

Open Letter to All My Friggin' Friends

*Thoughts on the Meaning of Life, Ecotopia,
the Free Range Human Movement, and
Regaining the Lost Spark of Humanity*

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Greetings and Sad Mutations to you all,

Here I am again, full of excuses, and reeling from my abject inability to carry off even the simplest of social interactions without causing some sort of international incident, be it real or imagined.¹ Though I write to you in a state of utter confusion, do not mistake this discombobulated demeanor as a sign that I am utterly unhappy. I am merely moody, blithely diagnosed as clinically bipolar, and whatever other invented disease one wants to use to describe the condition of spiritually sensitive human beings in the miasma that is the early 21st Century by time, and what will be called Late Capitalism by historical era.

You have all tolerated my rather incessant *kvetching* about Sacramento- that it is dull, that there is a large gaping hole in the personalities here, as if it were *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* come to life. Yet for all its social, economic, and psychological pitfalls, the natural amenities in Sactown are quite spectacular. This is a great biking town. The American and Sacramento River Bikeways² blow away anything Austin has to offer within its humid little confines. It is one of the best biking cities in which I have ever trundled or rambled, and I've trundled and rambled in many a city about this planet. In my humble opinion, only Amsterdam surpasses Sactown in this area. I can bike for miles in Sackatomatoes³ without seeing a single car, much less encountering one. Often when I do see a car, it is safely passing on a bridge overhead. The trails, levy roads, and bike lanes are as practical as they are recreational. With a little map study, these passages can get you where you need to go, and provide a good time getting there.⁴ If this is not an amenable environment for the free-range human, I do not know what is.⁵

I don't miss the Texas humidity. The weather here is great, cool and breezy, despite the occasional, and luckily, short-lived Summer bouts of 100-plus temperatures in the Sac Valley. The Delta Breeze quickly cools the air once the sun goes down on those hot days, and the bouts rarely last more than three days before highs in the 80's prevail again.

But this is not why I am writing this big open, overblown letter accounting "the show so far." I am doing so because lately, I have begun to think that I've been conducting my life wrongly, and I wanted to tell you about this stark discovery, and just what it means in regards to life, the universe, and everything.

This "living wrongly," does not speak of my external situation, but of my internal one. I have hardened. This is something that has not happened only recently, but in retrospect dates back to 1996 when the whole "paper that cannot be named" debacle thwarted my patience.⁶ That imbroglio was pretty much the straw that broke the camel's back in respect

to my opinion of more left-leaning sectors of the publishing media, and pretty much all self-proclaimed practitioners of the left in general.

I must admit herein that jumping into the legal field some 7 years ago was a reactionary move on my part. It was out of fear, and not of some deeply felt fealty to law, justice, the constitution and all that abstract idealism, or any sort of perceived syllogistic talent as I may have led people to believe. It was deep visceral fear, a fear that if I did not join the "correct" or "powerful" side of the law, I would soon be slowly twisting in the wind on the wrong side. Forces in the normal course of my day were crashing all around me. There were the countless run-ins with employers- editors, general managers. The only way I could go from my circumstances at the time was as far away as possible, if not physically, then attitudinally. A sea change was at hand. Plus, the idea of researching and writing all day long was not so bad.⁷

From about 8/96 to about 2/97, I was in a frantic state of paranoia. My paranoia even began to turn circles on itself. There was paranoia of paranoia of paranoia. I was in a dire downward spiral. I became "Joseph K.," a man consumed with guilt for an undetermined crime, a crime that most likely didn't exist, but for which he was guilty for guilt's sake.⁸ I blamed those "authority figures" around me, those who I felt were torturing me. I blamed them for being small minds and not letting me live beyond the moral pale meant for mere mortals and not an Ubermensch like me. They were fascist bastards, hypermoral ninnies and other nabobs of negativity as American's only Underground Man cum President would so aptly say. I was underground, and driving myself deeper and deeper into the darkness.⁹ The truth was - my life was too easy.

