



**A FATHER'S ANXIETY  
WITHIN THE BIGGER PICTURE**

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Here I am, on another "Father's Day," which happens, additionally, to fall on what would've (or could've) been my tenth anniversary (Jaime and I would--could--be at the 60th annual Wesleyan Writers Conference right now participating in the seminars, craft sessions, workshops, manuscript consultations; listening to guest speakers, editors, and agents. The conference, June 15-19, would've given us a long weekend of contemplating craft, adding to our own emotional communion, through tandem literary-transcendence.).

Check out: [wesleyan.edu/writers](http://wesleyan.edu/writers)

I think of my kids.

But I can't fret.

I could bury any hope of sanity if I dwell--in a situation like this, all we can do is take it day by day. Yet, I do plan, and look to the future ... just in case I make it. Just in case I somehow stay alive long enough to make it out of this Inferno.

I was out on the REC area earlier, exercising, listening to my portable Walkman's capture of what alternative rock it could muster from the airwaves. It felt about 95°f, and the sun was in an artistic ultramarine and baby blue mingling, with puffs of evenly spaced cloud formations, that looked like a tray of newly-risen pizza-dough balls, extending out in EVERY direction as far as my eyes could see, in a symmetry I had not seen in over ten years (since about 2003). An awe inspiring scene. Seeing things like that help. Aesthetic pleasures like art, plants, and depictions of nature--are rare in a place like this prison, as you could imagine.

Robert Leahy, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist, the director of the American Institute for Cognitive Therapy, and the author of "The Worry Case," speaks on this type of "wonder-as-therapy," nature as cure, or understanding the vastness of life and our place in it. As Leahy puts it, "cognitive behavioral therapy is about, yes, examining your thoughts, but also learning to take them less



seriously, to look at how they might be inaccurate or silly or useless, to stop taking what happens around you so personally, to realize *it's not all about you.*" (Psychology Today, March/April 2016, p.54, "It's Not All About You! by Carlin Flora) It's not that I didn't notice such aesthetics before, I always did; it's one of many unavoidable traits of an artist, to see EVERYTHING—especially unique patterns, colors, casts of light, etc.. Some people walk by a piece of artistic beauty and pay it no mind, possibly without even noticing it as anything other than background fluff within their peripheral vision; while others not only notice, but appreciate it or even become mesmerized by it. It's not just a stop-and-see-the-roses thing; but stop-and-see-the-world!

Materialism can suck us into an inescapable abyss.

One day, stand by a building and look at it for a while before starting your errands, job, or whatever your days consist of. Then, on an entirely different day, before you start, stand by a tree and look at nature, maybe watch a bird or animal, something. And take note of these two days, and how they'll differ in experience.

A 2014 review by David Pearson and Tony Craig concluded "that the cognitive benefits of being in nature are due to 'restorative environments,' which provide the experience of escape from daily demands and a perception of vastness." (Ibid. P.52) It turns out that even photos or films of nature can reduce mental fatigue and lead to greater attention spans, and health. Places like art galleries, museums, parks (especially with water somewhere by or within) help tremendously. Those floating dough-balls (part of Earth and her living biosphere) helped me. From within all the fence and brick—the sky is always still there.

It's always some variant of blue.

Always humbling, for those that care to look.

I was under extra stress due to the inescapable melodrama of a high percentage of pseudomature individuals around me here; but, I have to keep in mind what I've said before (in a previous column: June 12, 2016), about difficult people: each have their own unique reason for being who they are, or who they think they are, which consequently helps determine who they—actually—are, and will remain being, unless something alters their opinions and self-narrations of themselves. I have to remind myself at times that they are under just as much duress as I am; and that I'm in a post as an educator to help them. The problems at hand are much bigger than my own.

That awe inspiring skyscape was the existential kick in the prefrontal cortex I needed at that moment—I looked back at the building—the "dorm"—filled with childless fathers and fatherless children grown, and realized under the scope of those clouds: our problems were so trivial as to be pathetic. Although in each individual point-of-view, those trivialities can be matters of life and death. Out of the fifty-plus prisoners around me out there, I was the only one seeming to notice the bigger picture. The clouds'

own presence, and their intrication, a kind of serendipitous benefit for this father's anxiety.

I went in, got my typewriter out, and began something ...

... constructive.

Something my kids might like.

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