
QUOTES FROM THE EDGE OF NOWHERE

The Art of Noticing Unnoticed Life Wisdoms

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“When I was God, I thought I knew everything.” These nine words erupted from the edge of nowhere and collided with any conscious thought I was having at the time. I recall pausing to ponder the meaning of these words that were suddenly reverberating within my soul. Unlike the random arrival of quotes I had experienced in the past, these nine words did not reveal themselves to me as having a meaningful purpose. Despite this fact, those meaningless words continued to bang around the inner most crevices of my mind for the remainder of the day as if to dare me to acknowledge their need to be examined in greater detail. Weary of having my “inner voice” (Yes, I’m talking about that conscious little voice we have conversations with each day during our wakeful hours) dampened by the meaningless nine words, I paused at the end of my day to dissect the phrase.

“When we only speak about how we feel an event happened – this is gossip; when we report on what we think was observed – this is news; when society writes about the residual evidence of the event – this is history. The truth is that only God will ever know the reality of what actually happened.”

Truth is... (Continued)

“When I was God...” Well, this certainly seems like heresy. That was my first thought when this non-quote invaded my consciousness. I refused to acknowledge it and immediately attempted to dismiss its presence. There was nothing to see here so I might as well move on to the next portion of the phrase.

But before I could move on, my thoughts challenged me to take a journey back to a point in time where few of us return. As I scribbled the first four words on the paper in front of me, I began to reflect on how I gained the knowledge to read and write these words. I thought to myself, “At what point in my life did I become aware of the purpose of a pencil?” This thought exercise took me back to some long-forgotten point in my childhood when I must have seen a pencil or a pen somewhere in our house and realized grownups used these objects to create less colorful images on paper than I could create with my giant size crayons. My thoughts pushed harder to try and recall my very first conscious thought as a human being. I recalled the first day we moved into my childhood home and seeing that apple-shaped cookie jar sitting on top of the tall white Frigidaire refrigerator. The most distant memory I could retrieve from my conscious was of me sitting in my maternal grandmother’s lap fascinated by a fat dark raised mole on the right side of her face. I could see myself as a child reaching up from her lap to touch the mole. As a teenager, I recall sharing this early recollection of my childhood with my mother. She questioned how I could have possibly remembered this event. Her mother had died unexpectedly of a stroke at the age of 49 shortly after my fourth birthday. However, when I told her about the mole on my grandmother’s face, she confirmed my recall by fishing an old black and white Polaroid photograph of her mother from a box hidden beneath some old clothes in her dresser drawer. The fat black mole on the right side of my grandmother’s chin was not a figment of my imagination. Perhaps I did somehow salvage that morsel of toddler memory or perhaps as a curious child I had once found that same Polaroid photo while rambling through the dresser drawer, forgotten the event, and reimagined it as a discovered fragment of an actual interactive encounter I had with my grandmother.

Now it is your turn. Try as hard as you can to reacquaint

yourself with that moment in your life when you first became aware of your own existence. Just as our genetically predetermined neuropsychological system matures into an adult consciousness, it overwrites non-essential memories, much like a computer program. It hardwires or imprints essential memories deemed necessary for the advancement of life and survival. So even though I had no direct recall of when I first picked up a pencil, pen, or crayon to scribble on something, there was a moment in time that I did so. In fact, there is still evidence of my early works of fine art on the unpainted walls at the bottom of the stairs of my childhood house.

“My thought exercise pushed me back to this point in my life when I was closest to my creator.”

I pushed further with my thought exercise to that point in my life where I imagined myself being born into a world as a genetically engineered and biologically viable human being with no retrievable memories available at birth to insure my survival. Without thought or demand, my every need was addressed. Everything external to me responded to my needs. When I felt the pain of hunger, I was fed. When I felt the discomfort of cold, I was comforted. When I needed love, it was provided unconditionally. I controlled the entire tiny world I knew. I existed in my world with no desires. My thought exercise pushed me back to this point in my life when I was closest to my creator. It was there where I had no peripheral desires or interferences to obstruct me from the truth of the world surrounding me. I was a blank canvas awaiting to be granted wisdom by a lifetime of human experiences. Suddenly, the nine words in my head clearly revealed a metamorphosis of meaning... “As God’s creation, we desire to achieve wisdom.”

Truth is... (Continued)

“When we speak about how we feel about an event - this is gossip; when we report on what we think was observed – this is news; when society writes about the residual evidence of the event – this is history. The truth is that only God will ever know the reality of what really happened.”

This quote no doubt arose after watching the news on television. I find it increasingly frustrating to consume modern-era news without feeling violated or disenchanted about our prospect of survival as a human species. I know that is a boldly negative statement, but it is no longer the trusted news programming I grew up with. I could not put my finger on why I had become so angry and agitated by watching or listening to the news. Finally, I decided to do another thought exercise to analyze the source of my annoyance with the modern news media.

