

# SY SAFRANSKY'S NOTEBOOK

**TOMORROW NORMA AND I CELEBRATE THE TWENTY-EIGHTH anniversary** of our first night together. That's not such a long time, really, considering how long it takes to learn to love another person; considering that, even as you're learning to love her, she's changing, you're changing, and so is everything around you; considering that getting it wrong can teach you as much, or more, than getting it right — but there's a huge price to pay for that kind of education, and it's awfully easy to go broke. No, twenty-eight years isn't that long.

**WHEN ASKED HOW SEXUAL PASSION CHANGES** with age, Sophocles said, "I feel as if I have escaped from a mad and furious master." At sixty-four I know what he means, but there are plenty of nights when I miss the old jail keeper and wouldn't mind being locked up again — maybe in the cell where Norma and I used to make love from dusk to dawn; or where we made love a few times a day, not a few times a week. Still, I try not to take it personally that I've lived this long. So I kiss Norma's neck and brush a lock of hair from her face. I kiss her eyes. My hands have been everywhere, and they go there again. And I praise the fire that burns in winter, and the heat that rises, and the plume of sparks. And I praise the gods of the marriage bed, the cat that still meows, the dog that still barks.

**EMILE DE GIRARDIN: "A WOMAN WHOM WE TRULY** love is a religion."

**I DREAMT THAT A BEAUTIFUL STRANGER HAD** fallen in love with me. The only way to find out where she lived, however, was to look her up on Facebook, which I'd steadfastly refused to join. So that's what I get for my neo-Luddite posturing, for telling a friend yesterday that the world needs an About-Facebook.

**WHO I AM IS WHO I AM, WHETHER I CONFUSE MY-**self for a saint one minute or a sinner the next; whether I'm rigorously faithful to my wife by day or a serial adulterer in my dreams; whether my charitable donations are deemed sufficient by a well-fed jury of my peers or judged a capital offense by the hungry mob at the door.

**I OVERSLEPT THIS MORNING: A BAD WAY TO START** the day. Does that make me a bad man? It's tempting to think so: yet another opportunity for the vast right-wing conspiracy within me to score another point at my expense. What did I say to Norma recently? I need to start the Sy Safransky Anti-Defamation League to counteract the unprincipled and vicious attacks made against me by my worst enemy, which would, of course, be me. Yes, I can joke about it. But the self-lacerating shame isn't funny. The put-downs. The bullying. The gallows humor that, no matter how clever, always ends with a noose around my neck. Where is the justice, Your Honor? So I woke up at six instead of five. Instead of blaming myself for oversleeping, maybe I should blame

Norma for running naked through one of my dreams, indifferent to whether anyone might see her. If she'd exercised some discretion, I wouldn't have had to run after her and might have heard the clock radio from a thousand miles away, the trumpet call from that other dream realm I'm in the habit of calling "waking reality," though it might more accurately be described as "trying-to-wake-up reality" — and I don't just mean getting out of bed. I mean waking up! Get up, sleepyhead! You're not a bad sleepyhead or a good sleepyhead. Forget all that. Wake up!

**I'M SURPRISED THAT SOMEONE AS NOTORIOUSLY** impatient as I am isn't as critical of President Obama as are many of my progressive friends. Maybe it's because I know how challenging it can be to run even a small nonprofit organization like *The Sun*, or to reform my own healthcare system: to remember to exercise every day and take my vitamins and get enough sleep. And let's not even talk about my mental health: my worries piling up faster than the national debt; those fears I've dragged from decade to decade, as much a part of me by now as some huge military budget I'm unable to whittle down. In any event, I'm still willing to give Obama the benefit of the doubt. Of course he's the consummate politician; how else could he have been elected president? Of course during his first year in office he hasn't righted every social wrong. How many wrongs did I right last year? What about those New Year's resolutions? What about those deals I made with God?

**A DECADE INTO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, SOME** pundits suggest that we're living through the most divisive period in U.S. history; apparently they've forgotten the Vietnam era, the civil-rights movement, the campaign for women's suffrage, or, for that matter, the bloody and prolonged War between the States, in which nearly as many Americans died as in all our other wars combined, from the War for Independence to the struggle for the minds and hearts and oil of the people of Iraq.

A decade into the twenty-first century, the United States still has military bases in more than one hundred countries. U.S. dominance in the world continues to decline as India and China become the new economic superpowers. (Then again, global domination isn't what the Founding Fathers had in mind.)

A decade into the twenty-first century, Americans, apparently the thirstiest people on the planet, still carry bottled water wherever they go. The average cloud still weighs the same as one hundred elephants, give or take an elephant. String theory still suggests that there are a vast number of parallel realities; in one such reality, presumably, John McCain is president and Sarah Palin is vice-president. The female black-widow spider still occasionally kills and eats the male after they mate.

A decade into the twenty-first century, ordinary men and women still perform unheralded acts of courage. An ant is still able to lift ten times its own weight. Food cooked with love still makes young bones grow stronger. It's still impossible to commit suicide by holding your breath.