So here I am, quite naked, stripped bare of all the pretensions that led me here- this physical place, this state of mind. The fates graciously slapped me in the face in August of 2001, perpetuating my boom-bust cycle of psychological well-being. I was sent back to the woodshed for some soul-searching. To put it bluntly, as I am so apt to do, it was time to find "the shit that really matters." This process has been slow, methodical, and often frustrating. Now, after much gnashing of teeth, and utter wailing and moaning about the fact that I had been sent to this woodshed, I have recently calmed. If I have not yet discovered my deepest held beliefs, I have touched upon them, or rather, revisited them.

I have been thinking of when I was last truly enjoying life, ready to wake up every day and see where it would lead. This was a period from about 1991 to 1996. I wrote more articles, more fictional stories, more songs, and imagined more scenarios during that time than any other part of my life, and I was just insanely happy. Eighty percent of what I created back then never made it to the public, but only to a select few.¹⁰ I did not make a lot of money then. I was basically a barista, a caffeine vendor living on cash tips and minimum wage. I made a decent amount of extra money from free-lance writing, rhapsodizing on the virtues of this band, or that. I would get the checks for those rants, and laugh hard about getting paid for what seemed as natural and fun as sex. I was a rather happy whore back then.



Thinking about life gives the author a bluish glow.

But then ego took over, and I was driven to do more and more. Finally the demands of others and myself, most of all myself, led to burn-out, frustration, arguments with employers. I became a self-centered asshole. Everyone was wrong, except me. I knew what was best- no compromises allowed. I was being driven to control freakness by some vaguely defined inner force. I can only say that it was the dark forces taking over. I rode those forces for five years until I crashed on that fateful day in August 2001. I had crapped out. I had ridden this singular darkness for so long, forsaking the other side of existence that I couldn't go on anymore. Still, I pushed. I may have imploded if fate had not intervened. After almost two years, I am just now realizing this.

Now, looking back, I can see that I have been lacking balance between the light and the dark.¹¹ Perhaps the rage of the darkness was brought on by way too much light from 1991 to 1996. But how does one institute checks and balances of the soul?

I have toyed with going back to la skool. I am happy to report that the state bar has written me a nice long, complicated letter that I paraphrase as "McGeorge was full of shit!" I spent half a day laughing. But right now, I don't care. I jumped at la skool for the wrong reasons. I really wanted to be this big shot guy, head of a corporation, some studios, and have all this juice and power, and have everybody fawning all over me - basically a narcissistic wet dream. The jump was a strained effort to feed the darkness, make it bigger, faster, stronger. Dumbly, insanely, for I've been down this road before, I thought the only way to get attention was to do all this. Again, dumbly, insanely, I thought attention, fawning, worship, all that jazz, was what mattered. Narcissistic? Indeed. I was running from a rampant fear that the light side was the weak side. Luckily, I was humiliated and sent packing to try it all over again. I was told to get "real." And I have.

My move westward to the Golden state is the culmination of some 35 years of yearning. Now that I've regained my bearings, I know why I'm here- not just here in this place, but here on this planet. In essence, I have discovered that I'm just some friggin' wannabe-Ecotopian wanting to hole up in some bucolic place and let my imagination run riot. I want to take walks in the woods, build a nice big compost heap, bike everywhere, feel the beat of my heart, and forsake the pressures to keep up with the false idols of corporate America. Though I live in a medium size and growing city, this is the closest I have been to that ideal pastoral existence since those Austin "Days of Light" from '91 to '96.

In regard to Ecotopianism,¹² I may not adhere to its doctrine in the strictest empirical sense, but I am definitely an Ecotopian in spirit. I'm that guy on the bike who gets great satisfaction out of being able to get everywhere he needs with his two legs. I'm the self-righteous bastard who pities the poor humans in their cars trapped on the freeway, shackled by the golden handcuffs of good paying jobs, mortgages, and car payments. Is that really what life is about? Once you step back, the so-called "necessities" - the house, the kids, the nice cars, the high-powered jobs - are really just illusions perpetuated by late capitalism and its "consume, be silent, die" mentality. I'm ready for a post-capitalist era where people slow down and start living life again rather than running themselves ragged on the consumerist hamster wheel.

