

SY SAFRANSKY'S NOTEBOOK

I'M TIRED THIS MORNING AFTER HAVING STAYED up too late last night. Apparently I still haven't learned how to tell time. If the little hand is on the 11 or 12, and the big hand is reaching for the remote or something to eat, does this mean I have all the time in the world? Desire seems to think so. In the corridors of power where I try to govern myself, Desire is a lobbyist with a lot of clout. When the environmentalists argue for a good night's sleep, Desire yawns. She's heard it all before.

I'M WEARING A T-SHIRT MADE IN MALAYSIA, drinking coffee grown in Guatemala, and writing with a pen made in Japan. If I turn on my computer (made in Taiwan), I can send an e-mail to George W. Bush, who seems to live on another planet altogether. Maybe, after the Supreme Court handed him the presidency in 2000, he figured he could get away with just about anything: hijack an election; insist that the frightened passengers just shut up and watch the movie. And most of them did.

LAST NIGHT I DREAMT THAT I WAS READING aloud the names of young men who had been killed. I woke up weeping. "What's wrong?" Norma asked. "I dreamt that young men were being killed," I told her. "They are," she said.

MAYBE I'D BE MORE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT HUMAN nature if I hadn't been born the same month Anne Frank died of typhus in a Nazi concentration camp. Not long afterward, most of the camps were liberated; newsreels in every American theater showed bulldozers shoving thousands of emaciated bodies into mass graves. As I was discovering what it meant to be alive on this planet, humanity was discovering the depths to which it could sink.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S HARDER TO FATHOM: THE atrocities committed by the Nazis, or a prayer found written on a piece of wrapping paper in Ravensbruck, the largest concentration camp for women in Nazi Germany. The prayer asks God to remember "not only the men and women of good will, but also those of ill will. But do not remember all the suffering they have inflicted on us. Remember the fruits borne of this suffering: the loyalty, the humility, the courage, the generosity, the greatness of heart which has grown out of this. And when they come to judgment, let all the fruits which we have borne be their forgiveness."

CAN I CAN CONDEMN GEORGE W. BUSH'S ACTIONS without condemning him? He, too, is my brother. There. I said it. Or am I going to wait to love my brothers and sisters until they *deserve* my love?

I GOT MARRIED THE FIRST TIME WHEN I WAS twenty-one, and again when I was thirty, and again when I was thirty-eight. I should understand as much about marriage as an astronomer understands about a comet he's spent his whole life tracking. And there's much I do understand. Yesterday, after an argument with Norma, I understood exactly how it could have been avoided. But, as Fritz Perls said, "Understanding is the booby prize." Who understands better than the Israelis and the Palestinians why they keep killing each other?

THE MARRIAGE IS BIGGER THAN ME, BIGGER THAN Norma, which is important — because sometimes we become very small. But the marriage is big enough to shelter us through a spell of bad weather, even when we bring the rains down on ourselves.

DEEP DOWN, I KNOW THAT SEPARATENESS IS AN illusion; that making "I" my central reference point leads only to suffering; that, despite the rational mind's inability to grasp it, all things are fundamentally joined. Unfortunately, I rarely experience the world that way. Yesterday, however, while taking a walk, I suddenly realized that everything around me, whether "animate" or "inanimate," was alive and aware, and not just a stage set for My Important Thoughts. I stopped identifying with my mind, and the incessant chatter I generously call thinking, and felt myself part of a living intelligence that was more vast and magnificent than anything I could think about it. The moment came and went, as if I'd been kissed by an invisible lover, just a quick peck on the cheek before she slipped away.

AS LONG AS I INSIST I'M A SEPARATE ME, HOW accurate can my story be? I believe in my story the way a politician believes in votes and calls that democracy.

IT'S ILLEGAL FOR MY NEIGHBOR TO BLAST HIS stereo in the middle of the night. But there's no law against my lovely wife keeping me awake. I try not to take it personally; it turns out that, for some women, menopause turns up the volume on snoring. *Menopause*: a word I used to ignore the way, as a vegetarian, I ignored certain items on the menu. Who cared whether the pork roast had been marinated overnight or how much butter was added to the beef stroganoff? How little I understood as a young man about loving a woman as she grows older. It's two in the morning. There's a fat moon in the sky. I've retreated down the hallway to the guest room, where I lie on my back and stare at the ceiling, the kind of refugee I used to laugh at. Perhaps, in our dreams, Norma and I will sleep side by side, two boats adrift in the luminous night.