection. And university towns have good internet. Plus they tend to have a variety of food and entertainment. Add to that the beauty of the West, and money and people from the tech sector in California, Texas, and Washington poured in, driving up real estate and rent prices. For longtime residents, life suddenly became a lot more expensive.

7: The overlook to Lake Yellowstone which fills part of the caldera left from the most recent explosion of the Yellowstone Supervolcano.

8: The view out the window at the cafeteria by Lake Yellowstone. A friend once worked there, meeting a waitress that he later married.

For I have always lived violently, drunk hugely, eaten too much or not at all, slept around the clock or missed two nights of sleeping, worked too hard and too long in glory, or slobbed for a time in utter laziness. I've lifted, pulled, chopped, climbed, made love with joy and taken my hangovers as a consequence, not as a punishment. I did not want to surrender fierceness for a small gain in yardage. My wife married a man; I saw no reason why she should inherit a baby.

John Steinbeck, *Travels With Charley*

In late August, I was in a campground bathroom in West Yellowstone chatting with a guy at the sink next to me. He had a big belly, a gray ponytail, and was a Harley rider who had just come from Sturgis, the big motorcycle rally in South Dakota. Afterward, I went to a hut in the middle of the campground that sold coffee, bought some and a muffin, and sat down at a picnic table to journal. The guy came over and joined me. It turned out that he was a Ph.D. from Florida who works on space launches for NASA. He has a drum studio in his basement. His wife is a suicidal invalid, so he only leaves her once a year to come out West to meet up with his brother to go motorcycle riding. To say that my initial stereotype of him was wrong would be an understatement. I was humbled.

9: A hot spring in Yellowstone National Park. How rock near the surface boils the water.

10: Missoula, Montana, where I headed after Yellowstone. It is one of the settings for *A River Runs Through It*, a favorite book.

I have come to believe that a great teacher is a great artist and that there are as few as there are any other great artists. Teaching might even be the greatest of the arts since the medium is the human mind and spirit.

John Steinbeck, *On Teaching*

I have been a teacher for most of 40 years. I taught high school math for two years in Kenya, water resources for a year in the Middle East, geology grad school for 15 years in New Orleans, where I also volunteered as a GED teacher, and from 2005 till now at the University of Dubuque. My identity has been *teacher*, but the sabbatical year with which the trip west began was leading a year later to retirement. My identity was soon to change.

11: A warning sign.

12: Grinnell Lake in Glacier National Park. For years, students in my introductory geology lab course have used historical photographs of Grinnell Glacier to estimate the rate of its melting and the date at which it may disappear. I wanted to take a photo to show them I'd been there, but on my 10-mile hike that day, clouds kept it unseen. The hike was longer than I expected because the trail I originally planned to hike was closed because of grizzly bears.

Regardless of whether or not we're formally making art, we are all living as artists. We perceive, filter, and collect data, then curate an experience for ourselves and others based on this information set. Whether we do this consciously or unconsciously, by the mere fact of being alive, we are active participants in the ongoing process of creation.

Rick Rubin, *The Creative Act: A Way of Being*

My photos are not art in any gallery-centric way, but I am glad to have the opportunity to share them. They are *artifacts*, the remainders and reminders of my trip. If these were simply vacation photos, I'd keep them to myself. But taken together, they are the beginning of a story of change through space and time. When I, as a geologist, see the landscape, I see not only the current configuration—I see the physical processes that shaped it over long swaths of time. Tectonic uplift and erosion, flooding and drought, extreme heat and cold, all leave their imprint.

And I believe that understanding the science only makes the beauty more enjoyable. Art and science (and religion) are not at odds. Instead, a sense of awe flows through each. If I understand that block-faulting and glaciation shaped the Grand Tetons, it makes their beauty that much more impressive. Some argue that science removes the mystery. Perhaps. But it adds to the majesty and our sense of the special circumstances that came together uniquely to sculpt them.

