

Crossroads?

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Wish I could. Call this a crossroads, I mean. The word instantly conveys a fraught choice to be made, a decision that will not only determine the next experience, and the next, and so on, but will also erase all other choices, the options represented in the road not taken. I can't know with any degree of certainty where the chosen path will lead. Nor can I readily discern the opportunity cost of forsaking the other.

In this sense - the 'cross' part - crossroads is precisely the correct word. But then we get to the second part - the intimation that there is a *road* to be chosen. And that's where we run into trouble.

I see no road ahead. No highway leading off in any direction, no gravel drive, no meandering country lane. Not even so much as a game trail half-hidden in the undergrowth. Even the path behind, the one that brought me here disappears beyond the most recent bend. Recalling all the twists and turns would be an exercise in frustration. And, frankly, boredom.

I can't know where any new direction will lead, beyond the first few (faltering? resolute?) steps. Does the clearing just up there comprise meadow or swamp? And what will I find inside the tree line beyond? A magical forest or impassable tangle? And if the former, will it be dark magic or light? Or merely forest, from which I'll eventually emerge to find...what?

Will the path be rocky or smooth? And which should I prefer, given a choice? Rocky implies stumbles and falls but also perhaps more interest than the less challenging but ultimately boring sameness of solid footing. (Have I made a choice here?)

The only thing I can say with any certainty is that neither continuing as before nor standing still works for me. The events of the last few years have existentially divorced me from my former allegiance to the safety of sameness. I've been forced to reconsider not just the *how* but also the *why* of each step forward. And in so doing, I've come around to an understanding of what's essential to my life: my relationships with my wife and family and friends, of course but also to self. What does it mean to be me? What *can* it mean to be me? Does the past presage the future? And if so, why not simply continue as before?

In the paralysis of indecision, I took refuge in my usual sanctuary. Books. And on page 141 of Nancy Hiller's book on her life as a cabinetmaker (and so much more), I found this quote from her mentor: "Look. There's something you've got to understand if you're going to get anywhere: *It's all problems*. That's what we do: solve problems."

I was as gob smacked as was Nancy at the seeming simplicity of this bit of life advice. And as liberated. It's all problems. So choose one, solve it, move on to the next.

And so I lift my foot. And begin.