

WHAT
WE ARE
LEARNING

★★★

2008 - 2009

JANK EDITIONS ★ PORTLAND
2010



We wanted a portrait of everyone alone, together. We kept record of the discoveries, agonies, and oddities lived by our strangers and friends.

We said: “Tell me what you’ve learned this month, a revelation, a heart-break, a new way to tie your shoes. It could be anything, but be specific.”

We distributed monthly accounts of your progress for two years. Those accounts are gathered in this edition and presented to you as a proof of life.

★★★

WHAT WE LEARNED IN 2008

JANUARY

Nicolas was trying to figure out how to hang his wooden artwork with hooks and tiny nails. Kenneth found pictures of colorful boat-trucks sailing from Cuba to Florida. Chris included the phrases “Freedom Cage” and “Rainbow-Henge” in an internship application. Marc’s pajamas caught on fire one morning and he got some pretty serious burns. Ashley became financially independent by giving clarinet lessons and she had some time left to study flamenco. Jonah was learning to be a single parent, and how to waterproof a cement foundation using asphalt emulsions and Bensonite™.

Clea was disturbed to realize employers took her more seriously when she wore “nice” clothing. Sam made copies of a small pamphlet about parks in Olympia. Gary asserted, “As a community we can be proactive in developing and inhabiting our own self-directed social landscapes of possibility and magic.” Lucy was looking for something or someone called the *mohacs farsang* at a carnival in Hungary. Michaela sent off her application for graduate school. Helen considered taking “pigeon steps” and decided London should be closer to the sea. Dayna was studying performance as a tool for conflict resolution, while living according to her heart despite obstacles. Colin was researching a maritime cross-dressing theater event that took place in 1846 near Sauvie Island on the Columbia River. Ariana made a new poster. Alastair continued research into a Hypothetical

Nonphysical Spirit Generator that enhances the probability of an Event.

Jenny worked on mixing her album, and edited a really boring video with lots of wide shots of adults and children playing hand drums. Aisha discovered that a week of yoga yields incredible results, that a house must be repaired from bottom to top, and she decided a device called The DivaCup™ might have changed her life. Joy was thinking about the relationship between synesthesia and creativity. Peter wondered if it would be all right to title his new song “A Family Looked On While the Meat Slicer Cut Through Its Own Fucking Cord.”

Adam recorded music with an old band and a new band, and studied French. Amber pieced together a baby quilt that looked like a map, started quilting it, and researched natural dyes. Mark learned to use a computer to organize his increasingly busy and complicated life. Ramona was very excited about her class on Romanticism, and developed a paranoid hypothesis about the origins of *kombucha* in the Ural Mountains. Daniel was painting onto T-shirts: monsters, shitstorms, northern lights, wolf babies.

FEBRUARY

Charlie looked down the Avenue of the Americas all the way to the Flatiron Building, and suddenly he understood two-point perspective. Daniel photographed twenty-one houses in a “moist hamlet” where he once lived, and he sent these photos to his friends. Gabriel recorded and mixed the soundtrack for a film about riots. Eliza gave assignments to her friends in order to further their understanding of compromise, collaboration and public behavior. In high heels, Alyse tangoed gracefully with partners the age of her grandparents. Nick cut manila envelopes into depictions of little creatures with an intelligence different from our own. Martha used Meyer lemons to make lemon curd to share with her friends. Izaak learned that “Peggy” is short for “Margaret”, and found a “cool echo chamber” in the hallways of the Houston Airport. Lisa researched 4,000 bee species native to North America. Jeff was speaking the language of Guarani. Khaela got Rolfed.

Warren learned that snowflakes often form around a core of airborne bacteria. Helen was concerned about unspoken words creeping out through the cavities in her teeth. After vague but persistent difficulties involving both his nose and his sleep, Will concluded that something was very off. Sam and Rich started an online book club to discuss the collected essays of an 82-year-old Canadian poet. Ramona tried to work with disappointment, to free herself from contexts and to read Kharms without looking everything up. Chris

completed a 99-track mix CD with music and snippets of conversation with his friends, such as: “I like ... I like pink and reality combined.” Colin wondered about the relationship between what is possible and what is mutual, and he learned how to make a red lentil dip. Lionel studied the movement of his queen to c7 in the French Defense. Ingeborg made a website using iWeb™ and learned that although politicians can be helpful and decent people, real-estate lawyers cannot. Jason read a book called *Takeover* by Charlie Savage, and he believes everyone else should read it as well. Jonah was instructed on the proper technique for hunting small fowl in brushy terrain. At her new job, Clea learned to communicate with Italian cooks using an intricate combination of tickets, appetizers, red crayons, and “clippy things.”

Warmth from the sun made Amber’s work bearable, perhaps even enjoyable. Jason listened to NPR while doing yard work, spreading bark and hearing about political turmoil in Armenia. Michaela became embroiled in the production of abstract/schematic representations of her life thus far, and she bought a lot of seeds. Lucy sent her friends a picture of the vegetable stall beside her front door. Julian pre-sprouted eggplant seeds by putting them in damp tissue paper and leaving them inside a plastic bag for a few days. Sam took time to play, to respond with thought and measure, to change diapers, and to point out geese and trains when he saw

them. John learned that little turnips can still grow in conditions that may not be perfect.

Dirk was learning to stop wishing he was in love every time he opened his window in the morning. Phil learned he does not know himself at all and that he likely should not be married because he is clearer when alone. Jennifer learned that being in a relationship means moving forward together, even when it means leaving someone else you love behind. Ashley felt a glimmer of hope for her marriage, and learned from her professor that she writes in “a remarkably lucid style.” Peter watched an old friendship fall apart when two men disagreed over who worked harder at the record store.

Ariana conducted experiments into the ethics of looking at people or not looking at people. She withheld her gaze from those who might want her recognition too much, as well as those who might be embarrassed by it. Gary found value in pennies, and learned that sometimes, romantic situations need more than love. Kenneth was interested in a tragically desirable island off the coast of North Carolina called Ocracoke. Marc was appreciating everything he has. His mother said, “Don’t turn your back on fire.”

MARCH

Ian cut deeply into the muscles of his own hand with a paring knife. Clea experienced pain: “It was so deep, so deep I literally thought I was going insane, the pain was so horrible.” Something clicked, and Lizza discovered she contained a twenty-five-year-old well of anger towards her mother. Lucy rubbed her poor chin after chopping some chilies. A doctor told Lisa the cause for her pounding heart and aching arms was that she might be excited about too many things. Izaak’s mother told him imminent death is often indicated by a “certain strange, sweet foot-smell.”

Daniel was watching his mailbox obsessively and cursing the NBA™. Ladybird was concerned that writing imaginary words might transform a writer into one of her own unlikable subjects. Mackenzie worried she has only a few true friends. Malina realized too many people are born. Cecilia may have caused offense when she chose the wrong seat at an academic conference. After discovering that Philadelphia is actually south of New York City, Colin realized he had been wrong for years. Diego decided that giant Mexican sandwiches weren’t good for him. Jason considered the western literary canon to be a self-sustaining and self-referential system of allusions. Alastair contemplated the abyss between pre-formational Logos, wriggling in the ethers of the Good, and Nomos, the named idea. In Addis Ababa, Michael dreamed of Haile Selassie and honey. He began to wonder if there was a relationship between

dictators and “things that have a certain sweetness, but require the blood of many.”

Michaela heard about a preschool where there were no chairs at all but lots of indoor swings. Phil learned that when he was born, an astrologer exclaimed “Oh no! This kid loves himself too much!” He considered these words to be the “big true curse-blessing” of his life. Gabriel listened to very strange-sounding intervals based from the thirteenth partial. Sam attempted to prolong his fever-induced delirium in order to distort ideas about the palimpsest of urban landscape. Mary was curious about “everyday architecture.” Ramona had transformative multimedia dreams involving Parker Posey, Steve Martin, George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin. McCloud researched Sergei Mikhailovich Prokudin-Gorskii, who began making color photographs of imperial Russia in 1905 using three black and white negatives exposed through colored filters. Lauren was intrigued by the way ice formations are affected by music while they freeze. Amber investigated Bull Run, the source of Portland’s drinking water supply. While speaking with Mae West’s former personal secretary, Reece learned that Palm Desert isn’t quite as dry as it used to be.

Following Greek Easter tradition, Ashley made a wish and knocked boiled eggs together to see which would be the one to crack. Sara wore socks on the trampoline to build up bigger electric shocks. Liz was sewing circuits. Kenneth shopped for remote Alaskan real estate on eBay™. Adam woke at four in the morning every

day, and he played the accordion nearly as often. Martha made salt-caramels and rose-petal ice cream. Peter became diligent about cleaning his cat's box and saving his digital files. Treisa's efforts to go ice-skating with busy friends were thwarted. She had a wonderful martini in the John Hancock Building instead. Christian tore down a room and rebuilt it from the frame up. Michael tried to break the hugeness of his hopes into smaller, more specific pieces. While tinkering, Ariana found trust working within the machinery of her profound mistrust for herself. Alyse was learning to trust her decisions without looking back.

Chris felt alive by being so close to something he truly cared about. Leif read aloud from a letter his father had written from prison, finding new admiration for his father and the fight against tyranny. Arianna practiced hula-hooping on her knees and doing the splits. Gabe built up his back muscles. Anna searched for a place to plant cantaloupe. Ariel enjoyed the flavor of raindrops sipped from lilac blossoms.

APRIL

Julian swam with bioluminescent jellyfish. Ashley began studying the *cajón* with a retired flamenco musician who had recently moved to Olympia. “She played with Carmen Amaya in the golden days of flamenco,” Ashley said. “Now she’s here, somehow, like a god-send.” Julie learned that performance artist Linda Montano, who once tied herself to someone else for an entire year, lived as a nun for several years when she was young. Lisa learned what it was like to have her heart broken into a zillion pieces and thrown in a fucking blender. Liz learned to never go out in public with her mother. Kathleen found out that her best friend since second grade became her best friend because she had a cool Power Puff Girls™ lunch box. Julie learned the difference between comfort and love. Lauren realized that her cat cared about her a little too much. Tim’s girlfriend left him. Chris dreamed that Snoop Dogg was massaging a salmon into his scalp, and it was really cool how only he and Snoop understood the healing potential of fish. Demi learned how to make complex friendship bracelets.

Sam tried to teach young children to walk like insects in groups of three; pandemonium ensued. Anna did a headstand for an audience of kindergartners and received a standing ovation. Diego realized that girls are more complicated than he thought, and that many dogs eat their own poop. Christian realized that all people are selfish. Amber worked on putting together

a developmentally appropriate nursery school curriculum. Hannah learned the differences between life in Europe and life in America. Lucy made a field recording of Lim-Lom Day in Budapest. In Texas, Lauren learned to extract ticks without leaving their heads in her skin. Erika decided she didn't like the taste of Chinese herbal medicine, but when the acupuncturist stuck a needle between her eyebrows it took her away to the "Oh-Zone." Chris read that 1-2 % of North Americans have a third nipple and that 62% of such people have low self-confidence. While eating waffles in Göteborg, McCloud learned that a man in Northern Sweden was planning to build a 45-meter-tall wooden moose. Gabe learned that the universe is infinitely big and infinitely small. Khaela's foggy sense of having too much and too little to say was only deepened by reading books about the historic massacre of Jews. Ramona, struggling with the ethics of translation, was tempted to invent an apocryphal proverb: "You can't catch a mouse without a trap."

