

Contents

| | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| Intro..... | 1 |
| A word from your dad | 5 |
| Daring to be you..... | 10 |
| Dreams | 13 |
| Art for art's sake | 18 |
| God's footprints..... | Error! Bookmark not defined. |
| Sports and life lessons | Error! Bookmark not defined. |
| College and education..... | Error! Bookmark not defined. |
| Work & being of service..... | Error! Bookmark not defined. |
| A higher purpose..... | Error! Bookmark not defined. |
| Money and investing..... | Error! Bookmark not defined. |
| Being self-employed..... | Error! Bookmark not defined. |
| God, religion & spirituality | Error! Bookmark not defined. |
| Spiritual truths and practices | Error! Bookmark not defined. |
| The most important ingredients of life . | Error! Bookmark not defined. |
| Drugs and alcohol | Error! Bookmark not defined. |
| The power of the word | Error! Bookmark not defined. |
| The Agreements | Error! Bookmark not defined. |
| The information age..... | Error! Bookmark not defined. |
| Sex, love and big decisions | Error! Bookmark not defined. |
| Dad's take on being a woman today!.... | Error! Bookmark not defined. |

The Sterling Men's and Women's Weekends Error! Bookmark not defined.

Marriage Error! Bookmark not defined.

The truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth Error! Bookmark not defined.

Asking for what you need..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Responsibility and just saying no to victim-hood.... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Quitting is not an option Error! Bookmark not defined.

Lessons from your great grandparents.. Error! Bookmark not defined.

Dad's leftover tips of living a long, health, happy, prosperous life
Error! Bookmark not defined.

Books, Movies and Other Stuff Error! Bookmark not defined.

Some selected poems for my daughter.. Error! Bookmark not defined.

Conclusion..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Acknowledgements Error! Bookmark not defined.

Intro

Certain is it that there is no kind of affection so purely angelic as of a father to a daughter. In love to our wives there is desire; to our sons, ambition; but to our daughters there is something which there are no words to express.

~Joseph Addison

When I thought about writing this book, the biggest question on that came to mind was, “what do I want to teach my daughter?” What *should* I be teaching her? For that matter, what could I, a forty-three year old man who has never really been part of a stable “nuclear family,” teach a precious little girl about being a happy kid, a polite self assured young lady and a successful woman? What sort of qualities could she exhibit as an adult that might lead me to the outrageous conclusion that I'd had some hand in her success, wealth, happiness, health and wisdom?

Several ideas have slowly taken shape: First and foremost, I can

follow the advice that Justin Sterling gave me in October of 1999: “Be the man that you want your daughter to marry.” This odd little directive—profound, but elegantly simple—holds more depth and possibility than any I’ve heard since. In fact, I believe that I could use it—and it alone—to guide me through the rest of my life, not only in being a father to a daughter, but in my role as a human being as well. It is said that girls use their fathers as models in their search for a life partner. Further, research has shown that how we treat our wives sets the bar for what our daughters look for—and are willing to accept—in a relationship. Being the man, or more correctly, the “kind of man” that I would have my daughter marry carries many conditions and requisites: It requires that I am a loving, caring husband because I want *her* to have a model so that she knows what a loving, caring husband looks like; It calls on me to be a loving father who spends quality time with his children, because I want her to choose a man she can trust to show their children that they are worthy of his attention. This is especially true of girls, because often it is the father’s love and attention—or lack of it—that leads these young ladies into making either great or dismal choices in the men they spend their lives with. Many women waste their days looking for the attention they never got from Dad in a long string of emotionally dysfunctional relationships with broken men, who in turn use them to their own ends and leave *them* broken—and sad.

Outside of being a decent example, I think that I can impart some plain old practical life wisdom that is “gender neutral.” Boring but useful stuff about business, money and finance and maybe some more colorful advice on world travel and what to do with her first million. Maybe I can touch her spirit and guide her toward her truest calling with

some well told stories—both mine and from lives I've shared the dusty roads with. Perhaps, just perhaps, one line—even one phrase—will touch her deeply in some way unexpected, and make her warm all over. And that, in and of itself, will make this volume worth all of the effort I've put forth.

