

SY SAFRANSKY'S NOTEBOOK

ANOTHER DAY BEGINS. DAWN DOESN'T ASK IF I'm ready. The birds don't wait for every polluted stream to be cleaned up before they start to sing. Nor have they had a chance to study that timeless spiritual classic, must reading for those who would *Fly Like a Bird*.

IF I PRAYED MORE CONSISTENTLY, WOULD MY prayers be more powerful, like the body of an athlete who works out every day? If I meditated more regularly, would I be more practiced at staying mindful during difficult times, instead of letting fear gobble me up? What a big appetite fear has. What a succulent morsel I was last night.

I'M TIRED THIS MORNING. WHY DO I DEPRIVE MY-self of the rest I need? When it comes to sleep, I'm like an anorexic who insists he can get by on catnaps and daydreams. Eight hours? *Oh, please*, I protest. *I could never sleep that much*.

I TELL A BUDDHIST FRIEND THAT, NO MATTER HOW hard I work, I never get to all the items on my to-do list. He nods sympathetically. Then, with a little smile, he asks, "Why not keep a not-to-do list?"

AT THE TOP OF THE CLEAN WHITE PAGE, I RECORD today's date, which reminds me the month is almost over. I write with a throwaway pen, which will soon run out of ink. The cup of coffee I poured a few minutes ago is half gone and getting colder. My wife, nearly twice as old as when we met, is still asleep. In a moment, I'll get up from my chair and wake her. Then we'll sit cross-legged by the window, meditating on the transitory nature of things.

AFTER UNDERGOING SURGERY, G. WROTE: "WERE we always aware of our mortality, nothing would get done, because we'd be looking into each other's eyes and saying, 'I love you,' all the time." I intended to write back to her the same day I got the letter, but what a busy year it's been.

TOMORROW NEVER COMES. BUT DEATH COMES. Wake up!

"A SINGLE DAY LIVED BY A MAN WHO GRASPS THE impermanence of all things," the Buddha said, "is worth more than a hundred years lived in blindness and ignorance."

I'VE BEEN TRYING TO EAT MORE MINDFULLY, NOT distracting myself at every meal with something to read. But I still eat too quickly, habitually reaching for the next bite before I've finished what's in my mouth. Yesterday, to slow myself down, I imagined I was a condemned man and this was my last meal. Would I be in a hurry to finish? *Of course not*,

I thought. So I paid attention to each bite, reminding myself that I *am* a condemned man, that this is it: this is the meal I came here for, feast of feasts. *Take this bread and eat it*, Jesus said. *This is my body*.

ONE OF MY CATS TRIED TO WAKE ME IN THE MID-dle of the night. Did she sense the thunderstorm approaching? Was it her way of saying that this kind of weather, in the middle of winter, makes no sense? I told her to let me sleep. Foolish human, who didn't realize the gods were on their way. They didn't wait for a decent hour to deliver their message; they don't care if I, or my nitwit president, get a good night's sleep. A half-hour later, awakened by thunder and lightning, I could easily imagine the changes that lie ahead: Rising sea levels. Monster hurricanes. Tornadoes of unimaginable strength. *Maybe I should rush outside*, I thought, *get soaked to the bone as an act of contrition, sacrifice an animal or two*. But do the gods care anymore how they're greeted? They didn't come all this way to be told we had no idea they were so angry, that surely there must be some mistake.

IS THE SUN AS GOOD AS IT COULD BE? OF COURSE not. Do I agree that there's too much unrelieved suffering in its pages? Could the magazine be funnier, more diverse, more illuminated from within? As Paul Simon sings, "When they say that you're not good enough, well, the answer is you're not." But I'm confident *The Sun* will continue to evolve, just as it has for the last thirty-two years. I'll take it as far as I can; then someone else will take it farther than I can even imagine. Here and now, however, the challenge of running *The Sun* continues to occupy me. Sometimes it occupies me like a conquering army, sometimes like the Holy Ghost. Either way I'm grateful for the chance to do this work month after month, year after year — a man happy to have found his cross to bear. Yes, even living your dream can feel like a burden now and then. But, my oh my, to live your dream! And not just when you're sleeping, but every morning when you open your eyes. Then you sit in the dark and write a few words. Then the sun comes up.

I SLEPT LATER THAN USUAL THIS MORNING. I GUESS I needed the extra sleep, the way a hungry man needs food. *More dreams, please*, I told my waitress, who replied that she liked customers who weren't in a hurry to get back to the waking world. Now that everyone is working longer hours, she said, her job is easier, but the tips aren't as good. Then she disappeared through the swinging doors that separate the dreamers from the kitchen. When she reemerged a few minutes later, balancing a heavy tray on her shoulder, I craned my neck, hoping for a glimpse of what went on back there. *Now, now*, she scolded, setting my dreams before me.