Dayna found herself happily inhabiting a space between adulthood and irresponsibility, between drinking carrot-parsley juice and being secret, untamed, even to herself, and a bomb was dismantled on her street corner. Elizabeth learned that despite everything she had seen she was not afraid. Michaela heard that anyone can buy empty grenades, in bulk, at army surplus stores. Liz moved twice in one month, which was a bad idea. Treisa moved into a rent-controlled apartment in an old high school, with an African-American museum on the first floor. Marina learned that she really hates nebulizers.

Colin experienced the beauty of a 1971 fillet-brazed steel bicycle frame. Kenneth took inspiration from the Homestead Act of 1862. Izaak took his wet socks off and went to bed drunk. Clea discovered polenta's value as a breakfast food, serving it with sage and fried eggs. Eliza taught herself to crochet, and began work on a teal, yellow and hot-pink animal with two legs and no arms. Martha dug up some earthworms one weekend and smuggled them home to Manhattan, where she released them in a flowerpot. "Is that wrong?" she wondered. "Do you think they could die? Can they help each other out?"

MAY

Michaela went to a museum where she admired tiny dinosaurs and immense whales. Ariel was hit by a dump truck while riding her bicycle, but walked away with only minor injuries. “Life is sweet,” she said. “Wear a helmet.” Sarah and Lauren took turns wearing a blindfold while walking around their neighborhood. Tim cut his hair short for the first time in 12 years.

Jonathan fantasized about everything he could not have, drew pictures of these things, then buried them all in his back yard. Diego learned that his dog Balto is actually part wolf. Malina realized she should drink more water, that her best friend is dating a much older guy and that the poor nerd in her Physical Education class is not that bad.

Amber mowed her lawn in many ways, using many methods, with many tools. It was a physical exercise and a practice in neighborliness. It took a very long time. Nick tried to immerse himself in a single activity, rather than restlessly drifting from drawings to film, to food, to book, and so on. Eva discovered that gin is flavored with juniper berries, and that she should play music all the time.

While practicing an old favorite yoga position on his head, Fred realized that at age 62, his body was very different. Chris looked for jobs, which was challenging but made him feel optimistic and led to a new feelings

of care and connection with the world. He'd felt upset and detached in the past, but now when he walked past an infant in the park he was able to recognize, intensely, his desire to have children some day. He sat for hours working on a mix CD, and he watched aerial footage of France and Italy on his computer. He was completely happy.

Dirk learned a lot about permanence and the process of ownership. He decided not to move to Portland. He found that it was easier to love spring if he pretended it was fall. He has also started to love goats for their independence and their ability to produce lovable offspring. Ramona's family came to visit. Afterwards, she wished that she had found a way to take a walk with each family member individually. Mark enjoyed brewing beer in his apartment. Martha watched her earthworms thrive and multiply, while marveling that each one has five beating hearts. Will learned that cities are even louder thirty stories above ground, and printmaking makes his hands feel warmer. Sam found himself doubting the worth and sustainability of his writing practices. He questioned the assumptions underlying his use of words like "world," "experience," "conversation," "art," and "practice." He found some vague reassurance in an essay on gesture and film by Giorgio Agamben. Ashley played several songs at a clarinet recital, including: "The Recruiting Dance," "The Folk Dance," "The Mourning Dance," "The Quartet for the End of Time," "The

Abyss of Birds,” and “The Mast.” Her audience was full of people who were important to her.

An older woman told Alyse that she was born with psychic powers and that she would like to guide her through a discovery of these talents. Erin’s male friends told her they think it’s sexy when women wear black underwear beneath white clothing. McCloud learned that people who don’t have their own family history are very keen on making one up. Marla sang a prayer in Hebrew but she didn’t understand any of the words. Joe learned to fish but caught none. He learned that getting rid of a wart is serious business, requiring focus and determination. He learned that missing people you don’t know yet is just as sad as missing people you already know.

JUNE

Izaak learned that in bygone days bartenders would add water to the drinks they served to violently drunken cowboys. The water was thought to reduce the whiskey from 100 proof to 86 proof, and this act became known as “eighty-sixing” a man. Rich found out that gas sold in western Oregon and Washington is made from Canadian oil. Chris decided that the perfect antidote to his personality is alcohol and swimming. Ian purchased a quarter-pound of marijuana and one ton of Urbanite. “Urbanite is just a fancy name for broken-up concrete,” Ian said. “I use it to make stepping-stones in my garden. And I’ve never owned so much weed. I add fresh slices of bread to the bag every day so it won’t dry out.”

Khaela was surprised to find herself confidently and joyfully saying “Hello!” to strangers as she passed them on the street. Colin realized it would have been better to just enjoy his iced coffee, rather than engaging that rock-climbing barista in a strange male ego contest. Marc decided to try pointing out problematic issues in his current relationship, instead of letting them all build up. He wondered if he should start letting his guard down. Jenny’s ex told her he wanted to marry her and start a family. She didn’t think this was a good reason to get back together—she was busy trying to do things that made her happy, even when they also made

her uncomfortable. Eliza adjusted the brakes on her bike.

While practicing viola, Gabriel learned not to expect results from his practice—expectation leads to tension, and tension leads to poor playing. Ramona spoke only Russian. Under this constraint she attempted soccer, chess, dance clubs, and writing letters to her friends. Sammy heard that some people use their poop as compost. He also learned never to make sharp turns on a motor scooter. Chris cut down a 45-foot mulberry tree after his neighbors complained about the purple birdshit in their back yard. While watching *The Jazz Singer* (1927), Daniel envisioned a new life in which he dispensed of his pop records, went to synagogue to sing and study Hebrew, and also talked to his parents more often. Michaela's new bike made Portland open up for her. Lisa taught a 10-year-old boy to play drums, and researched sixty threatened species of *Hylaeus* bees in Hawaii. Sam went to the river but didn't swim, then regretted it. A week later, eager, he jumped from a high cliff into another river. Flailing to keep his arms tucked in and his feet together, he keeled over in midair and landed badly on his side. Adam made granola for the first time. Ashley performed flamenco on a stage for the first time, went kayaking for the first time, and contemplated the importance of trust in intimate relationships. Elizabeth, Zachary, and Alyse tallied all their past lovers in a Microsoft Word Document. Elizabeth

counted 19, Zachary 21. Alyse only counted 2. She began to wonder if she should be more open to people.

One morning Joe said to his friend, “By the end of the day I will be smarter.” Ariana was trying to learn again, for the so-manyeth time, how all of her hard feelings are actually detailed information she can use. Xela wanted to quiet her busy thoughts, and she struggled against her old desire to accept every invitation she receives. She tried to say “Yes” less often, but to more fully enjoy the time she did share with her family and friends. Amber tried to remain her true self, even under the pressure of “deep family dynamics.” She realized assumptions are a roadblock to good communication. Remi realized she was ready for a big change, but she knew her students would miss her. Also, she realized it would be much more difficult to leave her boyfriend than she had been expecting. Will sealed a cut with Superglue™.

On the Oregon Coast, Kenneth decided \$10 was too much to pay for an elevator ride to the bottom of a cliff where 200 sea lions were mating. He visited the gift shop instead, and took some pictures there. Martha sipped iced tea while watching *L'Atalante* (1934), Jean Vigo's second film. Chris learned, as he has learned many times before, that no matter how much packing you think you have done there will always be the same amount left to do. Ingeborg learned she couldn't take anything for granted, even though she thought she already knew that. Visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau, Phil decided it was both physically larger and emotionally

heavier than it appeared in photographs. Surrounded by hummingbirds, Anna read an account written by occult masters who magically created flowers from nothing. She wondered how they learned to do this, and what the point of it was.

JULY

Shannon was surprised to learn the Columbia River takes a sharp northward curve west of Portland. Ashley realized different types of wool (Shetland, Merino, etc.) are actually from different breeds of sheep. Alyse learned that Fritz Haber, a Jewish chemist who developed the Zyklon B gas used in Nazi concentration camps, also fathered industrial agriculture with his invention of nitrogen-based fertilizers. Clea heard about a blind nineteenth-century American counterfeiter named Joshua who painted bronze nickels to look like gold dollar coins. Joshua used his blindness as an excuse when he was caught—whence the phrase “Just Joshing.” Amber dyed cotton using dandelions from her yard and English walnuts from a tree down the street. It took her a day and a half to scour, mordant, and dye two 16’ x 18” pieces of fabric. The dandelions yielded a slight green, and the walnut a medium brown. Kyle learned that the German word for amber is *Bernstein*, or “burn stone.” While riding trains in Los Angeles, Michael read *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found* and he felt it was a perfect antidote to missing New York City.

In Sweden, Rob passed as French to deter people from speaking to him in English. Izaak’s housemate asked him to move out, which wasn’t such a bad thing. Will went to Cambodia and tried to counteract jet lag by drinking heavily, doing jumping-jacks between bars. It didn’t work, but he made some new friends. Rece

noticed the original album version of “Love Shack” by the B-52s was more than five minutes long, and wondered if his attention span was getting shorter. Dayna went up and danced with someone when she wanted to, rather than waiting around for him to come to her. Susan decided eye-rolling is a sign of contempt. She spent the rest of the month wondering why she rolled her eyes at her boyfriend so much. Geneviève wished she was better at getting straight answers from people. Xela learned people who fix old church steeples are never totally sure their ropes will hold. Khaela led a stage-diving tutorial.

Dennis was in the Himalayas studying an array of Vedic Wisdom. He learned how to subdivide White Prana into the colors of the spectrum for healing. Ultraviolet Prana was the most powerful. Michaela hoped the Big Thing would work out even if none of its little cumulative parts did. While bodysurfing in California, Warren’s nephew Atticus showed him how pregnant crabs have bright orange roe clinging to their underbellies. Anna wrote a “Declaration of Interdependence” that ended with a paean to clover, “that most excellent flower.” Ted felt less afraid that his heart might simply stop working when he learned all cardiac tissue is somewhat conductive. If the muscle bundles stop functioning, the tissue of the heart itself can still produce a beat.

Sam got a plastic bag caught in his bike chain. It was a horrible miracle, twisting the chain, tearing the cassette off the derailleur and bending one of the steel dropouts. Sofia tried to transform a deep dissatisfac-

tion in her life into a clean, clear resolution. Treisa's job felt like walking up a sand dune, even in her dreams. Joy spoke with Liberians in Ghana who were content to live in dire poverty because they were simultaneously very wealthy in the invisible spirit world. Remi discovered that camping alone wasn't as scary as she expected. Colin swam across the Columbia River. In the middle he had a moment of panic after he was nearly hit by a barge, and he stopped concentrating on moving his limbs efficiently. Then he regained his calm by realizing he would only survive if he let go of his desire to reach the shore.

AUGUST

Amber watched her cosmos bloom, over and over, in bright bursts of orange and yellow. Rob suspected hibernation might be the best response to summer. Peter was rereading *Ulysses* at work, one paragraph at a time between telemarketing calls. He sent selections from the book to his friends as text messages. Michaela was relieved to find she could still crank out a lengthy job application at the last minute. Kenneth's investigations into timber products revealed that Genoa's on the Bay, a restaurant in Olympia, was originally built as an experiment in plywood architecture for the 1962 World's Fair. It was first known as the "Home of the Living Light." Colin learned that the old paving stones in Guanajuato, Mexico were recently replaced with new stones deemed by UNESCO to more clearly impart a sense of oldness. Will learned ancient Chinese cartographers added imaginary rivers and mountains to their maps in order to balance each territory's *feng shui*.