In the recording of some of these thoughts, I often felt anxiety, thinking, “oh, what can I do to make sure she follows this piece of advice or that? I'll beg, plead with her, bribe her, if only she'll heed my fatherly wisdom.” Then I realize that much of my fatherly wisdom has been hard earned from the school of hard knocks as a direct result of ignoring *my* parents. I also realize that parenting is that impossible combination of knowing exactly what your children should do, but letting go and allowing them to find their own way, knowing that, at times, they will probably do just the opposite, much to their own peril. How could a loving God could ask such a painful exercise of restraint from us? It does seem that this is the very principle from which He often operates as he allows us “free will.” Indeed, the Gods *must* be crazy!

To round out this mix of modeling, lecturing and adherence to the serenity prayer, I would add the following ingredients: Desired traits and simple wishes that I believe are great building blocks for a happy, healthy, delicious life.

- ❖ To be the kind of person who treats others the same way she would like to be treated
- ❖ To have respect for herself, the earth and all others
- ❖ To take complete responsibility for her life and her actions

- ❖ To have the courage to trust and believe in herself
- ❖ To have the courage to be who she wants to be and do what she wants to do
- ❖ To stand up for what she believes and ask for what she needs
- ❖ To say what needs to be said and do what needs to be done, both positive and seemingly negative
- ❖ To be giving and help others—to be of service
- ❖ To be able to tell the difference between needs and wants and act accordingly
- ❖ To be able to “listen” to someone's actions and ignore their words, if the two are different
- ❖ To have the tools to be financially successful and independent
- ❖ To enjoy the journey and not just the end results or destinations
- ❖ To feel gratitude for her life and everything that shows up

Above all, I'd love to teach her to love herself and I would like to have at least some small part in her having a long, healthy, happy life. The rest is just a lot of words that will, I hope, make for great reading and not get too much in the way of the truth.

A word from your dad

Listen to the mustn'ts, child

Listen to the don'ts

Listen to the shouldn'ts

the impossible's, the won'ts

Listen to the never haves

then listen close to me

Anything can happen, child

Anything can be

- Shel Silverstein

Once upon a time, when you were a baby, I used to pick you up from your birth mother's house for three to four hours at a time, twice a week. This time was so precious to me, that on the way back to her house, I would reach into the back seat and hold out my hand and you would grab one finger. I would then drive like that all the way, ignoring the pain in my shoulder from my arm being twisted around. It was just my way of "milking" the last little bit of enjoyment and closeness from that visit. It was also sort of a tribute to our very first

moments together. Less than a minute after you were born, I placed my finger into your hand and you held on, much to my delight. So this holding of Daddy's hand has been a long established tradition with as much depth as any good old fashioned country-music song. I take great pride and comfort knowing I was the "first" to hold your hand. Once in a while I would pull my hand back to get some circulation moving again, and you would not yet be ready to let go and you'd say "hold Daddy's haaaand?" This has always stuck with me, and it just might be the simplest, most profound way a little baby girl ever said "I love you" to her Daddy. And so, in that spirit, this is what I've named the book. In those three words are everything I feel and want to give you. Guidance, love and as much help as is appropriate for your own neat little exciting journey through this strange and mystical phenomenon called life.

Above and beyond the typical "dad" stuff, I have a great and gnawing desire to place in your hands some yet to be named, priceless gem; something that you can take with you for comfort, strength, and guidance. What gift can I give you that will keep you warm on cold nights, get you back on course when you're lost or uncertain, and keep a love of living and a spark of hope for the day, when all else looks bleak. To that end, I wish these trinkets for you: To have the ability to recognize those curiosities of the human species who are living on the outer edge of the rules we've

been so firmly taught; living life on life's terms, but with their own flavor and pizzazz. To see the possibility that life is more than just a simple equation of cause and effect. To see through the mess and the mundane to the largeness and mystique of people like your Uncle Kevin, the Andersons, your late Grampa LaVoie, as well as the everyday heroes,

heroines, movers and dreamers you meet on your own. If you see these things, then you will see that life can be, and in fact always is, more about what we *decide* it is...than what we've been *taught* that it is. To be able to see the magic and extraordinary in ordinary people in ordinary moments. To behold an average Joe or Jane, that no one else notices, and really see the Knight, healer, nobleman, wizard, princess or master in them and to let them know what it is that you see, so that they may be given the miracle of seeing it too. To know that regardless of how much you canonize someone—anyone—it still doesn't come close to the truth; that there are no ordinary, average people. God says “hi” to us through our brothers and sisters. And they are *all* our brothers and sisters, my child.