But I have my own sort of pleasant wheel:

*Read, write, run, bike; Read, write, run, bike;
Read, write, run, bike; eat organic food, flagrantly*

flirt with the beautifully disheveled earth mamas at the Natural Foods Coop, go home, crash. Rinse, lather, repeat.

This has become my mantra.

Oh yeah, I work 8 hours a day in there. Still trying to make that fun so I can work it into the mantra.

I'm just a simple guy with his own loco version of Ecotopia. I am a *luftmensch*, really, who fancies himself as some sort of free-range human - happier, healthier, and better tasting (now if I can just find a nice Jewish girl who likes to sample the goods.. oh well.) than corporate humans trapped in their cars, their cubicles, their bills, their worries, their mediatized delusions of what was once termed "the American Dream," but is now just a nightmare of floating images removed further and further from reality.

I like to go for runs of distances of five to seven miles along the levies and parkways. The dreamy coziness of a run through the Curtis and Land Park neighborhoods at sunset is enough to remind anyone of just how musical the pounding of one's heartbeat and running shoes can be, as deep breathing creates a melody of constantly shifting crescendos and decrescendos. This is my lullaby to calm the weary, tattered soul while thinking of methods to mitigate the *mishigas*.



Scary guy just gets Scarier. Looking like Paul McCartney after a three year walk in the wilderness and a serious colonic.

Have I developed any solutions to this quagmire that is our Corporate, soul-numbing American Life? No. I often find that thoughts on the subject are merely so much mental masturbation. Like garden variety masturbation, it is relieving, but hardly fulfilling. The key is to find like-minded persons for rounds of stimulating cerebral coitus. I do not know who these people are. Perhaps I have already found them. Perhaps they are you.

But I have no great expectations. The fantasies of a glorious Ecotopian revolution are just that. I can cogitate on the virtues of ground war, and how secession from the United States could be accomplished with allies in what Mr. Rumsfeld recently referred to as "Old Europe." But again, how does one surround himself with the necessary masses to pull-off such a secession? That is my downfall in the Big Brother department. Dreams of being the next Castro are countered by the reality of my lack of charm and charisma. I will stick with my daily dosage of Two-Minute-Hate directed at the destruction of the soul by pervasive profit-driven media. It is all I have the huevos to do.

This brings me back to the fact that I have hardened from the years in the dark and that I need to soften my approach and regain some respect for humans in all their roiling illogic and panting emotions. First off, I need to respect those things as they exist in me. Grand Delusions must be jettisoned. Small wonders must not only be respected, but placed upon a pedestal.

My need for this softening was starkly illustrated in a short interaction that occurred on Monday, May 5, 2003. I had just finished purchasing about \$20 of provisions at the Sac Natural Foods Coop. The entire time in line, I kept looking at this young woman about two checkstands down. Though it was sixty degrees outside, she was wrapped in a heavy, knee-length coat, and scarf. Her pale features looked windblown. Her dirty blond hair was tossed about as though she'd just stepped out of a frigid wind. Little pink zits sprouted on her face like happy little mushrooms after a spring rain. They were not obtrusive, but rather a natural occurrence to be admired and not fussed about.

I looked about me to make sure I was not dreaming the whole thing. All the other scurrying Sacramentans were in jeans and t-shirt mode. I was wearing my camouflaged biking shorts, and red "Electronic Performer" T-Shirt that some nice person bought me at an Air concert a couple of years back. The woman's eyes shone when they made contact with mine. They did not go hard or quickly look away as those of most humanity would. There was energy radiating from this person. It was kind, sweet. The typical Californian brusque self-absorption was absent, allowing that energy to flow outward, rather than suck everything in the room inward like a walking black hole. I found this human anomaly refreshing, and the dozens of other humans scurrying about her disappeared, and it was just her possessing the room.