Does knowing that Michelangelo's *David* is sculpted from marble, not granite reduce its impact? Or does it instead help us appreciate the forethought that went into the selection of materials, the knowledge for example of the smaller crystals in marble, it's relative softness, and the resulting ability to shape detail?

13: The lake I skirted on the approach to Grinnell Glacier.

14: Many Glaciers Lodge, built by the railroad to attract more tourists to the area. Seeing it is proof to me that there is beauty in manmade structures that are in harmony with their natural surroundings.

Our sadness is as much a part of our lives as is our laughter.
To share our sadness with one we love
is perhaps as great a joy as we can know—
unless it be to share our laughter.

James Kavanaugh

The fall after that first geology course West, two of my sophomore classes had a student newly back at college after a year off. Both were small courses, and soon Jim and I were laughing together. But after my father was diagnosed with leukemia and then died, I learned more about Jim's grief. Jim had been waterfront director at the church camp on Lake Michigan that he first attended as a young boy. The summer before his year off, a camper drowned. Jim couldn't understand how a loving God had let the drowning happen. That's why Jim had taken a year off college.

The next school year, Jim and I were co-editors of the college newspaper. It was a weekly in the time before word processors and computer typesetting, so we'd stay up late on Sunday and Monday nights, first choosing the articles to include, writing our weekly editorial, and then the next night doing the layout of the print. Afterward, instead of going to sleep or to study, we'd head out for omelets at an all-night diner, to a doughnut shop, or to one of our apartments where cold beer awaited. Our conversations seldom dwelled on our grief, but it was always in the near background.

Somewhere during our college days, Jim went on an Outward Bound trip. Near the end, one of the counselors gave Jim a quote that starts with stating that its author is a searcher, not being satisfied with society's easy answers. He asserts that there are many of us. Jim shared the quote with me after Dad died, knowing I was searching for some way to understand what had happened. It ends with the quote above.

15: Potty humor.

16: A rare sighting of a sasquatch family. They are mostly solitary creatures.

Everyone has a holy place, a refuge, where their heart is purer, their mind clearer, where they feel closer to God or love or truth or whatever it is they happen to worship.

J.R. Moehringer, *The Tender Bar*

Polebridge MT has no cell-phone service nor internet, and the only electricity is from solar panels. The only store will sell you three gallons of gas, enough to get back to civilization. But it will also sell you a hucklebery bearclaw hot out of the oven that makes the drive over rutted gravel roads worth the trip, even on a motorcycle. A hostel nearby has warm water for showers plus a kitchen, and a saloon sells Montana beer and burgers. A few miles down another dirt road is an entrance to Glacier National Park.

17: In front of North Fork Hostel where I camped for several days.

18: Bowman Lake, less than a dozen milesfrom the Canadian border, near the Polebridge entrance to Glacier National Park.

The place to improve the world is first in one's own heart and head and hands, and then work outward from there.

Robert Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*

I rode into the state park at Thompson Falls MT with no reservations for the upcoming Labor Day weekend, a hard time to find a campsite. In the entrance hut, the camp host was checking people in. He was from Burlington, Iowa. I told him my predicament, and he replied that they had a site that wasn't on the computer listings online. Sure enough, it was available, and I booked it for a week, including the weekend.

The stay at Thompson Falls was the beginning of relaxing, planning less, going with the flow. I hung my hammock where I could look out at the Clarke Fork River while reading *A River Runs Through It, The Alchemist,* and other favorites. Town was within walking distance along a path following the river. It had a coffeeshop, a bakery, a grocery store, and a brewery. Serendipity.

19: The view from my hammock.

20: The path along the Clark Fork River leading into Thompson Falls from the State Park.

I am here not only to evade for a while the clamor and filth and confusion of the cultural apparatus but also to confront, immediately and directly if it's possible, the bare bones of existence, the elemental and fundamental, the bedrock which sustains us. I want to be able to look at and into a juniper tree, a piece of quartz, a vulture, a spider, and see it as it is in itself, devoid of all humanly ascribed qualities, anti-Kantian, even the categories of scientific description. To meet God or Medusa face to face, even if it means risking everything human in myself. I dream of a hard and brutal mysticism in which the naked self merges with a nonhuman world and yet somehow survives still intact, individual, separate. Paradox and bedrock.

Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire*

"Live simply so that others may simply live" is attributed to Ghandi, but it also ties together many of my life experiences—the Quaker college I attended, my volunteer work in Kenya and Africa, and my views on the environment. When I first moved to New Orleans, I lived for three years without air conditioning. And though a wife and two kids made my life more material, I still tried to keep it simple.

My dad was a Depression-era kid, and he built the home that I grew up in. I learned a lot from helping him work—basic plumbing and wiring, simple engine repairs, and, most importantly, a confidence that I could figure out what was broken and fix it. Keep it simple and repair it yourself.

Recently, my sewer line once again clogged. I have an old house, and the sewer line often gets tree roots blocking the flow. Years ago, I bought my own power augur, and I've used it numerous times. But recently, it stopped turning. It's not a particularly complex machine, so I took of the cover to the motor and belt system and saw that a set-screw had loosened, allowing the motor shaft to slip instead of turning the belt that turned the drum containing the augur. A few turns with a hex key, and I was back to auguring.

When traveling alone by motorcycle, the attitude of "I can make it work" can keep you going. Ahead of the trip, I had to believe that I could build the skills needed. At first, I dropped the bike several times, always at slow speeds, fortunately, but doing significant damage to the bike. Even on the trip, I dropped it twice, including once when I had to get help to get it back up after it went down an incline. Still, the stories my dad told me decades ago about overcoming adversity kept me going.

21: All my gear for 6.5 weeks had to fit on my motorcycle, including camping gear.

22: I sometimes washed and did laundry in a plastic bucket.

Quality is a direct experience independent of and prior to intellectual abstractions.

Robert Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*

Ecologists sometimes use the term *high-quality habitat* to describe an area where certain species may thrive. Food is abundant, the temperatures are appropriate, predators are limited, and competition from other species is unthreatening. *Restoration* of habitat always has an underlying model of some past *ideal,* an intellectual abstraction. Often here in Iowa, our ideal is what things were like before the Europeans arrived.

But that ideal is never achieved nor achievable. Too much has changed and is changing, some natural and some human-caused. Recognizing the futility of reaching the ideal can lead to despair. Perfection is the enemy of the good.

Instead, we can seek improvement, not perfection. Being unable to achieve our goals is not necessarily an excuse for not trying to achieve them. As Goethe said, "Courage is the commitment to begin without any guarantee of success."

23: The Clark Fork River carved its route as floodwaters from Glacial Lake Missoula drained catastrophically each time its ice dam floated.

24: The view from my campsite in Thompson Falls State Park.

I once heard creativity described as being the ability to grasp the essence of one thing and the essence of some very different thing and smash them together to create some entirely new thing.

Lori Gottlieb, *Maybe You Should Talk to Someone*

In the later stages of my career, I've come to believe that my biggest contributions will be not in one more graph of data but in communicating more clearly with non-scientists. First, if we want people to support conservation, we have to help them rediscover what they love about the natural world. Then we have to help them discover their shared humanity and the importance of community. I believe that one of the ways to achieve those goals is through storytelling—not making stuff up but making stuff personal.

I moved from New Orleans to Dubuque eight months before Hurricane Katrina put 6.5 feet of water in the home I had sold. One of my former student's mother drowned in her own home. The students of my introductory geology course hear more than they want about Hurricane Katrina, but by starting with personal narratives, I can later help them see why understanding the physical processes involved can help save lives. But if I start with the process of heating the water off Africa, I've lost them before the hurricanes ever hit shore.

25: Much of my trip took place in as the West burned with forest fires. Climate change coupled with human fire-suppression policies laid the tinder, waiting for just a spark to ignite it.