If you accomplish this, then the world is a better place already for having had you in it. You cannot help but make any room you inhabit a little brighter. To be unable to avoid a sense of wonder about being simply—and profoundly—alive. To know that life is more than the sum of its parts and to either shine a light *on*, or move away *from* people and situations that reflect otherwise. To be unreasonably and insatiably curious and to just know that there's something huge, mystical, wonderful and magical that you

just haven't figured out yet, but is right around the corner. That is my life, not including a few thankfully small servings of struggle, distraction, tail-chasing, pain, self-doubt, guilt, shame and fear. This is what I wish to give to you, but with much smaller portions of the struggles. The heart of a dreamer with just enough of its feet on the ground to keep it from flying away or getting lost in the winds of the world. To be able to hold your head high and be Elissa Rose and no one else, because Elissa Rose is enough—and then some.

Now as the adults in your life, we spend much of our time trying to get you to behave a certain way, and you try hard to “please” us because the more you please us, the easier your life is. However, it has always been a secret fear of mine that you will cross that line, and discover the warm but soul numbing comfort of a life lived to please others. This fear has been borne of my life; for that is the path I chose early on, much to my own pain and peril. So I want you to know that this “seeking of approval” should be a “temporary” arrangement. We are only trying to get you to behave a certain way so that you'll have the tools to be safe, happy, and successful when you get older, not to mention to protect you—and our sanity—in the here and now. We are not trying to teach you that your path in life is to please us—or anyone else. Please remember that you should always do what *you* want to do with your life, and strive to please only *yourself* with the path you choose, whether it's being a waitress at Denny's, a world class playwright, or an elegantly lazy beach bum! We have been blessed enough so that you will never have to work a dead end job just to pay for rent and boxes of macaroni and cheese, nor will you have to lay awake at night lamenting over dreams lost—unless you choose to do just that. So I want you to experience your life doing mostly what your heart tells you to do. We will of course compel you to learn the value of hard work and the lessons of self sufficiency that come from fending for yourself. We will ask you to work; and to help pay for some of your own things. This requirement is only to teach you the art of managing money, the difference between needs and wants, the benefit of working now for something later, the discipline and creativity to live beneath your means, and the satisfaction of a job well done.

My deepest, burning desire in life is to have been of good service to you and your mom; to know that your lives are better off for having had me in them all these years. Neither winning the lottery, nor jamming with my hero Keith Richards could come close to comparing with the manifestation of this quiet, hopeful wish. “My daughter lived a long, happy, healthy life—due in part to the father that I was.” What more could a dad wish for? “My wife felt taken care of, safe and happy as a result of how I showed up as a husband. On our fiftieth anniversary, she could honestly say that she would've married me again if she had it to do over.” What more could a man accomplish that would bathe his very soul in peace and allow him to “strut” across the threshold into heaven, cigar in hand, shouting, “Make way! A man’s man is coming through!” So this is my effort to lay some breadcrumbs and signposts for you, my beloved daughter Elissa. I pray that this work will not so much replace, but fill in any deficiencies in my real-world presence. I will, God willing, be around during your life, so maybe this is really a “how to” manual to remind *me* of what I want to teach you, or maybe just a reminder on how to live my own life; a subtle guide for being the man I always wanted to be. Either way, please know that I love you more than life itself; a love *and* a life that is sometimes painful but always joyful. But as Ted Brautigan said to Bobby at the end of the movie *Hearts in Atlantis*, “I wouldn't have missed a single minute of it, not for the whole world...”

I love you deeply, dearly and profoundly. You will always be my Baby Girl and my Snuggle Goose

~Your dear old dad

Daring to be you:
Overcoming the need for approval

Always be a first-rate version of yourself, instead of a second-rate version of somebody else.

~Judy Garland

Some lessons I give you from a place of victory, others from abject failure, and still others are “reports from the battlefield.” This chapter is one of the those reports from one of those battlefields. “Be yourself” is such a clichéd phrase: It has shown up in advertisements, slogans, and self-help books since before either of us

were born. It's obviously a slippery little bugger, or else we'd have all gotten it right by now and moved on. But alas, we are still here, struggling to master the art of being who we are called to be, and fighting the lure of approval from our parents, peers, and even self-created benchmarks. I think we may have fallen victim to a “dark agreement” of sorts—one that might read something like this: “We don't dare be ourselves because we might lose love or approval, which is painful. Because not being ourselves is also painful, when we are reminded of it (by someone daring to be themselves, for instance) we will “disapprove” of them—make them wrong—and make *ourselves* feel better for selling *ourselves* out.”