Jenny's mother taught her an exercise she had learned from her own mother, a way to keep her breasts perky as she grew older. "First, touch your elbows and hold them up parallel to your shoulders. Then squeeze your breast muscles in three sets of twenty every night before bed. Remember to increase repetitions gradually over time." Each day, the main thing Sam looked forward to was the watering of his garden. When it rained, he knew he had to quit his job. Mona decided not to apply to graduate school after all. A few weeks later, she

changed her mind. Alyse examined the flora and fauna of Los Angeles, her new home. She saw trees of figs, lemons, avocados and bottle-brush. She picked rosemary and lavender, and she spotted a coyote in Griffith Park. Phil learned he couldn't just go out and buy a good camping set-up. When hanging tarps, or renovating a fire pit, his parents had always made it seem effortless. He realized it takes years to correct each little kink in the gear, to make the perfect little inventions. Clea learned eye color is determined by melanin levels—gray eyes have the least, brown eyes have the most. Drew learned that Red Bull™ gives him acid reflux and that Tums™ make good candy.

Lindsey found the film *Overboard* (1987) had indeed withstood the test of time. “If you're going to be unemployed for a while, you'd better plan ahead,” she said. “Also, fourth-graders respond well to ‘the quiet sign.’” Jenny enjoyed her time with teenagers at a summer camp, although she was offended by the violent videos they made together. While visiting the United States, Gentiane learned the word “greyhound” does not actually mean “long distance bus,” but refers to an animal she would call *un lévrier*. Arwen suspected dogs were a vector for the outbreak of gentrification in her neighborhood. In Calgary, Geneviève learned it is illegal to spit, pee, poop, or sleep in public. She suspected the list might also secretly forbid being tired, being poor, or dreaming in public. While attending the Sziget festival on an island in the middle of the Danube, Lucy started to kick around an empty soda bottle as if it were a football. A woman from Belarus named Olga joined her.

“At home we play this game all the time,” Olga said.
“We call it liter-ball.”

On a city bus, Heather found herself in the company of shirtless/air-punching/pan-fluting/fake-accented/shopping-cart-pushing men. All were listening intently to one passenger loudly describe her career as a stripper, explaining how much she enjoyed being naked. Heather wondered if these people were “real,” or if she was just being fearful and suspicious. Gary realized he can feel anger without judging himself or others. Chris got a job, and walked the earth in the sunlight, wearing three pagers. After reading a poem about her husband posted on Facebook by one of his ex-lovers, Ashley began to distrust the merits of the Information Age. Khaela watched *Ghandi* (1982). The next morning she had a feeling of warmth in her chest, the sensation that everything she’d been missing from her life was suddenly in place. She tried to keep this feeling for more than a day.

SEPTEMBER

On a Saturday night, Michael cleaned the kitchen with a bucket of vinegar, baking soda, and fifteen rags. Keha learned to play a card game called “Nertz.” Colin tried to copy a lampshade Jenn made many years ago. Beth tried to be tough but nice, and her cat turned out to be a jerk. Daniel began breaking up with someone, but then he thought he might not be capable of doing it. Then he thought he might not be capable of dating anyone. Then he wondered if, after all, he might really have been “the world’s biggest douchebag.” Eliza doubted whether intellect was the best tool for overcoming heartbreak. Ashley realized how terribly significant, how emotionally erratic each phone call she made to her distant husband might be. She decided it was best to wait until she could be fully present before speaking to him at all, even if it meant postponing her dinner. Michaela learned that university libraries have specialized librarians for different departments. Sam helped a friend catalog and transcribe personal inscriptions from a dead poet’s library. JC planned expeditions into the remnants of his city’s past: weed-choked subway lines, abandoned train stations. “I must be quick,” he said. “The clock here is ticking.” Will tried making ginger ale at home, and it exploded.

McCloud traveled to the United States in search of hope and food. He felt a pang upon realizing it was no longer his home. Clea heard that in many states it is illegal to campaign for a candidate near a polling

site, and that people wearing T-shirts, hats, buttons, etc. bearing the names of candidates would be turned away from the polls on election day. Alyse learned it is illegal in the United States to photograph citizens in line to vote at polling centers. Dirk perceived the role of ownership and property in our world. Amber went to one of those stores that sell clothing no one has ever worn before. Eric learned that even Whole Foods and Trader Joe's aren't to be trusted. In the Adirondacks, Dustin learned how to catch brook trout. "It's a tricky little game," he said. "You let them nibble once, nibble twice, and on that third nibble you yank hard to embed the hook."

What Jenny really wanted was some freedom—to move around and to make the same mistakes over and over. This freedom, she realized, would require a car. Heather visited the DMV six times. Xela piloted several vehicles with faulty brakes, on highways and Brooklyn streets. She said, "Go slower, that's all." Evan noticed that when a person is spun, then stopped abruptly, their pupils will perform a "mad jitter-dance" for several seconds. Lisa quit drinking coffee. Anna watched a baby bravely take his first two steps. Alexis learned the earth vibrates at B flat.

At Kheer Ganga, a holy hot spring in the Himalayas, Dennis helped a Sadhu build a monumental house cave. The Sadhu showed him how to use whatever the jungle offered. They watched a lamb kick and flail after its head had been ceremonially removed. One third of the people at Chad's work were laid off, but he wasn't

one of them. “To survive in an office,” he said, “You cannot make waves, yet you cannot be a sheep. You must stay off of your cellphone.”

OCTOBER

Shucking oysters at an oyster bar, Roberto found a tiny, imperfect pearl. “Throw it out,” said his boss. Lucy broke up with Derren, and then cried all night on the train from Utrecht to Budapest. Once, puffy and sad, she saw a boy on a platform opposite her window. He was smiling and bobbing his head until she smiled too, and he gave her a thumbs-up sign when she did. Then her train moved on. Blanche culled the “mother” plants she had used for three years to seed a marijuana growing operation in her attic. Killing, drying and curing these “mothers” yielded very little marketable product, but she was relieved to symbolically conclude her career as a drug producer. In a bar, an older man said to Kyle, “I am a flower, but I can’t find any gardeners.” Lisa wanted to try living alone for the first time in her life. Evan found that you can’t always tell what a fabric is made of by the scent it gives off when you burn it. Sam craved hot sauce and wondered whether that was a symptom of depression. Grant read a poem that said: “There is so much to remember, but less need to—the fire does not memorize, what it burns is our best archive.”

In Sonora, Will and Sue attempted to go bird watching in the wreckage left behind by Hurricane Norbert. Ramona watched a friend felt a hat while they talked about Iceland’s economic collapse. Dustin finally discovered a theme for his screenplay—his insecurity about being a man. Kenneth researched Leo Hendrik

Baekeland, the inventor of Bakelite™. Born in Ghent, Baekeland immigrated to New York to work for Hooker, the same chemical company that contaminated Love Canal and provoked Lois Gibbs to a lifetime of activism. Jonny looked up the word “quixotic” after a curator applied it to his art show. It seemed to Jesse that no one will ever really know what they are saying. Keha re-learned the Pythagorean theorem in order to make a tent out of bedsheets for a performance. Xela learned that during the pain of birth, everyone in the whole house breathes and groans with a woman in labor. Heather got an order for 50 sweatshirts. She put off starting, then worked fourteen-hour days to sew them all on time. Also, she happened to sniff an orange and a pickle at the same time; it smelled like carrots.

Working on an art project, Gary bit off more than he could chew and spent a few days at the Good Samaritan Psychiatric Unit. “It’s a wonderful place,” he said. McCloud felt anxious about moving to Brussels and grateful for his guitar. Ashley was both pleased and horrified to realize she was the only person in her university classes who worried about paying property taxes. Rich learned Adderall™ is just amphetamines. Melanie was shocked to hear how, in the U.S. electoral system, the relative importance of each vote varies depending on the voter’s location. Izaak got eighty-sixed from the Comet tavern for refusing to acknowledge the doorman’s fragile authority. When Michaela wasn’t watching TV, she was investigating complex theories of “horizontal oppression.” David read that Saudi Arabia executes at least two people per week, usually by be-

heading, after their death sentences are read aloud in a language some of the prisoners do not understand. Also, he read that prisoners in Japan usually learn the date of their execution on the very morning it will take place. Lauren was astonished that plans she made two months before had turned into urgent realities.

Tim went with a date to Washington, DC, where they saw a two-tusked narwhal skull and walked on the Mall in the rain eating jellybeans. Chris realized he preferred the attention of a group of co-workers to the attention of a girl. Rob navigated Brooklyn on foot, bus and subway. Colin was learning to ride a bike in New York by following cyclists who looked fearless and experienced, imitating their every move. Alyse learned that it was easier to bike up steep hills if she swerved back and forth instead of riding straight up. She practiced this at night while there were no cars around. Clea threw a “Twin Peaks” party. Will made a new friend while hiding from a group of vomiting acquaintances who were dressed as insects. Jesse found a wonderful Irish music session at a pub in Tumwater. Maryrose learned that caves are 56° year-round. On a trip to Washington’s coast, Evan felt inspired by meeting a man who spent one day surfing and the next day playing with his grandchild. Geneviève watched the most beautiful movie she’d ever seen, and afterwards she felt unwilling to share even its name.

NOVEMBER

On a dark winter's night, Clea was crushed when her guests ordered pad Thai takeout instead of eating her butternut squash soup. Remi attended her first vegan Thanksgiving, where she learned that seitan tastes like Play-doh™. Ramona made a delicious pumpkin pie using stone-ground rye flour. Christian learned that the key to composing delicious recipes is the use of simple, fresh ingredients. In one week, he went from eating Taco Bell™ to enjoying fennel-squash pancakes topped with coconut butter and a dash of lime. In Sitka, Joy tried eating whale blubber: "It's black on one side, and pinkish-yellow on the other. When you sink your teeth into it the texture makes you want to gag. Then you taste the sea, sweet and salty."

Several times, Arlene spotted a mouse near her dirty laundry. A few weeks later she realized the mouse had actually been eating her underwear, when she found a precise hole in the crotch of every single pair in the pile. Later her housemate discovered the same mouse in his dresser eating cigarette filters. Rich thought, "Life keeps going. Don't give up on life. It is always out there working the angles." Travis learned his father is proud of him for his curiosity and for his ability to stick with things that matter to him. Working on a letterpress project, Sam gained a new appreciation for guide-pins. At an urban farm, Keha learned that if you put a chicken into a coop with a group of turkeys, it will teach them not to eat too much, and show them

how to come in from out of the rain. Sue learned that feeding a turkey too much bread at the last minute will result in odd fat deposits on its breast. Gabriel realized that marijuana is “fantastic” and that he needs thicker curtains.

Leif visited Alcatraz for the Sunrise Ceremony on Indigenous People’s Day, and learned about the American Indian Movement. Adam’s trombone playing improved rapidly while he was on tour. Dirk used *Psilocybe cubensis* to confirm that his home is indeed in its correct geographical location. Someone abandoned their worms at the Union Square Greenmarket, and Martha brought some to her house to help make compost indoors. “No killing this time,” she said. “I won’t let them fry to death in the sun.” Lauren worked on revising her poems. Evan tried to think of a good question to ask his mother at her Shuso, a Buddhist ordination ceremony. He wondered whether western Zen practices lead to political apathy: “If change is the only constant, how do you institute change?” One morning, Colin was approached by a man in a blue poncho who raised an American flag umbrella, then pointed it at Colin’s head like a pistol. “Barack says ‘Down!’” said the man. Then he lowered his umbrella and walked on. Zachary learned the difference between punk and hardcore.

On a rainy night, Izaak crashed his bike into the grates on University Bridge. He broke two fingers, and his palm was sliced wide enough to reveal tendons. As Izaak dragged his bloody bike out of the road, a myste-

rious man who was just standing in the middle of the bridge handed him some paper towels, then ran away. In the following weeks, Izaak learned to play all of his saxophone parts on the melodica, which only requires one hand. He missed no gigs.