26: Sunset through the smoke from the forest fires, looking across Lake Pend Oreille, over a thousand feet deep, carved by the flooding from Glacial Lake Missoula.

A fact-driven curriculum doesn't encourage creativity, a narrow cultural approach doesn't foster tolerance for people from different backgrounds and places, and there are few opportunities to immerse ourselves in our passions, even if we know them from an early age.

Jay Shetty, *Think Like a Monk*

All teachers have their favorites, whether they admit it or not. But Mike didn't initially fall into that category. Frankly, I misread him and his seeming negativity and hostility. Like many of our UD students, he had things going on in his life that had nothing to do with class. Once again, I am guilty of judging too quickly, but I am thankful that I got a second chance. After Mike graduated, we stayed in touch. I took subsequent students to visit his home where he had installed solar panels, a solar water heater, and a rocket stove. He had pigs and chickens and was a model of sustainability.

Mike left the Midwest for Hawaii with his newish wife to live in a microhome on a lava flow, then for his wife's sake to Washington State to be nearer society. His home was my farthest destination west. Each evening we sat in his inflatable hottub drinking beer and talking after a day exploring and hiking. Once we ventured into Canada, my lack of a passport not stopping us.

Mike is a prime but not unique example of students who have enriched my life.

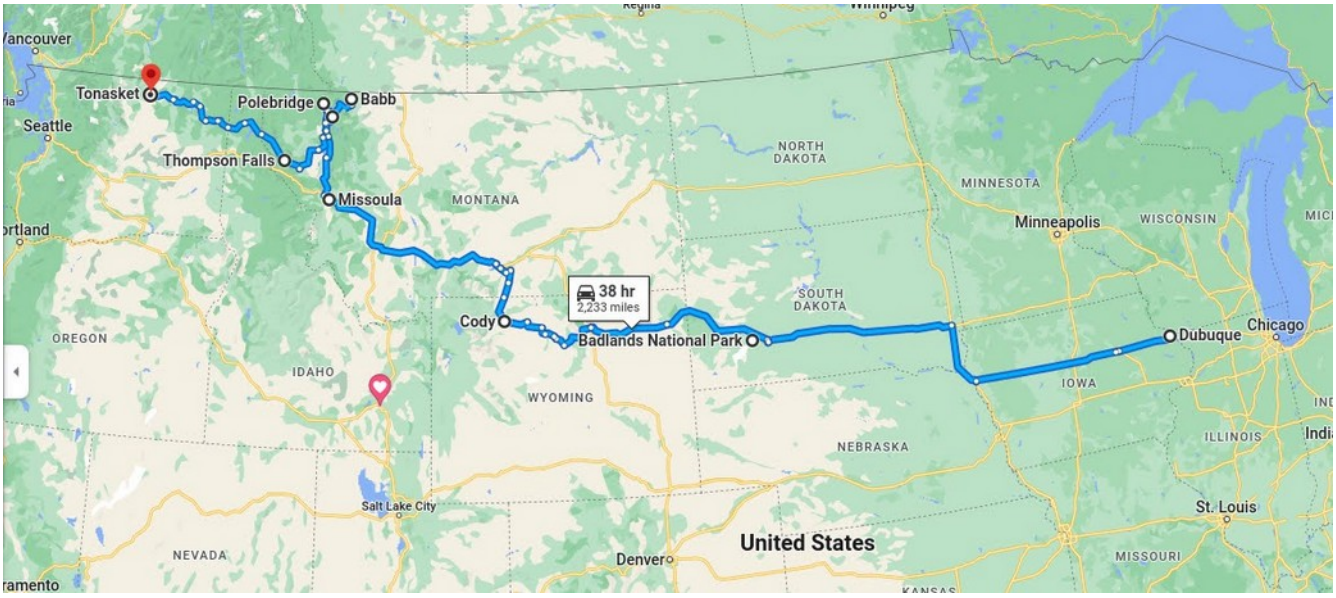
27: Camping along Franklin D. Roosevelt Lake, the reservoir created by the Grand Coulee Dam.