The truth is that we may indeed lose approval by letting go and being who we dream of being. There's a hidden blessing in this loss, though: “The approval you lose by daring to be fully *you* is approval that you gained by *not* being fully you in the first place.” This is a very sobering, if not mind-bending, thought; In fact I just learned it myself by writing it, and it's taken me a moment to grasp its profundity.

Human conversation is largely an endless attempt to convince others that we are more assertive or clever or generous or successful than they might think if we did not carefully educate them.

~ John Ortberg

I'm not sure how to impress upon you in this book the importance of staying true to yourself and having the courage to be “you.” For that endeavor, I will work on myself because I am a “victim”

of my own copy of that dark agreement. When I was growing up, I acted out quite a bit, especially in school. As a result, I was often singled out, and “picked on.” My interpretation of this state of affairs was: “Hey, this sucks!” So with that “battle cry,” I slowly adopted behaviors that were more “socially acceptable,” and at the same slow speed I forgot a lot about who I was and who I wanted to be. These days, I feel the power of the agreement most intensely when people come into my life that I know are quality people. I equate their respect as a reflection of my value somehow. I feel tense around them, and I find myself making unconscious efforts to impress them; to be *extra* funny, witty and charming. The promising thing is that I am aware of it, and I actually work on being conscious when I’m with those people. It’s funny that when I’m succeeding at being comfortable with them, and have temporarily lost my “need for their approval,” I don’t have all that much to say! It’s a testament to how much of how much of our conversation is meant to construct an image; a mask that we want people to see.

So I’ll continue to work. And I’ll encourage you to behave both in a way that addresses social acceptability, but at the same time keeps you connected to whoever you really are and want to be. I would have you learn that “social acceptance” is a useful tool, like many others, but to not allow it to mask your true fire.

Dare to be you and the world will adore you for it...hopefully before it crucifies you!

Dreams

Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.

~ Mark Twain

The funny thing about dreams, at least for me, is that they fade but never quite disappear. Like the scar on my knee from falling off my bike when I was a young boy—faded and dim, but still unmistakable—with a painful but exciting story to tell.

Be skeptical of those who tell you to be realistic, to come down to earth and to forget the “exciting stories.” Refuse to see the logic in their reasoning because you might just find yourself agreeing with that logic, and then all will be lost. Logic has a purpose but can also be misused to squash our dreams and redirect us down the worn and weary “safe” road instead of the one less traveled. In the arena of logic, the one with the best words “wins.” Whatever makes the most “sense” is the choice we often make, to the peril of that bright light that burns away

inside us. I would invite you to turn away from that type of logic that says “take the safe route.” Is it better to pursue—happily and full-heartedly—the life of a poet or rock star, and take the risk of languishing in unknown mediocrity? Or is the “right” choice playing it safe; getting an education and spending the rest of your life working—earning security in the form of a living wage and fringe benefits—in exchange for leaving your song unsung? I won't tell you what the right choice is, because that's up to you. I can only advise you to mix logic and common sense with a little wistfulness. Keep your feet on the ground, but don't forget to spend some time with your head in the clouds.

*Humanity has advanced, when it has advanced, not because it has been sober,
responsible, and cautious,
but because it has been playful, rebellious, and immature.
- Tom Robbins*

Those wild, crazy dreams light our way forward like the light on a locomotive, then at some point, the fog of responsibility and practicality blows in and slows us down. Instead of creating a vision where we can be responsible and still have our dreams, we shift to an “either/or” way of thinking instead of “all or nothing,” and we settle down and compromise. Compromise can be one of the greatest killers of dreams: The result is like watching a full color extravaganza on an old black and white TV. We put conditions on our goals and aspirations.

We clutter the doubtless clarity of our dreams with “as long as” or “unless.” We decide that *as long as* we make enough money, or have enough time, we'll do what we want to do: If not, we'll have to compromise a little. We'll save ten-percent of our income *unless* we need the money for more important things like bills or a fancy new pair of shoes. I'll continue my summer ballet lessons in New York, *unless* I'm too tired from waitressing, working, or partying. Do your best to leave out the fine-print of “as long as” or “unless” when crafting the verbiage of your dreams. You'll find plenty of barriers to overcome along the way without those that are self imposed. When you decide that it's “all or nothing,” magical things can and do happen. When failure or compromise is not an unintentional part of your game plan, opportunities often appear that were previously hidden behind an “as long as” or blurred by an “unless.”