Lisa learned that it was a bad idea to bring up sensitive subjects with her friends when they were hungry. Michaela was not an idiot, she just didn't want to do all of the reading. Daniel kicked the leaves. Sarah realized procrastination is a form of self-hate. By listening to Otis Redding sing "The Pain in My Heart," Lindsey amplified the pain in her own heart. Mia was learning how to play her cards close, even with somebody she loved. Nelson learned that Internet passwords can't have any spaces in them. After reading a guidebook of Washington State, Sandra felt nostalgic when she realized she once lived in a "secret city." While cat-sitting for some friends, Ashley discovered four individually wrapped goldfish in their freezer behind a bag of potstickers. She was genuinely unsure if this was something she could ask them about, or if it was better left private. John was indoctrinated into a sex club organized by Human Sexuality majors at San Francisco State University. He learned group sex is sensually superior, but emotionally inferior to monogamous sex. On Lamu Island, Rosie learned she can be properly in love—spontaneous, excited, effortlessly affectionate—when she is with the right person. Tragically, she learned this with a man whose past prevented him from ever staying in a relationship for longer than a week. Joe took time to

cook an elaborate meal for himself, then sat down to dine elegantly, happily, alone.

DECEMBER

Xela taught a kitten to stop scratching by putting its head in her mouth. Helen learned that most German men sit down when they pee, because they were taught to do so in the sixties by their feminist mothers. A friend brought an uncomfortable reality to Michael's attention—the green corduroys he'd worn every day for the last six months revealed his butt crack in school, work, and every other social situation. Michael wondered why no one had told him sooner. Amber learned from snowflakes that we are all unique, while all bound for the same destination.

Ariana was trying to learn how to meditate. She wasn't interested in enlightenment or spirituality, but she wanted to be less stuck within her own discouraging thought patterns. Alyse was learning how to wink, but several people told her that her winks looked more like she had something caught in her eye. John encountered the mystery of relationship and its impact on his wellbeing. After suffering recurrent nightmares since childhood, Rose learned to make them stop by waking herself up. After a long search for a teacher, Helen learned to knit on Boxing Day. After months of anxiety and depression, Sam felt better when he put on magic bracelets and went running. With the help of a snowstorm, Will turned Ravenna Boulevard into an

imaginary ruin and a playground by means of a powerful lamp and an improvised sled.

After dabbling for some time, Tony's heroin use spun out of control—up to three grams a day. He realized what was happening, quit cold for three weeks, and then he dipped in again. “It’s so hard,” he said, “I’m afraid that even when I’m clean and having fun, I’ll still secretly wish I was doing heroin all the time.” On a snowy solstice, Ashley and her friends held hands and stood in a circle around a giant bonfire. Their circle represented the Earth; the flames within represented the Sun. Eric learned to tell the freshness of an egg by sinking it in cold water. New eggs lie flat on the bottom; those that stand vertically are older but safe, and those that float to the surface are rotten. McCloud learned it was much easier to see dreams come true than to know what to do afterward. He also realized that some women actually prefer to see a masculine stereotype in a lover. Liz realized that sometimes people wait to be surrounded by loved ones before they die. Eliza learned Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac were not really people at all.

Susan found that many Dutch insults pertain to disease, such as “*typhus kanker whoren.*” While grading papers, Joseph realized it was unfair to penalize his students for doing things he had never told them not to do. Rodney read about the business of Italian opera, and how it survived modernity’s rough centuries without changing. At a Gogol Bordello concert, Ariel was

pushed until she began to push back, and she found it surprisingly satisfying.

Colin and Martha sampled civet coffee, made by roasting the droppings of the wild civets after they feed on coffee cherries in the mountain forests of the Philippines. Keha learned that giraffes speak to one another in a throat-language inaudible to humans, and that whales are sometimes transported in airplanes. Gabriel reread *Infinite Jest* while high, and realized it had long been an influence on how he writes and talks. In a book on Hindu astrology, David read: "If you dreamed you swam in an ocean, saw an elephant, drank liquor, drove a bullock-cart, received a sword, chewed betel leaves or were bitten by a scorpion while swimming, you are sure to acquire some money, however little that may be." Nicole read about transference, psychometry, and the Weather Underground. She grew sprouts in a jar and learned that the UC, Cal State and CA Community College systems were all free until Reagan became governor of California in 1967. Kenneth realized that voting really meant paying taxes, approving fraud, and supporting further colonial activities by the USA. Anna gave everyone permission to watch a time of wonder unfold.

According to Wikipedia, Matthew was not a reliable source for information about his own wiki-biography. He was forced to defer to the opinions of other wiki-authors who had posted on other internet sites and could (unlike Matthew) actually footnote their claims. Ramona learned about "active listening" in her hospice

volunteer training. Being an active listener meant she would not attempt to connect the patients' experiences with her own in an effort to express understanding and compassion. Rich watched four-year-old Josie politely wait in line for three and a half hours to present Santa Claus with a treatise she had written about her Kitt Kittridge™ doll, who needed a chair and roll top desk for her office. Heather found that, in addition to making animal droppings more apparent, snow makes people friendlier to one another and forces everyone to slow down.

★★★

WHAT WE LEARNED IN 2009



error by cheating on the final chord—a musical Watergate—any skillful musician would easily have detected both error and cover-up. But he was not the kind of man to have done it, even if he could have gotten away with it.

I learned, among many other things, that one of the more helpless feelings in life is to be singing in a chorus which is gradually going flat. You hear it, you know it is happening, but you can't do a thing about it. You have to sing along with everyone else, even though you know it is not right. Perhaps a really strong and experienced singer could hold the proper pitch and so keep everyone else in tune, but there were none like that among us. As time went on, more and more of us were able to tell when we were going or had gone flat, but we could rarely keep it from happening.

In between the work we would relax now and then, and Mr. Landers would talk to us about things musical. One day he told us something interesting that years later I was to remember and put to use. Someone had mentioned tone-deafness, and he interrupted to say there was no such thing. We were aston-

JANUARY

Bethany realized that she associates learning with death—"something being learned is realized, over, done"—and felt distrustful of the temptation to view life as a series of small deaths that might somehow compensate or prepare her for "the large one." Michael was inspired when he found out that the word "revolution" comes from the Latin *revolvere*, which literally means a constant changing of circumstances. Gary wrote a pamphlet called "The Death of Social Practice" in which he stated: "There is no longer a need for artists to explore the possibility of change through representations and relational experiments. The opportunity to effect real change is upon us." Leo learned that the Indeo IV50 codec is all but obsolete, but it can be converted to the Cinepak codec, which is almost but not quite obsolete. Mauled by a severe flu, Melanie had a premonition of what it might be like to be very old—to have someone else put her socks on for her; to give someone very precise directions for how to pack an overnight bag for the hospital and how to make tomato soup; to know she was frustrating them, feeling frustrated herself at the huge gulf between her mind's capabilities and those of her body.

Ashley put her cat on a diet. To curb his excessive begging and to boost his intake of fluids, she fed him "cat popsicles" made from chicken broth. Ramona learned that dementia comes in many forms, and that warm sauerkraut is good in a sandwich. Leif prepared a benefit

dinner to raise money for a documentary film series about sustainable food in California. His ingredients included baby golden turnips, Bolinas stinging nettle, and dinosaur kale. After struggling with several home businesses, Fred proved to himself that he could make a profit selling greeting cards on the internet. Kenneth found a posting on eBay™ for a 160-acre unpatented gold-mining claim in southwestern Oregon. Ariana wondered what other people were wondering about.

David learned that the small blurry spot he saw in his left eye was actually the imprint of his optic nerve end on the viscera of the eye, which was slowly separating from the retina, as everyone's does with age. Michaela had a vision of her pea-sized "spiritual self" floating in a body-shaped bag of glowing pink Jell-O™. Chris discovered that it helps to have a positive attitude whenever possible, or at least when it comes easily. Marc was learning to meditate, reading *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* by Shunryu Suzuki-roshi. "With so many distractions around me," he said, "It's nice to be able to sit down and do nothing for a while." In a dream, Sam read a letter from Ezra Pound that seemed to hint at a calm and uncanny happiness. The dream-letter was signed: "For Ever within the Conch-Shell." Alyse was experiencing recurring dreams about swimming into ocean surf. At first the water seemed calm, but suddenly when she was in it an enormous wave (more towering than anything she had ever seen) rolled above her. She turned around, looking upward in fear with her body swaying. As she dove into the wave, she woke up suddenly. Colin found in himself an intense desire

for certain things (whiskey, cookie, kiss), at precisely the moment when he was actually experiencing them. Rather than craving something that wasn't there, he found himself amazed at the perfection of their presence, and locked in a struggle to avoid consuming the desired object too slowly or too quickly. Somehow, this desire suffused the world, making everything else fiercely desirable too. It felt like having a candle behind each eye.

One morning, waking up to the Top-40 radio station, Warren was suddenly able to understand song lyrics. Prior to this, he could only hear the melodies and had been baffled when people could decipher a "message" from music. Mara learned that her best friend could perform back flips and wondered how she missed this fact in the previous eight years of their friendship. Will learned that before public notaries can notarize documents, they are required to inform their client verbally that they find reasonable evidence that the client is who they claim to be. Natsumi got her green card. She felt fortunate that it only took a year. Amber made herself a datebook with a calendar page for every month, and proceeded to fill up every day with more plans than she could keep up with. Matthew thought Los Angeles looked beautiful in the rain.

TEN THINGS I'VE LEARNED ABOUT TEENAGE LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS

1. You've got to know how to laugh, because God tends to have a pretty weird sense of humor about these kinds of things.
2. No matter how hard you try to hide it, usually anyone with half a brain can sense that there's something going on between the two of you.
3. Be prepared to be jeered at and treated like a joke. As of yet, the world hasn't quite figured out how to be kind.
4. As bad as it sounds, sometimes you have to be sneaky. This is especially true if the parents do not know/approve of this kind of relationship.
5. Be prepared for strange, unpleasant, and/or crazy ex-boyfriends who are unwilling to accept the loss of their girlfriend to another female.
6. This shit is confusing, and learning how to deal with that is hard.

7. Sometimes it's better to let your family hear it from you rather than from someone else.
8. Common sense, common decency, courage, faith, honesty and trust are your number one best friends.
9. Cover your eyes and follow your heart. Yes, you will probably bump into some stuff and get a little bruised up, but chances are you won't regret it in the end.
10. Love is worth it if it makes you happy. You can do this.

FEBRUARY

Coming in to the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport, Mark looked down at the variegated terrain of Texas and thought, for the first time, that he might want to go back to school to study geography. Michelle was learning about sea creatures, natural cures, and about organizing her yarn. Colleen read up on feminist anarchism, and learned to silkscreen. Her first project: A T-shirt emblazoned with the Goodyear Blimp, and this phrase: “Ice Cube is a Pimp.” Hanna took her first Yiddish lesson. She was much younger than any of her classmates. Michael noticed that the Tibetan word for a long coat, *chuba*, is close to the Russian word for a long coat, *shuba*, and wondered whether this was evidence of “a third Silk Road.” Michaela studied family structural theory.

Emily learned mistrust for the word “natural,” especially as used at Von’s Supermarket. After six years in Paris, Rob was impressed to find complexity in American television shows—for example, the intricate love story in “The Office.” Liz became addicted to bubble gum. Even when her jaw was sore she couldn’t stop chewing. In a dream, Will sat down in front of his boss, spat most of his teeth into his hand in a single loogie, and then felt his tongue expanding. According to Colin’s swim coach, the most efficient path for the crawl stroke is an S-curve, “as though each stroke described the shape of a woman underwater.” Maryrose learned to stretch the arch in her foot by pulling the big toe

backwards. In Sheffield, Susan learned to use “dry” as slang for “not good,” as in: “The gig was dry.” But, she said, “It doesn’t matter about the show, if it’s good or bad, or if people like it. It just matters to do it.”