28: Mike and his wife, Catie, at a restaurant in Canada.

If we are lucky, a transition comes along to wake us up. If we are unlucky, we sleep through the rest of our lives.

William Bridges, *The Way Of Transition*

My route West had come to an end, and it was time to start working my back to Dubuque. For the next few days, I headed southeast toward Pocatello, Idaho, where my elder daughter, Ananda, lived. A week before I left on my trip, she had gotten married. People say that you don't lose a daughter—you gain a son. Intellectually, I get that. But emotionally, I was surprised to feel grief. I like my son-in-law, and my feelings reflected no shortcoming of his. But from a few days after she was born, Ananda and I went walking each morning with our dogs, read books together, and laughed frequently. Even now, when she comes home, we often start our mornings with a long walk with the dog. And talk.



29: My route West.

30: Grand Coulee Dam, the largest power station in the U.S., across the Columbia River.

And new philosophy calls all in doubt,
The element of fire is quite put out;
The sun is lost, and th' earth, and no man's wit
Can well direct him where to look for it.
And freely men confess that this world's spent,
When in the planets, and the firmament
They seek so many new . . .
'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone . . .

John Donne, *An Anatomy of the World* (1611)

John Donne wrote the lines above soon after Galileo's telescope introduced us to a world far greater than we had imagined. The last line makes clear the break in thinking that resulted. What had been a coherent worldview, with the Earth the center and the heavens above, suddenly appeared limited, even mistaken. We live in such a time now —the rise of A.I, the devolution of our political system, etc.—where certainty is lost and a transition begins. Yet we can not see where it will take us.

In our own lives, we encounter points of transition—to adulthood, parenthood, retirement—where our views necessarily alter. Do we approach them with courage? Anxiety? Fear and loathing? Viktor Frankl, in *Man's Search for Meaning*, says we get to choose. We choose our attitude towards our own inevitable suffering. If we can find purpose and meaning in it, we can endure.

31: The Snake River Gorge near the spot where Evel Knievel tried to jump it on a rocket-powered motorcycle.

32: Shoshone Falls Park on the Snake River. There is little water trickling over the falls, as most has been diverted for irrigation.

Standing there, gaping at this monstrous and inhuman spectacle of rock and cloud and sky and space, I feel a ridiculous greed and possessiveness come over me. I want to know it all, possess it all, embrace the entire scene intimately, deeply, totally, as a man desires a beautiful woman. An insane wish? Perhaps not—at least there's nothing else, no one human, to dispute possession with me.

Edward Abbey*, Desert Solitaire*

While visiting my daughter in Pocatello, Idaho, we visited two very distinctive geologic sites—Craters of the Moon and the Grand Tetons. Both are related to a geologic process called lithospheric extension. What that means is that instead of being crunched together, the area is ripped apart. In the case of Craters of the Moon, the resulting tear allowed basaltic lava from deep within the Earth to rise to the surface, creating the beautiful but other-worldly features. In the Grand Tetons, the extensions caused the rotating of large blocks of rock, creating what I think are the most beautiful mountains in the world.

I believe that if we environmental scientists want to preserve the world, we need to help people appreciate the amazing beauty and fragility of it. And for me, understanding the causes behind its creation only adds to the beauty.

33: Craters of the Moon National Monument, Idaho, the site of geologically recent volcanic eruptions (15,000–2,100 years ago).

34: With my daughter hiking in Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming, about three hours from her home in Pocatello, Idaho.

Probably the most dangerous thing about an academic education, at least in my own case, is that it enables my tendency to over-intellectualize stuff, to get lost in abstract thinking instead of simply paying attention to what's going on in front of me. Instead of paying attention to what's going on inside me.

David Foster Wallace, *This Is Water*

Academic education is a double-edged sword. It can provide tremendous insight into the way the world works. But it can also sew the seeds of self-deception, creating a false certainty that we educated ones know best. The arrogance of science often bumps up against its limits—reality is always more complicated than our models. And art, though it often pushes us beyond the simple ways of viewing the world, can become inward focused and petty. In both cases, taking the time to simply pay attention to what's going on in front of us can take us beyond our navel-gazing.