We begin life as human creatures typically cared for by our biological mothers. Bonding to another human begins with our first oral meal from a mother’s breast or a bottle. This feeding routine evolves to the point the baby begins to imprint the image of the mother or trusted caregivers onto its blank consciousness of understanding about the rapidly expanding world revealing itself to the infant. As we mature, we are educated about our world by our caregivers and social environment. Within our first decade of life, this social imprinting becomes the cultural language we understand and the genesis of that “little voice” speaking to us each day as we attempt to navigate society.

Early in our life journey, most of us acquire a primitive mode of transportation called crawling. This provides us the opportunity to venture away from our primary caregivers and acquire additional information regarding our surroundings. With this ability to ambulate more freely in our environment, the realization arises that the world is bigger than we had previously known. The crawler/toddler now discovers for the first time that they do not know everything. Even worse, the protective caregiver(s) restricts their access to obtaining new information (i.e. preventing them from venturing down stairs, climbing into cabinets, walking into traffic, playing with fire, etc.).

We hear the word “no” for the first time and repeatedly thereafter. The toddler soon becomes aware of their restrictions in obtaining information about their expanding world. This results in frustration, disappointment, tantrums, and what we describe as the “terrible twos.”

Eventually the harsh reality that we are not a God, whose every wish and want will be fulfilled by others, is reconciled. This usually happens by age four or five; but, unfortunately, for some, this reality is not understood until much later in life (i.e. adulthood). At this pre-school stage of life, the child looks to those who provide them care as their authoritative source for the acquisition of knowledge. Instead of just physically touching, tasting, hearing, smelling, and seeing the world around them, children begin to ask the question, “Why?” Why is the sky blue? Why is snow cold? Why don’t birds fall out of the air? Why do only mommies have babies? Why do people have to die? When my youngest daughter, Ciara, was about five-years old she asked me, “Why do daddies know everything?” While I was both temporarily stunned and fascinated that she thought I knew everything, I resisted the urge to give her a humorous answer like, “Because daddy went to school, where he learned everything that there is to know.” As I recall, I just looked at her and softly replied, “Only God knows everything, dear.”

By age 10, most social character traits have been firmly imprinted on a child by the individual’s family, geocentric culture, and social environment. Now, peers, friends, and mentors begin to supplant or supplement the parent(s) as a new resource for knowledge during the transition from adolescence to

Truth is... (Continued)

young adulthood. Despite the ever-present socially conscious “little voice” in our head telling us to do otherwise, a young person will sometimes do the opposite due to an overwhelming curiosity about the unknown, or the pressure from peers to fit in or react to newly acquired hormonal instincts.

Until recently, this abbreviated description of early childhood development has been the usual course of human psychosocial evolution; but now a technological wild card has been thrown into this evolution of human psychosocial communication. It is called digital social media. Instead of knowledge transfer taking months, weeks, or hours to be transmitted, it happens instantly. Instead of waiting for the evening news or a morning newspaper, a summary of major news events appears in our life on our chosen social media device (cell phone, computer, digital pad, watch, or television) within seconds. We are bathed in the opportunity to consume new knowledge 24 hours a day. For some, it has become a new form of addiction.

We no longer passively watch the news, we emotionally “feel” the news as it is visually presented to us. To increase viewer ratings, now the news is depicted more graphically. Commercials or political opinions come disguised as news. The desire to be the first to make a news story “go viral” often overrides the reporter’s responsibility to verify all the knowable facts prior to distributing the information as legitimate news.

**“When we only speak about
how we feel about an event -
this is gossip.”**

“My cousin, Terry, got me addicted.” He told me how much he enjoyed it, so I had to give it a try. It initially began with me going out to the car to turn it on, but I found myself needing it every day. I began using it at home right there in front of my children. It was embarrassing, but I finally had to admit I had become addicted - to talk radio and television.

The appeal of this medium is how it resembles the familiar social chatter we hear at work, at the salon or barbershop, in the school lunch room, or during dinner table conversations. Even if you don’t have a water cooler at your place of employment, most of us are familiar with the term “water cooler gossip.” This is where we take a break from our daily work activities to hear detailed commentary about the latest office politics or scandals. During our adolescence, it was usually in the lunchroom or bathroom where our peers never even had to land a physical punch to invoke fear, anxiety, or major depression into some kid’s life by spreading negative gossip about them. Now social media can be used as an instrument of mass character destruction by a new generation of cyberbullies who have the capability to spread fake gossip about our children within seconds.