While listening to NPR, Eric learned that it’s best to keep potatoes in your kitchen away from sunlight to stop them from continuing to grow. Ann tried to make buttermilk pancakes, but she forgot the baking soda, so they turned out more like crêpes. Lucy learned that in Hungarian, as in English, the word equivalent to “fuck” can be modified phrasally: *kibaszní* (“fuck somebody over”), *elbaszní* (“fuck something up”), *megbaszní* (“really fuck”). Rachel learned to tug the beard of a mussel toward the hinge of its shell. If one were to tug in the wrong direction they would kill the mussels immediately, when really the goal is to keep them alive until the moment when they are immersed in a boiling mixture of white wine and shallots.

Phil learned the meanings of the words “mortgage,” “escrow,” “loan,” “title,” “home owners’ insurance,” “fixed-rate,” “adulthood,” and “living in a place for a hundred years.” David learned that, in a Japanese Garden, “the design of the path is critical, and each stone serves a purpose.”

Chris realized this: What you think about most is the Lord of your life.

TO BEAT AND BE BEATEN WITH EUCALYPTUS IN A RUSSIAN BATH HOUSE

You get hot in the “dry sauna,” while lying on your stomach on the highest bench. Your friend throws two dippers of cold water into the furnace, and more on each wall. Do not throw water on the ceiling, because the drops might burn you. Next, your friend holds the eucalyptus bunch high up toward the ceiling to gather heat, then they try to draw that heat down with each swat landing all over your back. When you are both as hot as you can stand, get out and throw ice cold water on each other, or jump in the coldest pool you can find. Repeat this process twice more, once receiving the blows on your stomach, then again receiving them on your back.

This process can also be performed using oak or birch leaves.

BLESS YOUR UNCONTROLLABLE WEEPING

I spent a lot of time crying last January. Hours, maybe, for a few days. Not crying for any particular reason. I tried to think of reasons, but they were just reasons to give to someone else, just the surface and not the depth. It was a little scary. So many tears for no reason.

My boyfriend was worried. Sometimes, it is not easy to love someone whose face is covered with snot. Maybe he felt like he needed to be careful with me, and it's hard to be spontaneous when you're being careful, and spontaneity is usually where all the fun is. So, it follows that it might be hard to be in love with someone when they are no fun. And I was worried. What if the tears never ended? What if I was actually a very sad person and all this time I had been pretending my happiness?

What if I crashed into something while crying and driving?

One morning on my way to work, I was listening to a story about Juarez, Mexico, on "Hearing Voices," and almost missed my exit because all the tears made it hard to see. Later that morning, Stevie Wonder was singing: "I just called to say I love you ..." I started crying and crying while I was harvesting arugula. Luckily,

I was alone. On the drive home, my dear friend called and just the sound of her voice set off so many tears.

She told me a story. Her mother had been having a similar problem, crying at completely inappropriate times. Her mother sings with a choral group, and in the middle of a song she would burst into tears. She couldn't stop and she couldn't leave, because there were people on all sides. While eating lunch with her *reiki* teacher she mentioned her condition. Her teacher said, "Oh, you have to bless your tears. So many people can't cry. You can cry for all those people. Just bless them, and bless them."

And so, when I got home to our apartment, I went upstairs and cried and cried and cried, and I didn't try to stop and I didn't try to have any reason. I felt much better.

MARCH

Amanda learned that light therapy for Seasonal Affective Disorder really works. Sam saw beautiful hexagonal formations of columnar basalt in the Willamette Valley. Clea realized that it was helpful to remind herself that she'd probably be able to do something later if she couldn't do it now, like read Dostoevsky and really enjoy it. After several attempts to crochet her boyfriend a wool hat—one too small, one too large—Erin finally figured it out, a week into springtime. Colin visited a mine in Bayan Obo, Inner Mongolia, which is the world's largest source of ytterbium, an oxide used to produce the color red in television screens. Every television in the world contains a few flecks of this Mongolian rock. George stopped introducing herself as Rachel. Regarding this change, she wrote: "I think choosing the name George reflects a strong femininity in me. I bring out a hidden feminine essence to the name, rather than it bringing out a hidden masculinity in me."

Lara learned that eucalyptus trees draw a tremendous amount of water from the soil and also release a chemical that kills the surrounding plants. Anna went to see the apricot trees blooming at her friend's farm. When they got out of the car, her friend started pulling flowers off the branches and scattering them on the ground. She was disconcerted until he explained that the branches had to be thinned so the trees can make more succulent fruits. She tried stripping a branch her-

self, and found it calming. Evan was surprised when a beekeeper told him that San Francisco was a great place to raise bees, because of the abundant gardens hidden behind houses. He wished he could turn the city inside out and walk among gardens instead of blocks of drab façades.

Colin learned how to change the size of his Facebook picture, and he learned that distance is sometimes just as valuable as intimacy. Matthew learned that websites can actually be driven somewhere in a car—for instance, from San Francisco to Portland. David learned about and visited a secret tea club in Santa Cruz, California, where he had a conversation about the accessibility of poetry. Alyse discovered the suburban Chinatown sprawl of the San Gabriel Valley and sampled the ancient art of imitation meat, which she previously thought was an Americanized vegan trend. Susan learned that venison is not at all gamey, but very moist, although when cooked it becomes drier than beef. Michael learned that power pole technicians are called linemen and that this is the third most dangerous profession in America because the linemen often fall or are electrocuted. Michaela learned that until six years ago, in order to turn a cable car around, the driver and the attendant had to get out and manually rotate it. As Will delved into his first try at art criticism, he realized that it worked best to write about each piece individually, rather than try to write about the show as a whole. James learned how to do letterpress printing,

and collaborated with a new friend on a greeting card that said: “We are fairies. There is no death.”

Bethany realized that many of her activities over the past twenty years have, in some way, resembled a stunt that she pulled long ago: She stole a wheelchair from a church and took it to a highway median strip, where she danced with it, Gene Kelly style, wearing a wig, a pair of nylons stretched over her face, and pillows stuffed under her clothing. For four days, Joe was convinced that time was making his eyeballs heavier and creating bags under them. On the fifth day, he snapped out of it and went for a run. The following week he tried to live without worrying about anything, and it felt great. Melanie learned that being overprotective of your body doesn't always help you heal faster. Also, she was pleased to find that some people are sweet when their clothes are on and nasty when they are off. After an hour-long conversation with his house-mates about love, Eric realized that he is emotionally unavailable to the women he dates.

Christin noticed a lot more old people in Florida than she remembered from growing up there. Amber was shocked to learn that Ashkenazi Jews have a higher rate of a certain genetic mutation that increases the risk of breast cancer. As the daughter of a three-time cancer survivor and the granddaughter of Lithuanian Jews, her panic and paranoia were oddly not heightened. She was just surprised it took so long for her to find out. Remi met a young woman who believes in alien abductions. She was skeptical but somehow still fright-

ened. Lee read that bunny poop has more nitrogen in it than any other kind of manure and is very beneficial for garden compost. Even though she doesn't like the idea of keeping pets, she considered constructing a large bunny cage in her backyard with worm compost bins beneath for the nitrogen-enriched poop to feed the worm compost. If she chose Angora rabbits, she could even harvest their hair a few times a year to sell or spin Angora wool. She looked through photographs of the Angora rabbit breed, deciding "they look like fur-ball aliens." She might leave the idea behind all together.

APRIL

On an unseasonably warm day, Will and Susan went hiking to a lake in the Olympic Mountains with their dog Morena, who became overly excited beside a river and devoured a salamander that had been sleeping on a log. In a panic, they tried everything to make Morena vomit, putting their fingers down her throat, while wondering if they should rush her straight to a vet. As they waited for Morena to show signs of convulsion or paralysis, Will and Susan tried to remember their herpetology classes from college. Did the salamander have an orange back or an orange belly? Which of these would be poisonous? They decided it might be safe to wait. Back home, watching Morena sleep soundly, they realized it was the salamander they should have felt sorry for from the beginning.

Listening to the radio, after a cursory report on the year's deadliest day in Iraq (April 23rd), Gabe learned that Bo, the Obama family's new puppy, "exhibits typical puppy behavior, such as barking and playing... chewing on people's feet." Gabe was reminded how a great many things can be very meaningful and completely meaningless at precisely the same moment, which was perhaps why he couldn't stop laughing.

While discussing the "tiny dog craze" currently sweeping Asia, Colin learned that in Japan and China, it is not uncommon for affluent owners to wipe their dog's bottoms after they poop. Jennie, meanwhile, learned

that in China people usually pray for more money when they visit Buddhist temples. Chris said, “Whatever you pay attention to, grows.”

Amber learned that under Washington State law a married couple is treated as a unified financial entity, even if one half of the couple were to have no idea what the other half was doing. If someone was spending, investing, borrowing, or declaring bankruptcy without their spouse’s knowledge, well, tough beans. “Know your husband or wife,” said Amber. “It’s great if they’re making wise decisions, but it’s not so great if they aren’t. In fact, it’s really fucked up.”

James made some delicious ice-cream floats with sake and Ben and Jerry’s™ Cherry Garcia™. Clea stewed some herbs in oil for a few hours, and then added beeswax to transform her infusion into a salve. Sam’s razors lasted twice as long when he started storing them in their plastic case between uses.

Lucy was embarrassed and annoyed to learn that, even though a man might flirt with her, pay her fine compliments and take her out to dinner (twice), it still didn’t necessarily mean he wanted to kiss. Apparently, kissing is a very serious thing. Or, she theorized, some men may in fact be gallant half-zombies, flirting with their living parts while the rest of them has been deadened and decayed by overwork, stress and exhaustion. A seventh-grader taught Mervin what convection currents are, and how these hot flows of

molten rock in the Earth's mantle cause tectonic plates to move.

While considering the perils of “segmentation fault core dump,” Liz was upset to learn her calculator cannot model such a situation's hypergeometric distribution. Michaela learned that the little round symbol with the tail coming off the top meant “standard deviation,” and that the “z-score” measured the number of standard deviations from the median. Somehow, there was a way to use this information to determine whether something was statistically significant, but Michaela didn't yet know how. In Michoacan, while writing reassuring emails about swine flu to her family and friends, Laura decided :Q is an emoticon for someone smiling while wearing a surgical mask.

Passing through Dubuque, Iowa, Jenny took a ride on “the world's shortest, steepest scenic railroad” – also known as the Fourth Street Elevator. Joe learned the Los Angeles train station is a good reading spot for when the downtown library closes. While visiting Seattle, David ate hand-rolled Needle Noodles and tried to compose a tongue twister about them. Anna learned she has a *torus palatinus*, or bony overgrowth, on the roof of her mouth. It measures 15 by 12 millimeters, but it will not be the cause of her death. Mika learned that mountain lions are not cute outdoor pets but wild beautiful creatures, predators.

SUPERWOMEN ALSO WORTHY OF LOVE

In a conversation with my mother, on one of a few rare occasions when she's cried in my presence, I learned that after my parents' divorce the many sacrifices my mother made for my brother and I were rooted in a profound need to prove (first to my father, second to herself) that by being Superwoman, she was someone worth loving. This pride for her Superwoman persona, coupled with her insecure belief that she has failed as a mother, has since led her to keep my brother's suicide attempt and my abortions secret from her dearest friends. I learned that pride is a complex and mightily lonely force, capable of binding the most sensitive of hearts in subtle bitterness. I am learning daily how to keep my heart fresh and aching, resisting familial patterns of closure. When I most want to be held, I have learned to lean my back against broad tree trunks and look up at the moon with long deep breaths.