Let me tell you about a dream of mine: This is one that affects us profoundly, and in fact led to the creation of our family. When I was twelve years old or so, I decided I wanted to be a singer or musician like Elvis Presley. I had moved from Maine to

Rhode Island to spend a summer with my father, whom I'd never really gotten to know because my mom and dad were divorced when I was a baby. Dad got me a Yamaha acoustic guitar for Christmas, and I learned to play—but I was a slow learner. I kept it up, though, and started jamming with a few people, and eventually joined a Creedence Clearwater Revival “tribute” band while I was working at our family's restaurant, the Purple Cat. I washed out of the band quickly, however, because I'd also discovered the party scene and there just wasn't room for both. So I just stayed working in the kitchen, developing my “trade.” But I kept

practicing: Something just compelled me to keep my guitar in my hands when so many others I met had let theirs gather dust after missing their “big chance” or settling down and having their first child. Then my dad took me to a nearby bar called George's when I was sixteen years old. There was a band playing there and Dad convinced the leader, Kevin Fallon, to let me sit in for a couple. We did *Big Boss Man* and *Kansas City*. Kevin told my dad afterward that I had a natural gift and to not let me stop playing. That was a defining moment, and one that's helped keep that guitar in my hands ever since. Logic or good sense didn't enter into the equation. I didn't care that I was twenty years old, nor did I care when I turned thirty. It didn't matter that my “prime” was past. I kept playing and I kept tweaking my style. I was a closet guitar player for twenty years. I played and I got better. Then late in 1997, my foreman, Troy Maddux, convinced me to join his country band. I crammed and learned all sorts of country licks and became a pretty “first rate” country picker, if I do say so myself. We went on to win some state awards, which earned us the opportunity to fly to Las Vegas and compete nationally. Your *dear old dad* walked away with the Country Music Organization of America's “*Instrumentalist of the Year*” for the United States in October of 2000. This is where I met your mom and the rest is history.

I eventually left the band because I tired of the long nights and I wanted to devote myself to my family. Now, years later, I'm honing my skills and thinking about a solo gig or maybe a duet at the local pubs, or maybe Colby College. In case you haven't figured it out yet, I'm listening to my own advice! I can never put it down because it's my sword, succor, and shield. My guitar is to me what Sampson's hair was to him.

Me on stage is what your mom fell in love with. It completes the warrior in me, and success or not, I recognize that it will always be a part of who I am. It will be there to give me comfort, keep my passion for life alive, and maybe give others some pleasure in the process. I pray that you always remember this lesson: If you find your dream, or something that you love, don't judge its worth by how much money or recognition it brings. If you find yourself a middle-aged, closet violin player, never having been paid for your craft, it does not mean you've failed. In fact, having stuck with something so long that gives voice to your spirit is more success than many even dream of. Let your dreams defy logic. Let your *life* defy logic. Be every bit of yourself you can be, and create the life you want to live. Don't let the illusory security of "as long as" keep you grounded.

Art for art's sake

We all know that Art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize truth, at least the truth that is given us to understand. The artist must know the manner whereby to convince others of the truthfulness of his lies.

~Pablo Picasso

It's five o'clock in the morning at Augusta West Campground. We're on our second camping trip as a family. I'm stuck hip deep in the quiet of the morning with a familiar gnawing at my gut: An unsettled feeling that I get when I'm in an alien environment—stripped of regularity—or when something is changing in my life. Sometimes it means I'm meandering off course in my life, and at others it's simply the result of my creature comforts being laid aside and no longer protecting an old wound, and it's coming to the surface to be healed. Today I think it's the quality of the environment—It's taken me

back to a younger time when there was great unrest in my heart. There's something that rubs me raw about the plain-ness of the days here. After my morning reading, writing and reflecting, the day becomes a predictable but enjoyable, stress-evacuating regimen of swimming, talking, playing cards, eating, more swimming, planning what to eat next—and very little else. This is good stuff, and giving it to my family, as well as myself, helps me to keep things in perspective and forces me to make life about something other than little old me. I think part of this gnawing feeling is a deep and un-nameable fear about missing out on the abstractness and depth of life, even if this fear is only imagined.