My dream broke as I reached the front of the line, and checked-out. My eyes kept flitting over to her. She was in the check-out process, too. She was at ease during the process and in no hurry. I could hear her voice. There was something about "Dave Matthews." Of course, my cynical mind wanted to dismiss her as a troglodyte right there. But I couldn't stop admiring her grace. I was actually jealous of the lady. I was a working man. I could not be bothered with mindless chatter about 3rd rate college rock bands with poetic pretensions. How wonderful a life must be that allows such indulgences.

I exited the coop and went to my bike in front of the store. I slowly unlocked it from the blue ribbon rack and waited for her to walk by. It took her some time. I thought that maybe she had walked behind me while I was wrestling with the U-Lock, and that I had missed her. I was about to mount the bike as she popped out of the coop's side door and walked past me. I rolled by on her right, calling "on your right." I apologized for my rudeness of riding on the sidewalk, expecting nothing but a sneer and a harrumph.

She actually spoke.

"I'm sorry," she said in a polite, rather sweet, yet dignified tone, "I'm not from here. I didn't know that it was rude."

This explained everything. She had not had time to build the requisite Sacramento crust. This explained the sweetness, the radiance, the lack of fear in the face of this stranger.

I stopped dead in my tracks as though I'd seen a hundred dollar bill lying still on the sidewalk, and walked the bike beside her.

I was in absolute shock. I thought for certain that walls would be immediately thrown up and a brusque, but polite word or two would brush me aside. But she actually engaged my eyes and smiled, and she actually spoke again.

"I'm from New Hampshire," she said.

I took a deep breath.

"How long have you been here?" I asked.

"Three months. I was working in D.C. before."

Wow, this was an actual conversation. Well, if not an actual conversation, we were at least exchanging some engaging remarks. Fear rushed through my body. What was the trick? Where was the candid camera? Where was the undercover FBI sting operation bent on stopping lonely old men like me from striking up conversations with sweet strangers. The small spark of humanity still left in me wanted to jump out and engage this person who so openly showed her own humanity. That spark was a dog wagging its tail, propped-up on the backyard fence on his hind legs, just begging to be petted, perhaps have a frisbee thrown his way. But I automatically restrained myself - a natural reflex from years of being duped and humiliated. Though all evidence showed nothing of malice in the lady or the situation, the stone walls remained intact. They got even thicker.

"Are you from here?" she asked.

I almost choked on my response. So many things I wanted to say, but half of them would have made me seem like an asshole. The most prevalent answer was "Hell No!"

"No, I've only been here two years," I said.

"Do you like it?" she asked.

Again, "Hell No!" reverberated through my head. The spark dog was panting, whimpering, spinning in circles. "Hello human, hello human," his lonely little face said.

"Well," I admitted, "It's really dull."

She was confused. Her brow furrowed. It was if the statement was insulting. It was. But at least it was truthful.

"It's not bad," she said. "I like the weather."

"The best thing is that you are close to the city," I said.

"Indeed," she said.

She cut behind me to go north on 30th. She told me her name, but I was too shocked to absorb it. I said my name. She then smiled again, said, "nice to meet you," and sauntered-off. The spark dog really wanted me to follow her. He was yapping now, whimpering. But the fence was too high to jump. He tried desperately to climb it, but he only fell back with a

thud. No opposable thumbs. I just stood there, dumbly watching her walk away. I was feeling ashamed for having such a fearful reaction to such a simple interaction. To her, this was just how people dealt with each other. To me, this was a breach of every cynical notion of how humanity should be - nasty, hateful, fearful. Bark, bark, bark. Poor Sparky. The fence is too high.

I went home. As Sparky sadly lied in the back corner of the yard, I felt tears well-up in my eyes. I really felt badly for poor Sparky. I realized that there was something horribly wrong with me, and that if I didn't work to change it immediately, I would die a lonely, miserable old man - be it tomorrow or 50 years from now. Sparky would turn mean and rabid, and there would be a debilitating fight everyday.



