

# SYSAFRANSKY'S NOTEBOOK

THE DAYS GROW SHORTER. THE OLD SADNESS RETURNS, speaking a language I still don't understand. *Autumn*, I say, grateful to have a word for it.

THE INNER POET CLEARS HIS THROAT. THE INNER POET insists that he can't begin working until the trash is emptied and the house is tidy and the planets are aligned. But there's no right time to start writing again. I can't wait until I'm enlightened. I can't wait until George W. Bush and Saddam Hussein sit down and work the damn thing out. As Gail Sher says in *One Continuous Mistake: Four Noble Truths for Writers*, "If writing is your practice, the only way to fail is not to write."

AFTER SEPTEMBER 11, EVERYTHING CHANGED ALL right — for the flag makers, for the defense contractors. *Soldier of Fortune*, the magazine for mercenaries, saw its newsstand sales increase by more than 75 percent. I wonder: Will the war on terrorism include all the terrorists in this country, too? All the neo-Nazis and white supremacists? Will we raid their hideouts, too?

THE PRESIDENT PROMISES THAT EVIL WILL BE VAN-quished, along with bad breath and the inheritance tax. The president promises to kill more of our enemies in less time, so that none of our soldiers will have to be late for dinner or miss the first twenty minutes of the big game.

WHEN GEORGE W. BUSH RAN IN 2000, HIS SUPPORTERS insisted he was a family man, a God-fearing man, who would never disgrace the presidency as Bill Clinton had. They were right about one thing: no one has accused President Bush of sexual impropriety. In God's eyes, Bush evidently believes, blowing up Baghdad is a lesser sin than getting a blow job in the Oval Office.

IT DIDN'T TAKE MUCH TO START WORLD WAR I — THE assassination of an archduke. Yet how rapidly Europe came crashing.

GEORGE W. BUSH ISN'T THE ENEMY. HUMAN NATURE isn't the enemy. There is no enemy. Yet there is suffering. Gustave Flaubert: "Our ignorance of history makes us libel our own times. People have always been like this."

I CALL D. TO TELL HER OF A FRIEND'S DEATH. D. SAYS she won't pretend to feel sad. Her attitude about death has

changed. Our friend finished her work here, D. says, and it was time for her to go. I'm not sure how to respond. Movies make me cry, even bad movies sometimes. Death makes me cry. D. is right, of course. Yet how does one say goodbye without a piercing sadness — whether the one you love is moving to another city or to the city of the dead?

I DON'T NEED TO SEE DEATH AS AN ERROR. I DON'T need to resent God for not creating a universe in which those I love live forever. *A Course in Miracles* insists, "Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists." I've been trying to understand those sentences for twenty years.

WHAT A DISAPPOINTMENT I AM: WHEN I'M WORKING, because I think I could be working harder, and when I work so hard I ignore the beauty all around me; when I don't meditate, because I think I'm too busy, and when I do meditate, because I get lost in my busy mind. Today, before doing any of my practices, or not doing them, or agonizing over whether I should or shouldn't do them, can I just pause for a moment? Can I remember that I don't have to be perfect to experience a moment of perfect love?

IT TAKES SO LONG TO RUB THE SLEEP FROM MY EYES, to shake off the dreams of my father and my father's father, to remember that, like me, they were just men. Not patriarchs. Not father figures. Just men.

DEEPENING MY AWARENESS IS A CHALLENGE. IT ISN'T a challenge because my parents didn't love me enough. It's a challenge because it's a challenge; I don't need to take it personally. I've spent years excavating my past, sorting and cataloging the wreckage. But who I really am, the essential truth of my being, can't be grasped by the mind, no matter how acute my insights. I've confused introspection with awareness, but they're not the same. Becoming the world's leading expert on myself has nothing to do with being fully present.

I BOW TO THE ANCESTORS. THEY CAME FOR THEIR LESSONS; I've come for mine.

THE MUSE SMILES. ONE MORE FLIGHT, SHE WHISPERS. I nod dumbly, too exhausted to reply. When she invited me up to her room, I was a young man; I wanted to be a writer; I took the stairs two at a time. How many stairs I've climbed since then. How many times she's assured me there's just one more flight to go.