

Hello, again

A year since...

10 Feb., 2019

It has indeed been a year today since I went up a ladder, intending to spend fifteen minutes taking down the last of the Christmas lights from the roofline. Expecting to then move on to the next chore and the next. Distracted by the sight of a length of fascia that would need to be (repainted? replaced?) before we put the house on the market. Glad for the two-day respite from rain that left the roof sufficiently dry to safely do this job. And then, realizing only when I reached the top that I'd grabbed the wrong ladder and with a quick time check deciding to swap it out for the safer version, I took my first annoyed step down. I didn't mean to hurry but I had a lot of outdoor chores to accomplish that day of no rain.

It was at this moment – 2:05pm on Saturday, February 10, 2018 – that my life changed. Because it turns out that when you grab the wrong ladder, allow yourself to be distracted and then start back down in a huff and the knobby sole of the hiking boot you should not have worn for this chore catches on the rung, thus freezing your foot in place while your body mass continues in the downward direction, the outcome is preordained. That first step down turned out to be the last one I would ever take without feeling some level of pain. I landed in a sitting position from about ten feet, jamming my spine and bursting - that's what they call it, the people who study these things, a burst fracture – Lumbar One in a fairly spectacular fashion. And so began my new life.

To be sure, many events have changed my life. My first real job, winning and losing my first true love, seeing death up close for the first time, finding and keeping my forever love, seeing my children for the first time. The list goes on, prosaic in its commonality. Because everyone goes through these events, experiencing, internalizing, affecting and being affected by the milestones in our lives and those of others. But these events that happen to all of us are part of the trajectory of our lives, bumps in the road, even changes of direction but still part of the whole.

The event of Feb 10 was more than that. It changed not only the direction but the manner in which my life would be lived. Each day of the last three hundred, sixty and (almost) five has included some measure of physical discomfort, ranging from the mild twinge I feel as I type this to the excruciating, mind blasting horror that accompanied trips to the john those first weeks or the accumulated pain of the week we spent on travel for our daughter's wedding. A year on, most days I don't require much in the way of meds and I only use the cane when I'll be walking for a while without a shopping cart to lean on. But the pain remains.

I no longer travel for my job as an advocate for folks living with severe disabilities (I know – ironic, is it not?) and I have to be careful where and when I decide to venture forth on everyday errands and explorations. Preparing my workshop for a return to my favorite hobby has been and continues to be a series of careful calculations: which tools I can still use and where they should be located, which tools I will never use again and so should be given away, how to chop a mortise or shave a tenon shoulder without insulting my tender back and what that means in terms of shop layout.

Of course, woodworking is a hobby that I can take as it comes, allowing for periods of rest and recuperation. It's a thing I do in my time off.

Not so, writing. Writing is not something I do, it is part of who I am. It has been a year and in the interim, I've had to wonder where the writing has gone. How do I express myself when 'myself' has been so radically altered? Whatever, whoever I was before, who am I now?

I was in the midst of trying to market a book of fiction and writing every day and creating this website to better share my thoughts with the world and mapping out the next book, thinking and imagining about it all and then... Then the nothing that accompanies trying your hardest not to think – about pain, about prepping the house for sale, about the wrenching changes forced upon your beloved as she confronts the reality of life-as-caretaker. I became good at not thinking for a time. And writing is about thinking, so it's been a year of fits and starts.

Eventually, the body seeks out its new normal, which in turn allows for everyday activities to seek their natural level, which eventually allows for a view forward. I'll never be a great ballroom dancer but I was never going to, anyway. I won't become a famous furniture maker but building for Mary has always been my highest aspiration in that field and that, I can do. I may not be able to bounce (eventual) grandchildren on my knee but I can love them, just the same.

But the writing... As I said, it's who I am.

That dumbass moment a year ago and the resulting changes have taken a year from my writing. They don't get another one.

Today, I begin again.