Physically, I feel great. Yet if my internal workings were manifested you would see a starving, leprous wretch- crumpled broken body, lying on the street - helpless.

How does one exercise the soul, the soul that has been sitting on the couch eating potato chips for 39 years? This is my next big challenge. Perhaps I should start by playing catch with Sparky.

"Sparky!" Whistle, whistle. "Sparky!"

¹ I recently read an article from www.slayage.tv. This is a really cool site with *Buffy* related articles written by people with lots of letters after their names. These are the very same people who use big made-up words like normativity. Anyway, there was this article describing Dostoevsky's "Underground Man" as applied to the vampire, Spike. It described the Underground man as someone bitter, who thinks that he can't get along with other people because he's too good for them. Nonetheless, despite being too good for them, he needs, and in fact, demands their attention and admiration - a man of polar opposites - a man with the desire to fight, but so confused by his moral outlook, that he is left inactive. He is a man who is both lion by intent, and mouse by action- thus the Dostoevsky character, Leo Myshkin (which roughly translates to Lion Mouse). This observation could also apply to Camus' *Stranger*. The Underground Man is so obsessed with what would cause people to dislike him that he does not realize that it is obviously due to his holier-than-thou attitude. Looking in the mirror, this scared the hell out of me.

² Thanks to the American River Trail, Sacramento is a hub on the American Discovery Trail. This is a network of hike, bike, and horse trails that span the continent from San Francisco to the Atlantic Coast in Delaware. See, <http://www.discoverytrail.org/index.html> for more information on this national treasure.

³ I've come up with many names and slogans for this place. Mr. RH in Paris coined the term Sacraghetto. I render many props to him for that turn of brilliance. Author Marc Reisner call it "Kansas with a Mountain View." Some of the terms and phrases for Sacramento that churn in my head from time to time are: Sacralame-o; Sacashit; Poor

excuse for a State Capitol, especially that of America's most populous state; 3rd world charm at 1st world prices; California's Red-Headed Stepchild; Omaha West.

⁴ I must also remind myself that I flung myself as far from Texas as possible in light of the rank Bushification of the place. He was rather harmless as governor. As you and I both know, the office of the Texas Governor is a nothing gig. The real power lies with the Lt. Gov., and the Speakers of the two legislative chambers, not to mention the Railroad Commish who oversees the Oil "bidness." Gee Dubya stole the election with the help of his friends in FLA (his brother, too, of course) and the Supreme Court. I have moved to a blue state where we are all currently plotting his downfall and the reestablishment of decency, or, in other words, a Pagan Place full of orgies, and freethinking radical stuff, and shit. Now that is Ecotopia. Let's put the juice back in life.

⁵ I hope to produce a manifesto on just what a free-range human is. Like his counterparts being raised to be eaten by humans, the free-range human, is not boxed in - by a cubicle, excessive debt, a car, consumerism, etc. That is the basic gist of being a free range human - avoiding society's traps and moving about freely, as cheaply as possible, enjoying the journey to its fullest. It is about avoiding boxes, be they economic, social, spiritual, psychological, emotional, and all the other variegated planes of being.

I have commenced work on this manifesto. Like everything else I do, it kind of circles around the edges of an idea before slowly spiraling inward to strike the core. Quite often, I never get midway to the core. There is much starting and stopping and rethinking along the way. That's how my life is. I have no plan, I just get a hunch, ponder it for a bit, learn a little more about, then a little more. If I don't get bored with whatever endeavor this may be, I may eventually get to some sort of solid idea or action, but it is usually far down the road, usually much further than intended. I just sort of follow it. See where it goes. If I don't like the scenery, I turn around and come home.

⁶ My distrust of the left, as you all know, began in 1986 when I had but the most casual involvement with a group of Lefty Radicals at the University of Texas. I lent my support, but over a period of a few months, it was obvious that these kids did not care for much more than padding their own resumes, and being self-righteous bastards (of both sexes). Unfortunately, a certain governmental law enforcement construed this involvement as being a wee bit more involved than it really was.