When human feelings are used as the primary verifier of factual news, there is enormous latitude for erroneous observations to be made and transmitted to others in the guise of factual news. Using traditional broadcast and digital social media offers what appears to be legitimate vehicles to share social gossip in the form of “opinion news.” While it has its merits, it also provides a powerful tool to distort reality by injecting multiple layers of flawed observations, bias, prejudice, and unverified opinions. We exist in an era where we can find a media channel to validate or confirm any truth we elect to believe. (Author’s note: This is not unique to the 21st century. Prior to this century we called them cults, sects, clads, exclusive social clubs, political parties, etc.)

Initially, I fell victim to talk media gossip. I found it was a great way to stay aware of what was happening in the world around me. Because it looked and sounded similar, I accepted it as being equivalent to the network-produced news agencies I had traditionally consumed. I failed to realize that in our fast pace new cycles there is limited time for trusted, investigative journalism to occur. There is even less time for trained journalists to precisely filter legitimate news

Truth is... (Continued)

from social gossip. After noticing the many inaccuracies being delivered in the form of “breaking news,” I began the process of weaning myself from talk news media. It felt like a renewing breath of fresh air to not have my senses constantly bombarded by notifications from my phone, watch, radio, computer, newspaper, associates, television, and friends regarding what or who to be fearful of on any given day.

When we report on what we think was observed – this is news.

In ancient cultures, news spread by word of mouth. I’m certain gossip has been a mainstay of communication since humans have been able to use language to express their feelings about one another; however, before the printed word or books, most ancient cultures appointed a trusted elder to be the tribal storyteller. Notice how I used the word “trusted” to describe this individual who’s in charge of providing the sacred history of their culture so it is accurately passed on to the next generation. Some of these individuals could recite centuries of historical information about their culture.

People transmitted history and news by way of parables, songs, religious hymns, stories, nursery rhymes, and various other means familiar to the culture. Most of us are familiar with the origin of the Olympic marathon distance of 26 miles and 385 yards. Dispatched from the battlefields at Marathon in 490 BC, the Greek messenger Philippides ran the entire distance of 26 miles and 385 yards to Athens, Greece, to declare the Persians had been defeated. Legend also reports he spoke only three words, “We have won!” before collapsing on the floor of the assembly hall and dying. You could say this was the Golden Age of investigative journalism and reporting, when people were literally dying to spread the news. Philippides witnessed the Battle of Marathon and then reported the outcome without embellishment.

Hand printed logs of historical news events followed by the invention of the printing press in approximately 1450, largely supplanted the practice of exclusively using the art of storytelling. Those who had the ability to read and purchase books expanded their awareness about the world around them while the uneducated masses continued to rely on word of mouth or gossip as a means of spreading news.

Early after the turn of the 20th century, radio became the new medium providing access to the news regardless of one’s ability to read or write. All you needed to do was take the time to listen. It was not until the late 1940s that televisions became affordable enough to begin appearing in the average household. The National Broadcasting Company (NBC) briefly did a television simulcast of their radio network newscast in New York; but the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) was the first to pioneer a dedicated daily commercial news program to the nation. These technological advances brought the news from around the world directly into our homes at designated times. Everyone knew when legendary news anchor Walter Cronkite, aka “Uncle Walter,” was on the television. Like most of his broadcast news colleagues, Cronkite was an investigative journalist who reported news facts and not his opinion. This earned him the honored title of “The most trusted man (person) on television.” Thought exercise: What woman or man holds a similar title today?

As television matured, so did its ability to blunt our capacity to use our imagination. When there was only radio, listeners used their imagination to see the characters attached to the voices emitting from the “squawk box” sitting on the living room fireplace mantel or hidden in the dashboard of the family Chevy. As I listened to songs on the radio in my youth, I could only imagine what inspired the artist or songwriter to compose such beautiful music and lyrics. I used my own imagination to envision the characters and the scenery in the songs. Then came MTV (Music Television) with music videos.

Truth is... (Continued)

Seldom, if ever, did the videos match the scenery or the characters I imagined in my version of the song. Those videos were entertaining, but not always lyrically accurate.

As the World Wide Web began to envelop our lives, social media began to supplant television and radio. Now the news could be in our home, in our pocket, and in our head (headphones) 24 hours a day. We can now post, Skype, Facebook, tweet, Snap Chat, email, and digitally gossip to the point of exhaustion. We literally have the means at our fingertips to spread our opinion, propaganda, virtual truth, unverified facts, or anything but the truth instantly. With great technology, that can become a weapon of massive societal destruction, comes great responsibility. Nothing but the verifiable truth is the threshold we should seek to achieve prior to hitting the send button.

“When society writes about the residual evidence of the event – this is history.”

You may have noticed that in this chapter I injected a bit more researched history to demonstrate the value added in validating the truth provided by the storyteller.