It's a similar feeling to one that compelled me, as a youth, to move back to Rhode Island and live with my father. I had been living on a farm in Maine for a year or so. It was a good life of hard work and simple living. But one summer it all came to a head for me: We'd been working in the hayfields for the whole summer, and the single-minded monotony of it got into my blood like a bad virus. I started having dreams about the work at night, and lifting, throwing, and stacking hay bales consumed the lion's share of my days for what seemed like the entire summer.

I realized I needed more: I needed more intellectually *and* artistically. I couldn't spiritually survive a life of monochrome labor, despite the great and simple rewards it might provide to some. I moved back in with my dad, and despite the unstable environment—and his lack of parenting experience—I have always been glad I did. It gave me access to so much culture, so many diverse outlooks on life; poetry and music I'd never heard before; and a chance to work—and live—in a different environment.

I think that is what's coming up for me during this camping trip. So much talk about sales at Wal-Mart, a little small-talk, planning of the next meal, and not much else. I was born with the heart of a seeker, so my tolerance for the mundane has always been low; I hope you inherit a similar heart, and a similar intolerance. It has me yearning for the same feeling I looked for in my youth. It's difficult to put a finger on what I'm missing, and frankly I've never had much luck naming it—to others *or* myself. I suppose it's the “spirit” of something. The spirit of creativity. That force that made Charlie from the book “Flowers for Algernon” pause—then ask, “If the plural of mouse is mice...is the plural of spouse...spice?”—and to just leave the question hanging in the air with no answer, but pregnant with unspoken meaning. I believe it's this feeling, or context, that led to the first utterance of the phrase, “Art for art's sake.” Some create because they can; others because they must. They hope that someday they'll find that perfect combination of profound words, or inspiring lyrics—wound loosely with well placed notes. Or the colors will fill and blend together on the canvas in such a profound and simple way that the “sum of the parts” argument will fall away like the spent petals of a wild rose in the late July breeze; and a place will be revealed to them that they cannot ever forget. Unless, of course, they spend too much of their lives on a farm!

I want you to spend some time around people who exhale a thoughtful sigh when “spice questions” are posed, although caution is advised as there may be the occasional unsavory character in that lot. People who are meant to create are haunted by an ache, deep in their bones, much like some experience when a storm is approaching. This

ache is spiritual; it alludes to questions not meant to be answered, but felt; allowed to do their own thing like a sip of good Bordeaux; to awaken something that has been asleep, or at least give a momentary respite from the grayness of reality.

Pursuing art for art's sake has probably saved my life—at least my sanity and self-confidence—more than once. There were times in my life when everything seemed bleak; no meaning—just food, work—and a little diversion. Then along came a line of profound poetry, or the right lyric, driven home by the hammer of a beat that spoke to my *wound du jour*, and I'd be lifted up and out of the damp darkness I'd imposed on my own soul by my acceptance of life as ordinary.

Music in particular has provided me this succor and solace more than any other medium. I've spent hundreds of hours hooked to my guitar, losing myself in a melody or riff that just wouldn't let go. There's something about music that is strangely universal: I can hear a song that has *nothing* to do with the mood, or state of mind I'm in; but the combination of the passion in the singer's voice, the harmony, rhythm, and timbre all come together and speak to me exactly as I need to be spoken to. Suddenly a song about a country road or Georgia pines makes me feel like life is so beautiful; or one guitar riff will bring me back to high school with such force that I can feel the emotion, and heat of my youth, and hear my friend's voices clear enough to make me turn my head and catch my breath.

Whether it's Haiku or popsicle stick bird houses; it's up to you to find that which gives voice to your soul. You ignore this part of your life to your own peril. I will do everything in my power to make sure you have the opportunity and motivation to explore the world of art and

creativity; whether it be drawing and painting, music, writing, or the performing arts. There is no harsher sentence than to spend one's life with both their feet planted firmly on the ground and one's eyes watching carefully where they walk. Keep your feet on the ground and use good sense to keep your life on track and in order, but don't forget to look up, out—and within—for the deepest guidance of all. Listen to your spirit: Create for the sake of creating; it needs no purpose other than that. It is a language, and it must be spoken, and spoken often. It is a part of who you are, and I have seen it. Let the notes, metaphors, colors, rhythms, onomatopoeias and allegories take you to a place where there are questions without answers, yearnings with no names, and silliness for no reason at all.

Give the middle finger to practicality and logic once in a while. This is art for art's sake. Follow it's whisper; ride unsaddled on its damp, musky back into the dark forest—and don't be afraid.