⁷ Unfortunately, less than .4% (that's two-fifths of one percent, mind you- or four parts in a thousand) of my time in the legal field has involved research. That endeavor, for the most part, is left to the attorneys involved. This may have been no small part of the drive to law school, also. My time is basically spent taking orders from the Senior Partner General, and those orders are for the most mundane of tasks only- call this doctor, track down this medical report, subpoena this witness, set-up this depo, get reservations for this hotel. Nowadays, of course, I have the trials and tribulations of many of our clients. They are, overall, not the brightest members of our species. It can be frustrating trying explain the nuances of the California Labor Code to some poor guy whose god-given talent was to be Sanitation Engineer, Prison Guard, or General Custodian. Though most of the clients I deal with now possess at least a modicum of intelligence, the few that just don't get it because of their woefully trickling or outright nonexistent synapse flow, can make me seem at times like a glorified day care worker without the glory. It's easy to get hardened in such a milieu. It's either that or sob yourself into oblivion under the weight of immense pity.

Then there are the psychologically unhinged. I have talked three people out of suicide in the last year and a half. On the other hand, I have gotten one voice mail message in the middle of the night from a client saying she was about to shoot herself and to call her as soon as possible. When I returned the call at around 8:30 the next morning, it was too late.

One client died in a fire a few months ago. We found out two days ago that another had died in March. I checked my notes after getting the news. I had spoken to her the night before she died and told her to call me when she got out of the hospital. Unfortunately, her condition upon leaving the hospital prevented this. She was a sweet, but addled lady. She was Native-American, and worked at one of the tribal casinos out in the foothills. She kept promising to go to Oklahoma, and bring me back a nice Cherokee girl to take care of me. Too bad she never got the chance to do this.

⁸ In Kafka's *The Trial*, Joseph K. is on Trial, but he does not know the charges against him. Like Camus' *The Stranger*, although his crime is clearly defined as killing an Arab, his moral ambivalence is on Trial.

⁹ Again, refer to Dostoevsky's *Underground Man*, as found in *Crime and Punishment*, *Notes from the Underground*, and *The Idiot*.

¹⁰ Whether or not these select few honestly deemed themselves fortunate is a matter of debate.

¹¹ You may insert your own duality metaphor here. Some suggestions are: Buffy/Faith; Vampire/Nightingale (got this one from Tori Amos when I interviewed her in New Orleans in 1994); yin/yang; Cane/Abel; Dorothy/Elphaba (Elphaba is the first name of the Wicked Witch of the West. Read *Wicked* and you'll find out a few things about the social tensions in Ozlandia, and that the witch wasn't so wicked after all, see, http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0060987103/qid=1052633390/sr=2-1/ref=sr_2_1/002-3826479-1861664, for more info); Luke/Darth; Mary/Jezebel; Virgin Mary/Mary Magdalene; Jerry Brown/Willie Brown.

¹² *Ecotopia* was written by UC-Berkley Professor Ernest Callenbach. In the book, Northern California, Oregon, and Washington secede from the United States, and form an ecologically stable state. My fave dictum of *Ecotopia* is the 20-hour work week. Oh yeah, the sexual openness of that society is pretty cool, too. Sacramento is part of *Ecotopia*. San Francisco is the Capitol. Oakland has renamed itself Soul City. I originally read this book in 1993. I reread it shortly after Aimee departed. I was amazed at just how much in tune with this book she was, and she'd never even heard of it until I mentioned it to her. As I will one day tell you all, her sexuality took anything but the frank, matter of course attitude of the *Ecotopians*. To put it simply for now, she was as kinky and twisted as a neglected water hose.

For more info on *Ecotopia*, see its Amazon listing:

http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0553348477/qid=1052608922/sr=2-1/ref=sr_2_1/002-3826479-1861664