MAY

Tim helped his girlfriend move from Staten Island to Greenpoint. He put 110 miles on a U-Haul™ over two days, and lifted most of her heavy furniture. He learned that though he might make or buy things or perform errands to show his affection, she only responded to what he did in front of her. He wondered whether his more subtle gestures were simply lost on her, and why he was so desperate for positive feedback in the relationship. Jason got drunk and tore apart his dinner nook, throwing a tabletop across the room while his friends hid from him in a truck outside. As he poured a concrete foundation for a new nook-table, he said, “It’s not good to keep emotions bottled up inside. A man should keep a journal.” Ashley created an “outdoor living room” behind her house, complete with chairs, potted plants, and mirrors. Rachel knit snails. Sam was learning to speak clearly and firmly with preschoolers. When he failed to do this, they drew on his shorts with orange and blue crayons.

Luke heard rumors about a small gang of “bee wranglers” who were corralling wild swarms into wooden hives they’d built on their rooftops in Brooklyn. Liz heard that she could reduce pollen allergies by eating a little bit of local honey every day, beginning before her allergy season, but if she began during her allergy season it might make reactions worse. Keha realized she wanted to make her own mistakes as a farmer, and she began “broadcasting” a variety of seeds in experimental

planters. Dustin learned a new way to pee at the beach, by digging a hole in the sand and then lying over it on his belly, in a nonchalant fashion. “It’s great, it just sort of drains out!” he said. Kenneth felt cozy when thunder and lightning woke him in the middle of the night.

Amanda started bellydancing, and learned to do a three-quarter shimmy really fast. Amber learned that a failed career in teaching is not really a failure, it’s just a good background for a future in children’s librarianship. Boris realized he is being pigeonholed by his editors into only reviewing novels about Jews and Russians. Ramona learned that all caretakers should take at least one day off per week, and that it’s less stressful to visit her home town if she doesn’t call everyone she knows there beforehand. Jenny was bored by the lengthy healing process, after she broke her foot in a car accident. She watched “Colorsplash,” a TV show about decorating houses, and started thinking about buying a house. Alison learned what it’s like to have “an adult illness,” and appreciated her body’s health despite its imperfections. Michaela was reminded that she had really good friends.

Warren read about the Boston Molasses Flood of 1919, in which the town’s molasses plant exploded, sending a 2.3-million-gallon wave of molasses through the streets. It engulfed everything in its path, killing people and horses. Elizabeth read a speech by Elie Wiesel, who wrote: “We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the

tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere.”

In Gansu, Jennie visited a Tibetan nunnery where one sister spent all of her days walking in a circle around a pagoda, either because she was sad or because she was sick. Rob learned the complex rules that governed his Brooklyn Public Library account: if he had \$15 in fines, they would block him from borrowing, but if he had \$14.99 they would just send him notices three days before something was due—which they wouldn’t do if he had no fines. Colin was trying to talk his way into staying in one of the many workman’s dormitories in Manhattan’s Chinatown, but he kept being turned away because he was white. Terry had a “once in a lifetime opportunity” to invest with some fellow marble collectors in a project to revive a derelict marble factory in Ohio.

JUNE

Michaela invented the sock unicorn. Julia climbed a twenty-eight foot rope. When she touched the gym ceiling, again, she felt just as proud as she did when she was ten. Remi realized that the most difficult part of a marathon isn't running 18 miles every weekend, nor the new spandex shorts, nor the artificially flavored electrolyte gels—the hardest part is the fundraising. While assembling her portfolio for applying to art school, Lindsay realized that to actually be an artist she must actually make artwork. Ashley got paid \$1,000 to paint a railing green, then took a vacation to the Redwoods using change she'd been saving all year in a mason jar. After publishing a 60-page newspaper about electrical linemen, Michael realized that he wants to make more newspapers about things he has not yet discovered. Rejected, thank God, by the graduate program she applied to, Susan commenced a study of utopias, heterotopias, and “the multitude.” Sam read about Freedomland USA, a history-themed amusement park that ran from 1960 to 1964 on a 205-acre property in the Bronx. Shaped like the 48 contiguous states, its attractions included a replica of Chicago as it was in 1871 on the eve of the Great Fire. “The city will burn down every twenty minutes,” read the Freedomland press releases, “Despite the volunteer companies that will rush down its streets ... You may be one of those who help fight the fire to a standstill. As the call goes up for volunteers, maybe you'll rush forward bravely to aid in manning the hose or pumping the water that

douses the flames. Later, as you sail farther and farther from Chicago, suddenly you'll see the towering inferno reflected in the water." On the Pacific Coast, Blanche realized the heart of the sunset will always be in front of you, no matter where you are standing.

Marc studied the career of Harry Hopkins, who in 1931, as chief administrator of the Works Progress Administration under Franklin D. Roosevelt, sought employment for some of the 8 million people then unemployed by creating public works projects and arts education programs across the country. Though Amber always saw organization and tidiness as something beautiful, positive for the mind, she began learning to let go and accept her clutter. Brittany was working on Little Short Mountain Farm with Sandor Katz, a man who cured his own HIV infection by eating fermented foods. She thought a lot about *kimchi* and sauerkraut. With both, the key is to keep the cabbage in liquid, or it will mold. She placed wine bottles filled with water on the kraut to keep it submerged. "If the kraut does mold though, that's fine," Brittany said, "you just scrape it off." Also, she figured out how to make carbonated *kombucha* that doesn't taste too vinegary: "After you make a batch, wait one week, then bottle it. Add a teaspoon of sugar before sealing each bottle. The bits of culture continue to feed, producing carbonation and keeping the flavor crisp." Eric learned that the sugar

in juice quickly turns into carbohydrates, which make you fat.

Alyse made a rare discovery: Richard Simmons was teaching an exercise class in Beverly Hills three times a week, just six miles from her house. Beverly Hills had always felt so distant, like a separate universe she had never found a reason to visit. Alyse attended his class for the first time on the day Michael Jackson died. In honor of the sad occasion, Richard's aerobics segment was taught using Jackson's music exclusively, in decadal increments. The class of 30 aerobicized like regulars, each memorizing the steps as if they were in a workout video audition. The class held elderly blonde women in sexy vintage leotards, overweight students enthusiastically rearing to lose pounds and regain control of their lives, two teenage boys forced to attend by their mothers, and a small group of girls wearing short-shorts and pro-Israel T-shirts. Richard wore his customary black and white striped mini shorts, sequined tank top with an embroidered rose, poofy hair and white scrunchy socks. "Keep your legs up higher!" he yelled. "Front, front! Back, back! Down, down!" Wanting to be in the center of the action, Alyse took a place at the front of the class, until Richard's workout assistant asked her to move toward the back row where her "unique moves" would not confuse the others.

Also, Alyse learned that Frank Lloyd Wright took naps every two hours instead of sleeping through the night, that almost all of her faculty advisers collected Danish Modern furniture, that Persian and Armenian cucum-

bers were amazing, that there was a Christian university directly across from the beach at Malibu, that her best friend cycled everywhere without a helmet because her hair was too big to fit, that itching at poison ivy won't spread the reaction even if it does pop up in different places days later, and further she resolved never to forget what that plant looked like, and she promised herself not to go blindly following friends into the wilderness just like she had promised herself before after she followed Colin and Kenneth on that trail in the dark with only that one flashlight in search of a hot spring that was actually under a cold river, and now again she made herself promise after following Iza up a coyote trail full of poison oak, no, ivy.

JULY

A couple from the city, the story goes, decided to adopt a child. After a search, they found a young mother-to-be in Montana, a promising student whose boyfriend was a star of the football team. The couple bought her a car, and she drove east with her baby to spend several days with his new parents. One day, quite serious, she took the adoptive mother aside to say, "I know you'll be a good mother for this child. But I have one request. Please, please, don't let my baby do rodeo." The new mother was bemused: "Oh, I don't think you need to worry about that." There was no further contact with the birth mother. Now, ten years later, the boy grows increasingly obsessed with horses.

It has been believed that hummingbirds migrate by stowing themselves among the feathers of larger birds—geese and eagles. In fact, they fly alone. Tiny, fearless, they have been found in the thermals high over the Gulf of Mexico.

In front of Ikea, a couple sitting together at ease, chatting. It is clear they have traveled here individually, to meet one another, to go home again together. A date. He says, "Now, as long as the audio unit's remote uses radio and not infrared, there will be no need to maintain a line-of-sight for its sensor." She touches his neck, and after a long pause she replies: "I'll go at those screws with the screw-extractor tomorrow. I'll call if it doesn't

work, so we can talk about a nuclear option.” He turns to look at her, unguarded, astonished.

Later, at a bar, there is gossip: “What he needs is a marriage, that’s what he’s looking for—order. Same with Sarah, it’s why her house is so messy, she has no axis.” In the street a jogger bobs in place at the stoplight, and I realize, too, that my own fallen love had once been the logic of my life.

In a film, Bronx boys fill ladies’ stockings with crumbled plaster, and dressed as ghouls they wage war in the streets. The skirmishing commences with hilarity, progresses to sincerity, and then allegiances begin to form. A butcher emerges to call a halt, seizing one boy by the jaw and draping an apron over his head as if he were a falcon. Seated nearby, a chalk-spattered victim bleeds lightly from his nose, eyes like dull embers as he comprehends the magnitude of so many betrayals.

On the set of a commercial for instant rice, an actress will present her casserole. The director muses aloud: “Do you have kids? We don’t know if you have kids. But you’re looking forward to this nice meal. It’s a Friday night ... no, it’s a weeknight ... but you’re making it feel like a Friday night.”

To one side, I stand in a kitchen filled with props, sorting chickpeas, arranging them in concentric circles.

The stylist gasps when she discovers my mandala: “Oh my! Every bean is perfect!”

In a dream, I stand beside Gloria’s father examining her new tent. “What about the old one,” I ask. “I went on a trip,” she says, “A man on the mountain offered me this one because he had too many.” It is in this moment that I realize: just as musicians long for dancers, a liar needs believers.

Rain drips from the gutter onto the train platform. Beside me, a young man extends his hand into the falling stream. “Stop it, James, just stop it,” his mother says. He looks at her, peacefully, as his palm overflows with water.

Because the hummingbird whirs its wings with such speed, the Asháninka of Peru have concluded the bird has more than just its own life.

Boarding a mailboat at the pier, I found the crew busy strapping a large cage to the foredeck, inside of which stamped a grown bull, destined for a small island offshore. A final length of rope passed through his halter and out to cleats on both sides of the ship, to keep him from turning during the voyage. Later, the crossing turned rough, with a steady green swell rocking the ship fore and aft. I stood on the pilothouse bathed in spray, listening to the poor bull groan and fart, bound

as he was, unable himself to look away from the coming waves.

For the Aztecs, all warriors slain in battle rose into the sky, orbited the sun, then returned to earth as hummingbirds. Each night they became warriors again, doing furious battle with the darkness until it retreated, and light could return to the world. The beauty of each dawn drove the warriors into frenzy.

A jackhammer below my window brings me down into the street for a look at my tormentors. Men in white helmets stand calm and intent around this new hole. I fantasize drawing my knife and slashing through their pneumatic hose, then realize the hose would be quickly replaced, as would the belt, the pistons, the steel bit, etc. But at the heart of the tool burned a force I could never confound, an element that could not be removed: *the will*.

Nootkan children smeared slug slime on twigs beside flowering plants. Hummingbirds, light of wing, were thus caught and tethered by a string threaded through their nostrils. And so they would fly in circles to everyone's amusement but their own.

My landlord sits astride a chair near my front door, flapping one hand lazily against the heat. Our pleasantries evaporate into the burning air. He appears to be sinking, distracted, listless, examining a \$1,000,000 dollar bill given to him by Jehovah's

Witnesses just moments earlier. As I walk away, I spot several identical bills in the trashcan on the corner.