A storyteller, whose purpose is to preserve an accurate history of their culture, takes pride in always choosing the righteous path toward preserving historical facts. The wise have no patience for idol gossip. Gossip can be corrupted by human emotion to alter the receiver’s opinion of a person or group of people. Gossip is short-lived if not fed by public attention.

News is intended to accurately inform the masses of noteworthy, not trivial, events which someday may be worthy of historical memory. To become a good reporter of the news, an individual must demonstrate credibility. The individual does not have to hold the title the most trusted man or woman in broadcasting, but their professional work ethic and character should rise to a level that makes them worthy of the title. Let us define news as the raw

evidence of human events happening in the present. Philippides was a warrior at the Battle of Marathon and thus had credibility when he reported the news, “We have won.”

History is an amalgamation of social news events that have factually survived the scrutiny of time and social evaluations. History can be revised in the short-term, but the future will always reveal the truth. Gossip spread that the warrior Philippides ran into the Athens assembly building, then his lifeless body was brought out hours later. The news tells us the Greeks won the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC; but history confirms the Greco-Persian Wars persisted for another 41 years (the war lasted 50 years from 499 BC until 449 BC).

Trusted storytellers or reporters of truth avoid participating in idol gossip or reporting unverified news. They seek to take what I call the “alphabetical path” toward wisdom.

This path begins with the desire to become aware of the truth. This is the reason children instinctively ask the question, “Why?” They desire to have an awareness of the truth. The wise know that all facts are not immediately known. To simply be aware that someone finds you attractive is not enough evidence to start making wedding plans. You must continue further down the “alphabetical path” toward wisdom before making the final decision to purchase wedding apparel.

Once the reporter is introduced to this void in their level of awareness, the pursuit of truth inspires them to seek trusted resources to educate themselves with factual evidence, not opinion, about the situation at hand.

With the appropriate amount of unbiased education, the learner will obtain true knowledge regarding how best to use this newly acquired asset to enhance their life or the lives of others.

Truth is...(Continued)

Truth about the world around us becomes less complex when we have accurate knowledge. We become intellectually better equipped to anticipate how best to socially navigate our environment. The pursuit of truth becomes our guiding star to find a joyful serenity in life.

Wisdom comes when the reporter has gone through each of the above-mentioned steps. Then, they will have arrived at a well-researched, wise conclusion to integrate into their daily life.

When I was in medical school, I learned about the sympathetic nervous system. The fact that someone discovered this automatic physiological system in 1850 and named it after a basic human emotion – sympathy, was fascinating to me. This unseen autonomic nervous system works in concert with an opposing parasympathetic system to create a balanced neurohormonal environment that operates without our conscious knowledge. We do not have to think about breathing, making our food digest, or encouraging our heart to beat. When a fearful or confrontational situation is detected, the parasympathetic and sympathetic systems coordinate to activate the physiological mechanisms to facilitate either a “fight or flight response.” Even love can be an activator (love sickness) or a stabilizer (to be in love) of this emotionally triggered system.

I began this chapter by expressing how I could not put my finger on why I had become so angry (fight) and agitated (flight) by watching or listening to the news. Through my thought exercises, I became aware of the subtle physiologic insult to my autonomic nervous system being activated repeatedly with unrelenting fear-invoking news. This constant neurohormonal overstimulation results in the breakdown of our primordial protective mechanisms and contributes to chronic disease (hypertension, diabetes, etc.), anxiety, depression, burnout, addictions, chronic fatigue, sleep disorders, and social dysfunctions. Try limiting the gossip, news, and non-work related social media to less than one hour a day and replace it with an hour of silent contemplation. This daily dose of digital silence will literally allow your body to heal from the inside out.

We arrive on this earth with certain basic genetic, biological, and physiological assets that facilitate our survival. At some point, we become aware that we are unaware of absolute truth about the world around us. We are not a God who has all the answers. To experience truth, we must become as comfortable as the four-year-old who constantly asks the question, “Why?” Remember, our view of the world is filled with distorted perceptions we accept as fact because we have been imprinted with a lifetime of socially acquired beliefs – some being more accurate than others. Even in the presence of verifiable information, some of us will vehemently refuse to accept any facts contrary to their established belief. There are those who will decline any offer to journey down the laborious path from enlightened awareness to acquired wisdom. It takes time and the will to change the way we view the world around us.

I know I remember sitting in my grandmother’s lap when I was three years-old and touching that black mole on the right side of her face. The photo I may have seen in my mother’s bedroom drawer had nothing to do with my recall of this event. The Polaroid picture just confirmed a fact I had not imagined - or did I? Only God knows...

“It is human nature to desire knowledge and truth about everything we encounter during our life journey. Some continue to pursue wisdom, while others stop the pursuit once they convince themselves that their version of the truth has been captured.”