But paying attention seems to grow harder with the rise of social media. Our attention has been monetized, and some of the best psychologists have used their training not to heal the world but to find ways to distract it. Every moment our eyes are on a screen instead of on nature is making money for someone—Facebook, Instagram, Google, etc.

35: Falls within the city of Idaho Falls.

36: A lava flow in a city park in Pocatello, Idaho. The walls like that shown are popular among rock climbers, including my younger daughter who visited there.

And I submit that this is what the real, no-shit value of your liberal arts education is supposed to be about: How to keep from going through your comfortable, prosperous, respectable adult life dead, unconscious, a slave to your head and to your natural default setting of being uniquely, completely, imperially alone, day in and day out.

David Foster Wallace, *This Is Water*

One of the longest-running studies of aging, the Harvard Study of Adult Development, has studied 724 participants, some living through 75 years of interviews, health checks, and surveys. It has enabled its researchers to look back and see what characteristics predicted *a good life*. Only one characteristic was useful—strong relationships, the sort yo could depend upon if things went bad. For those who have such relationships, even pain is experienced differently. Imagine the grandfather who has arthritis in his hip. Will he sit and watch TV, or will he get off the couch and go watch his grandson's ball game? The strength of the relationship decides. And Robert Waldinger, the 4th director of the study says, "Loneliness kills."

37: A hail storm in Pocatello. My daughter was out in the hills running at the time and took shelter under an evergreen.

38: Near Interstate 80 at Rocks Springs, Wyoming. The wind is often fierce, so the campground has put up fences to protect tents from blowing away.

“You must do everything that frightens you, JR. Everything. I’m not talking about risking your life, but everything else. Think about fear, decide right now how you’re going to deal with fear, because fear is going to be the great issue of your life, I promise you. Fear will be the fuel for all your success, and the root cause of all your failures, and the underlying dilemma in every story you tell yourself about yourself. And the only chance you’ll have against fear? Follow it. Steer by it. Don’t think of fear as the villain. Think of fear as your guide, your pathfinder—your Natty Bumppo.”

J.R. Moehringer, *The Tender Bar*

As I turned toward home and crossed southern Wyoming, I hit 60 m.p.h. crosswinds. Tall, lightweight vehicles were banned from the interstate. But I made the decision to ride on through. I thought that my destination, Laramie, was only a bit more than an hour ahead. It took longer. At times, I dropped to 50 m.p.h. or less, especially through curves, as the winds threatened to push my motorcycle off the road. Large trucks struggled up hills, pushing their own air currents with me. And it was cold. Without grip-warmers, wind pants, two sets of gloves, and multiple layers of clothes, I wouldn’t have made it. But I did.

Soon after I got to Laramie, I learned that a favorite professor, Peter Shive, was at the Hospice House. I spent 5 hours there the next day. Not what I’d planned, but one of the most valuable parts of the trip. Peter was a Stanford Ph.D., an early leader in geomagnetism, a subfield of geology that was foundational in developing the theory of plate tectonics. But later in his career, he changed his attention towards teaching, especially in the Honors Program. And he also became a 12-time national champion in Frisbee golf.

Peter was dating his future wife, Gail, when I was in grad school, and I saw their relationship develop. Gail had first married at 15 to a rural rancher who grew abusive. It was art lessons that served as the catalyst for her leaving that marriage and eventually earning a Master’s degree at the University of Wyoming where she met Peter. In particular, an art class on *found objects* led her to express her pain through painted purses which became a nationally recognized art exhibit. At exhibitions, Peter would always say, “I’m not *that* husband.”

39: A train loaded with coal passing through Laramie, once a stop on the Transcontinental Railroad. Wyoming is a major producer of coal, but it also has lots of wind for renewable energy.

40: Home at last.