Midnight, waiting for the F train, a man with a trombone plays an easy roundabout version of "All Blues." He stops in mid-phrase, saying softly, "To remind everyone, the B train no longer runs after 10:35. If you are waiting for the B, it will not be arriving tonight." Then he resumes the final notes of his song. On each of his steady hands grows out a tiny, perfect sixth finger.

Midnight, again, now with an urgency so great it drapes like a fragrance over the city streets. I glimpse at the corner two men wearing identical shirts and white trousers. They cross the street holding hands, and for a moment my eye searches for the mirror, for the edges of the mirror, for the doubling of the night and its legions. At the curb the pair breaks their hold, one walking north while the other enters a store, neither turning to watch the other depart. Nearby, a tiny dog whuffles in the air rising from a grate.

Paiute legend tells that Hummingbird once filled his pants with seeds and set off in search of the land beyond the sun, eating one seed each day he traveled. But his seeds ran out before he even reached the sun, so he returned home and told no one of his journey. Navajo legend tells of a hummingbird who flew above the clouds to find what lay beyond. He found nothing.

AUGUST

Kaia had been waiting for the white eggplants in her garden to get bigger, but when some began to rot and split, she realized it was high time to harvest the rest. Sam decided it was a good idea to do dishes every day, rather than once a week. Phoebe learned how to make vinegar sodas. Michaela passed her driving test and got her license. Ryan learned that on a standard five-speed transmission, if he didn't adjust the master cylinder, the clutch oil hose might not receive enough pressure, making it hard to switch gears. A fire in a barrel spread across Jeff's neighbor's lawn, consuming the lawnmower and nearly catching the garage, from which it would inevitably have spread to Jeffrey's garage and house. He ran next door to alert the neighbor, who was in his living room watching TV. Jeffrey said: "If I don't keep my eye out, my neighbor might destroy everything."

Amber learned many contradictory definitions of the word "information." One of her favorites was: "any difference that makes a difference to a conscious, human mind." Dirk sent out an email to his friends, asking for suggested reading on the following topics: "place, geography, counterculture, participation, Utopias, poetry, Canada, North (idea), West (idea), Northwest (idea/place), built environments, old ways, the Kamchatka Peninsula, the Internet, hunting/killing, pioneering, geology, Hokkaido, wilderness,

land-use, organizations, empire, feminism, home-building, damp, dripping, deadly weather.”

While walking alone on an isolated Pacific beach, it occurred to Ashley that she had three addictions: coffee, comfort, and having things come easily to her. The last, she decided, was by far the most detrimental. Chris was relieved to find himself in situations where he felt permission to be himself. He said: “It’s better to have nothing and be hopeful than to have something and be fearful.” Although she considered herself a very patient person, Meghan found it challenging to participate in consensus decision-making. Ariana was in the process of “learning to not give up but also not force things.” Rich realized that some people like smoking pot so much that they should never smoke pot, and that “money is still a thing.”

Peter discovered a rare 1969 concept album entitled “The Love Cycle” by Forever Amber, which used psychedelic pop to describe the full trajectory of a single love affair, from its sweet beginnings to its bitter end. After listening to the album so much that he wore out the vinyl, he began to consider writing a similar concept album about the dating scene in his own town. Colin hiked to Dead Man’s Lake with his parents, along a ridge scoured by ash from Mt. Saint Helens’ eruption. In the volcanic soil huckleberries were flourishing, and as the three of them picked, he realized he was quite fortunate that outings such as these were his sole familial obligation. Ramona read that cats have three sets of teeth in a lifetime. They’re born with milkteeth, then

grow “baby teeth” with no roots, and after those fall out the mature teeth grow in. Kyle read somewhere that acts of justly meted revenge are not only psychologically beneficial to the people who perform them, but the vengeance is also subconsciously soothing to the surrounding community.

A FLOOR IN BRUSSELS

The history of buildings is not always evident. Perhaps it is the materials used to construct or renovate them, or the methods of workmanship, that can lead us to guess the wrong date of construction. In this case, a floor painted in red lacquer was found to be disagreeable. It was repainted with a primer and a coat of baby blue. After a few days the blue was still sticky, and a test area was used to see whether the paint could be removed easily. Strangely enough, the new paint made it easier to remove the pre-existing layer of red paint, and thus began a two week job of removing all of the layers of paint, a process which was been aided by a Dutch sun lamp. I have learned that wood is indeed the best surface for a wood floor. And I learned that the floor was constructed or repaired at two different times, resulting in two different sorts of pine. I suppose it is for this reason that the floor was painted in the first place.

BINK AND HOLLER

I hold the bunny on its back and he clips the bunny's nails very carefully for the first time. We think that we can tell that one bunny is male because he mounts his sister repeatedly. But the sister is a brother and the brother is a sister, so we learn in the office of the veterinarian.

She said that hydrolysis might still be important and we realized that we didn't have the right words to describe the various ailments of this factor. Upon further discussion we hit upon a different mutation that would answer the question that was of greatest interest. "I don't think you need to know the question," he tells me, when I ask what it was. "What is the question of greatest interest?" Then he laughs.

Jacob learns to clip his own nails. He is seven.

We watch our bunnies bink. Bink is a jump for joy that young bunnies make. Do older bunnies bink? We do not know. But I wonder about human binking and how to continue.

He said, "Do you want to go the back of the property?" It took a long time to get there in the ATV. Jacob looked out over the cliff and said, "Does grandpa drive carefully?" "I'm not sure," I said. Grandpa said there's an abandoned oil derrick at the back of the property. All that's left is a pipe that goes 1,000 feet deep in the

ground. We drive to it. The boy yells into the pipe and hears his voice echoing hundreds of times. We drop a stone. It makes a whistling sound that grows louder and louder until it sounds like it's burning and then it makes a snap and a deep monstrous gurgle. On the way back we see a perfect eye carved into a cliff.

SEPTEMBER

After five months of training, Remi ran her first 26.2 mile marathon in Maui. A week after returning home, she looked up the sports photographer who shot the event. Their website sold portraits in many sizes: 5"x 7", 8"x 10", 20"x 24." She was excited to buy the biggest size, until she found four images of herself in their database, and saw that she was about to cry in every image. Then she wasn't sure if she should order one. Alyse had been looking forward to using the burdock she planted at the start of summer. One weekend, she struggled to dig up the roots of her single burdock plant for a half hour, then gave up, leaving it in the ground. She learned that it would be easier to harvest burdock much sooner or to plant it in large pots. Ashley and Jeff paid an arborist \$1,000 to artfully thin and extend the life expectancy of an injured black walnut tree in their front yard. In the process of saving their loved tree, they learned that black walnut contains a toxin, mostly in the roots but throughout the plant as well, which can kill other plants within a 50 foot radius.

Amber felt awed and overwhelmed by the prospect of planning to have a child. Sam learned that reef squid die after mating. Kenneth said: "True love never dies and makes you cry all the way in every way, and soul mates put the mirror to the heart to read the reflection." Zach and Cynthia realized that to live in perfect harmony they would need to develop a system for dishes, so they put a brown busing tray and a black

busing tray on their counter. Michael learned that the Shakers hope to be remembered not as makers of chairs but as experimenters in communal living. Clea realized she prefers silence to “pointless/ endless chatter/ singing/ humming/ noise.” Gil was asking himself simple questions: “How large is my vessel? What am I doing to make it larger?”

When James and Jeff were hiking through a logging zone, a Caterpillar shovel truck carved a path for them to cross the expanse where Forest Road 62 used to be (and will be again). It packed the dirt down, flattening it with steel knuckles. Josie, Colin, and Adam circumnavigated Manhattan in canoes. “I’d been imagining the island the way it used to be,” said Adam. “No buildings, no roads. I wanted to see what was left. The water has lost none of its power. The ravine at Spuyten Duyvil. The artificial rapids above the Harlem Sewage Plant. The rush of Buttermilk Channel.”

Joy learned that the way to stop a haunting, in Y’upik’ lore, is not to yell at the ghost spirit but to walk up to it, put one hand gently under its chin and the other over its head, and coax it back into the earth. Once it has gone down, one must pat the ground and rub it, like someone ill might soothe their belly by rubbing it. After shooting and eating one of the geese that swam in the canal beside his house, Francisco learned that geese mate for life. When his meal’s mate returned several days later, calling and searching, Francisco felt really guilty. Then he started looking for someone to buy his air rifle.

MAGENTA IS MY FAVORITE COLOR

I learned that sometimes I look at my life in fragmentary snapshots and that I like to see these snapshots disconnected, imagining they belong to someone else's life in a movie or a series of postcards. While staring at a postcard rack in Newport, Rhode Island, I realized that people have stopped buying and sending postcards. I learned from a pirate tradesman that the pirate store business is profitable in vacation resorts. I learned that vacationing is good for your health, but that the benefits dissipate immediately after you return to work. I learned that polyether is used to make casts on teeth, and that it tastes like a sweet-bitter chemical and looks like a purple silly putty. I discovered that the pirate tradesman's irrational fear of dentists comes from a bad experience from his childhood in the seventies when a dentist tried to fix a cavity and instead gave him another tooth infection. I realized that I want to decorate my house in the style of the Camino Real hotel in Mexico City, and that magenta is my favorite color. I also realized that I miss Mexico. I noticed that I am starting to look a lot like Andy Garcia but that I have been behaving more and more like my father. I live across the street from the tiniest French restaurant in the world. I learned that cicadas tend to make noise collectively, that they climax together, and that during cold summers they are quieter. I learned that in the sixties inept archaeologists put a lot of cuneiform tablets in the oven, trying to preserve them but instead

totally ruining them. I also learned that cats can squeeze themselves to an eighth of their size. I know now that when one moves to a new house, ones view of humanity changes at least slightly. I learned that I am more creative about doing something when I am being pressured to do something else. I learned that no one really knows what they are talking about anyway, and that is so liberating.

THE PLIGHT OF A JOURNALIST

I was walking past the mental hospital the other day. The patients were shouting, “13 ... 13 ... 13.” The fence was too high to see over, but I saw a small gap in the planks. I looked through to see what was going on. Somebody poked me in the eye with a stick! Then they all started shouting “14 ... 14 ... 14.”

ROBBED

I have terrible news! Last night, my last night in NY before driving off to Utah, our car got broken into. My computer was stolen, along with my camcorder and one of the VHS camcorders that we used for Chelsea Clinton. All of the footage from Chelsea was on my computer and on the tape that was in the VHS camcorder. It's gone. It's all gone!

This is very heartbreaking for me and right now it feels like one of the worst things that's ever happened to me. I'm devastated. It seems very unreal. Just heartbroken over all the good work that was put into the film, and now to see it disappear.

Usually I have everything backed up and put into another place, but since I was the director and the DP it just didn't happen this time, of all the times. I'm very sorry about this, and I can't explain it.

I do have a Quicktime file which has about a third of the film on it. I will send it around to you all to watch next week, just for interest's sake. Now I'm going to try to recover. And I'm hitting the road.

OCTOBER

For more than a year, Tony lived a double life as a loving father who smoked heroin alone at night. In the summer of 2009 he lost control of his habit and went on what he called a “massive binge.” He lost two of his three jobs, became estranged from his fiancée, and took money from his own mortgage to keep buying drugs. Even at his worst, none of Tony’s friends or family had any idea that he was struggling with a heroin addiction. To those who knew him, he seemed troubled, emotionally distant, hard to reach, but no one would have guessed why. The disparity between Tony’s two lives surpassed the limits of reasonable expectation, so it remained invisible.

One afternoon, while his mother waited for him at a café nearby, Tony was buying heroin from a little fat man who wore his pants around his knees, pacing the room with a needle still hanging out of one buttock. Tony was only allowed near the man because he’d proven that he was a serious user—not a dabbler, not a yuppie. Tony and the dealer spoke of being “sick,” of wanting to “get well.” Around them sat other members of the fat man’s entourage—leeches, protectors, tasters—a social network catalyzed by a common obedience to the urgency of addiction. As Tony stared into the smoky, squalid room, he still couldn’t believe this was a world where he belonged. He pocketed his drugs,

walked out into the street, into the sunlight, and then out to meet his mother.

Tony has a warm personality, a quick sense of humor, and a fondness for modern French literature. Until recently, he'd never used heroin and was a little unnerved by people who did. He started a family while still young, supporting them by working three jobs. But after four years together, he and his partner began to grow restless with the responsibility they'd placed upon themselves, with the pressure of being adults and parents. Tony's partner wanted to write novels, wanted to stop being a mother. Tony lost his trust in her, in the role he'd played for his family for so long. The relationship unraveled.

In the months after the breakup, Tony began dating again. He reconnected with some old friends who liked to cook together and to smoke a little heroin after their meal, while listening to music. Tony picked up the habit, and then occasionally he'd smoke by himself, on evenings when he worked on remodeling his kitchen. The drug became more and more of a presence in his life, filling more of his time. He became distant and inefficient. When he lost his job he stopped working on his kitchen. He'd sit up at night with his drugs, staring listlessly at the house around him, at the dark rooms where he'd once led a completely different life.

"Before, it was difficult in many ways," Tony says, "But I felt like I was doing the right thing, the noble thing.

When it all stopped working, I felt like something in me was damaged.”

“What I’ve learned about depression is that every time you have a major episode it increases the likelihood that you’ll have another,” Tony says. “If I’ve had three depressive episodes, there’s already a 90% chance that I’ll have a fourth. Knowing this makes my memory of past depression so much more vivid, and the future holds this oppressive guarantee of sadness.”

Tony has been clean for several months. A therapist he sees gave him a book about depression, and it feels like the first time he’s read something that perfectly describes his own experiences.

The book’s theory is that some people have a natural mental inclination to solve problems. When these people experience something intensely, internally upsetting, their critical faculties immediately seek a rational solution to the problem. But emotional problems don’t necessarily have rational solutions, so instead of solving anything, some people slip into a compulsive over-analysis of themselves and their emotions. The cycle becomes hard to escape.

“I think the book will teach me to develop meditative practices that help release my impulse to analyze and solve, to simply let everything go. It seems hopeful to me that we might change our way of thinking. I’m not

sure how, yet, because I'm still in the middle of the book.”

Tony has been dating someone almost since breaking up with the mother of his children. They were temporarily engaged, but in the past months she's been doubting whether she wants to stay engaged. Her mother has been asking her what she plans to do with the rest of her life, if she wants to keep working in bars. Tony thinks they share such a clear and strong emotional affinity, that they shouldn't be so concerned about abstract ideals like wealth and stability. It seems more important to appreciate what they do have, rather than wishing life was different than it actually is.

“She's struggling with her position in life, her age, and her desire to have, suddenly, all of the things she never believed she would ever want. I've always tried to live life with security. I don't feel like I can support her. I worked so my kids could have health insurance, good food. I feel helpless, because not only do I not have those for myself, I can't provide them for the people who are most important to me.”

“When I was strung out last summer, I would chase dealers all over town, do everything frantically, thinking, ‘Okay, I just need to do this so I can get this and then I'll be able to get the drugs and I'll be okay.’ Sometimes, in the middle of it all, I'd think how wonderful

it would all have been if I lived the same life I was living, but without that constant pressure.”

“Before I started using, I lived according to calculations, sacrifices, and backup plans. When everything in my life changed, I finally started taking risks, and I wasn’t afraid to face remorse. When I was supporting my family and paying for a house, I had no choice but to completely believe in the work I was doing. I was completely trapped, I couldn’t ask real questions of myself. I’m definitely happier now, even with everything that’s happened. I’m freer, but the lack of clarity that comes with freedom is terrifying.”

NOVEMBER

Eric crashed his car and was forced to accept that it couldn't be fixed and that he couldn't afford a new one. He acquainted himself with the Los Angeles public transportation system and found an LA he never knew existed. Marc had a panic attack and was reminded that "we are very fragile beings," and that many of our systems (mental, physical, digestive) are interrelated. Jeff experienced "runner's high," which is caused by a cannabinoid neurotransmitter called anandamide. Michelle's boyfriend pointed out that she always got moody when she spoke with her family on the telephone. While wondering whether any of her desires were actually realistic, Alyse came to the conclusion that all of the unrealistic decisions she had ever made felt more real than the so-called realistic ones—like swimming in cold water at night without a towel.

Michael had his first "almost coherent" conversation in Spanish. He realized that by inverting an accent one might accidentally say "I lost my potatoes in the train hole" instead of "I lost my parents in the subway." Eliza learned that "slow and steady really does win the race," and that the capital of Qatar is Doha. Paul learned that female tussock moths are flightless. Karl heard that yams originally came from Southeast Asia, not Africa. Laura Kate read that right-handed snails cannot mate with left-handed snails, and that many snakes have evolved asymmetrical jaws that make it easier to extract right-handed snails from their shells.

As a result, though there is a greater number of right-handed snails, there is more genetic diversity among left-handed snails. Sam was told by a masseur that the rib below his right shoulder blade is rotated.

Crystal became curious about the blues musicians whose music Led Zeppelin imitated, especially Willie Dixon. Michaela learned that Narrative Therapy adapted some of its ideas from cybernetic theory, including negative explanation, circular causality, and negative feedback loops. Josie said: "It's not a good idea to call a Portagee a Shortagee. You might get punched." Colin decided to drop out of journalism school, despite threats from his university to make him repay his fellowship stipend. Mark moved into a new house and a new office at the same time. "It's never as good as I want it to be," he said. Adam learned to make risotto, and also took psilocybin mushrooms for the first time. Both went well.

Passing under a freeway bridge on his way to a lecture, James noticed a person huddled under a heavy coat. He walked the same route several more times before it dawned on him that the person had not moved at all for more than a day. He went back and discovered that the man was dead, then called the police. He was haunted by the image of the body, and by feelings of guilt, but did not alter his habitual walking route. A few nights later, after smoking a joint on the way home from work, he found himself in the same place, staring fixedly at a small crumpled yellow object sitting on the ground in the precise spot where the body had been. It

was moving slightly in the breeze, and he didn't know what it was, but he was sure it had been left there for him to find. There was something obscurely terrifying about it, and several minutes passed before he was able to walk forward and take a closer look at the object. It turned out to be a microwave burrito wrapper. This memory continued to trouble him, and became inextricable from his daily walks through the yellow leaves by his house.

TIPS FOR NETWORKING

Make **ONE** great contact. Don't feel compelled to "work the room." Instead, set aside a goal of making one great contact at each networking event.

Reach out. Approach an individual who is standing alone. They may appreciate you reaching out to them. (Also, it's hard to break up a group unless you're invited.)

Use a neutral ice-breaker. Begin each conversation with a smile, eye contact and an outstretched hand. Break the ice by simply saying, "**MY NAME IS ...**" It may sound like common sense, but don't forget to clearly say your name.

Give first. Focus your conversation on **LEARNING** about the person you are meeting—who they are, where they work, what their responsibilities include—and **HOW YOU CAN HELP THEM** (**NOT** how they can help you.)

FOLLOW UP! Use the 48-hour rule. **WITHIN** 48 hours of a networking event follow-up with anyone you met whom you'd like to stay in touch with. Send an email letting them know you enjoyed meeting them, etc. In the same email include any information you think may be of help to them – something they mentioned during your conversation.

DECEMBER

While experimenting with disguises, Colin noticed that people in New York City were more likely to ask him for subway directions when he was wearing fake tortoiseshell glasses. Rachel learned not to approach barracudas, not to taunt them. Daniel stumbled upon a collection of poetry by Emilio Alvarez, a vulgar, rural poet who harbored a deep affection for his donkey. Once, Alvarez cursed his donkey so strongly that it kicked him until he bled. Josie held a nudibranch for the first time, “a squishy thing that came up in a lobster trap, it felt like a little bit of slime that had no temperature, even though it had come from icy water.” Laura Kate was experimenting with the varying density of different brands of India ink. While diluting some inks produces an uneven variegation of greys, other inks yield a cohesive layer of darkness on the page.

McCloud sought to reintegrate the savage and the modern, and also to start slow and small. Devin discovered Dr. Rick Doblin’s diligent work in psychedelic therapy at the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, where he works to treat PTSD with MDMA, and uses Psilocybin and LSD to assuage patient anxiety related to their own life-threatening illnesses. Amber discovered peace of mind while assembling a Van Gogh puzzle.

Always seeking a cure for his psoriasis, Kenneth began traveling toward the radioactive mud baths on the

Aeolian island of Vulcano. Dayna learned that we can change the way we perceive the world and how we behave in it by changing the structure of our spines. Joe wanted to balance his productive, social, and physical practices in order to be happier. Kyle recalled a time when human beings feared that their own creations might rise up against them, make slaves of them. Then he considered the internet, its profusion of inane rectangles that have entirely subsumed the daily lives and thoughts of creatures once capable of poetry and pottery. Martha put ten cloves of garlic in her *spaghetti bolognese*, in honor of Les Blank and 2010.

An active microbial assemblage, including relatives of *Thermacetogenium phaeum* and *Desulfo-capsa sulfexogens*, had been living in isolation for 1.5 million years, in a subglacial pocket of ancient marine brine, eking out an existence by metabolizing iron dissolved from the bedrock with the help of a sulfurous catalyst. Megan enjoyed taking pictures of her boyfriend with her Canon PowerShot™ SD 1200 IS and uploading his photos to her Facebook profile.

OUR OWN OPPRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

Recently I got into two disputes about the nature and responsibility of representation. They were with different groups of people and in different cities, however they happened within three days of each other. I don't think I learned anything from either discussion initially, but only later decided that my initial questioning of both of these individuals stemmed from a perspective which was inherently a privileged one (in this case, the privilege of education informing my criticism of what appeared to be offensively racist or sexist pieces of art/writing) and that power structures are difficult to get away from without enforcing some other power structure. I don't see a final way to think about this, but suffice to say, humility is perhaps something that is vastly important, especially when someone else is not aware of her or his own oppressive behavior—as you and I are often not either.

FORCED TO CELEBRATE

We played Christmas carols at a soup kitchen run by the Union Gospel Mission on Christmas Eve and it was so fucked up! All these homeless people come to eat at mealtime and the mission workers sign them in and then they shut the door at a certain time and make these hungry people sit through 20 minutes of caroling and religious preaching before they feed them, so these poor people only get to eat if they sit through a sermon. It is so twisted and backwards!!!



Elizabeth H.B.

Pd 2

3/20/08

I learned that

A human being can only take so much.

I learned that

The grass isn't always greener on the other side.

I learned that

Ms. Emdur makes her own tea.

I learned that

My family history is important to me.

I learned that

It's ok to be attracted to other women.

I learned

How much it hurts when you drop a glass on your toe.

I learned that

I like to make friendship bracelets.

I learned

That there is an angry Chinese man living in a hole in my friend's front yard.

I also learned

What it's like to be so attracted to someone that it hurts.

I learned to

back out when you can't take any more.

I learned

All over again

What it feels like to truly love someone.

I learned

That the woman who lent me

"Native Son" in eighth grade

deserves a poem, a hug, and a smile.

I learned, again,

How big the universe is.

