

# For the Aching Hearts and Empty Arms, on Mother's Day

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We who are childless are not sitting at a table for one. There is wonder here.

# For the Aching Hearts and Empty Arms, on Mother's Day

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## Those of us who aren't flesh mothers

tend to brace ourselves for the annual American florists' holiday known as Mother's Day. (We still want our honorary gardenia, of course, and the tributes to being mothers in spirit; something like a horse of a different color but a thoroughbred just the same.)

But today, in 2019, welcoming from afar my family's newest little prince, Oliver, and his first days of life in the neonatal ICU (yes, he will be coming home in a day or so)—I love the dedicated Day of Mothers. He is a child of my blood, birthed by my sister's son's wife.

There is no list of 11 how-to's for the childless on how to survive Mother's Day, in what I once described as "America's great secular religion of repeated lifts of champagne goblets, odes to sacrifice and endurance, piles of presents and roses, roses, roses." I also used to refer to myself as "a refugee from the Island of Misfit Toys," as a cute device to, sympathetically, brand myself.

The fact is that we live in a world of families, by any definition. The world markets to families—from kids-free all-you-can-eat-pancakes to entice new customers into IHOP, to Disney anything the typical family cannot afford, to more subtle forms of parenting pressure, always with a price tag attached.

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If there is any how-to on surviving Mother's Day, it's only to observe the relentless forces competing for the souls and wallets of children and their parents. And along with guilt-free freedom from responsibility for day-to-day mothering, consider compassionate ways to empower and help them, however small and simple. This may well be by just showing up, intuitively, at a moment of need.

Picking up and handing back a dropped binky, with a smile. Not scowling when a stroller is parked next to you, at the jammed gate waiting for your regional jet to finally make it in for your next connection. Making an anonymous present of the free paper samples in your studio—with a few of those very cheap acrylic brushes you keep around just to mix mediums, not paint with. Not intruding on young mothers by offering to hold their babies when neither really know you, but instead finding a way to create a clean, sweet little cone of calm. For mother and child, I've discovered there is no price tag for that.

In such ways, I've discovered I am not sitting at a table for one on Mother's Day. With me are billions of mothers and children, aching hearts and empty arms. I see you and with uncynical, odd wonder realize that on a certain date and time all my own, I myself was, and still am that new one, given or chosen, immense with possibility.

Mother's Day, as every day a day to celebrate—not just to survive, but thrive. Teach us what you, your little ones and your families need most from us.

—Aunt Mimi

# Widow's Walk

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Stepping out onto the black carpet, the audience wants to know who I'm wearing tonight.

# Widow's Walk

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## I knew I'd be asked that, with popping

flashbulb eyes, the second I stepped onto the black carpet. Brooding in front of my closet a few hours earlier, I defaulted to the same getup spontaneously designed, by me, to be authentic, yet appropriate. Nice, but not needy. Distinctive, but not threatening.

Fortunately, “revealing” isn't my style.

Someone will be offended just because I showed up, but I can't apologize for being a widow. We're all upset. We're all familiar with survivor guilt: the one (inexplicably) still alive. When I, the Widow Woolf, began to emerge socially, to the polite question of how it happened I spontaneously came out with, “Well, someone had to go first.” Of course, that applies to swan dives or a great-grandparent as much as marriage but it was an instant hit—a very effective verbal tweet with a sad little wink, inferring the obvious but easy to take.

For a widow too often personifies death—not “survival”—while still alive, a little ghoulish. Black widow, merry widow, widow's weeds, widow's walk... is the word, and concept, of widow harder than that of death itself? I say yes. The evidence of this is that people who so easily throw around the unspeakable, from obscenities to live streaming of massacres in progress, for an anonymous media audience avoid the five-letter word “wid-

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ow.” (And I would bet widows and survivors, themselves, in person—too real.) But that day may be here. In the dark web of obscenities passing today as free speech, the Rubicon has recently been crossed where the special respect, if not uneasiness, around widows is concerned. Ask Cindy McCain.

Who am I wearing? Let’s have a little fun—you guess my label! Helpless Glamour, Suffering Predator, Irresistible Tragedy, Unaccountably Calm, Armored Yet Vulnerable? Surprise! I’m wearing Flying Solo. Bereavement Couture. Timeless style, mix-‘n-match, reversible. Here, would you like to try it on? One size! No, I didn’t think so.

The ends of life say it all. We compensate for terror of the intimate sorrow at the far gate with celebration of the joyful intimacy at the first gate. Understandable—babies don’t make us feel vulnerable. Fear, which is learned and an acquired choice, does. (Where do babies come from? The same place babies and former babies return to, of course. Consider.) As the 1972 bell-bottomed Stealers Wheel song goes: Here I am, stuck in the middle with you.

# When You Get the Evacuation Advisory, Don't Forget the Lipstick

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Preparedness means practicality. You can't eat designer sandals, so don't pack them. But when the unthinkable happens, a tube of lipstick is indispensable.

# When You Get the Evacuation Advisory, Don't Forget the Lipstick

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## Chances are, when Cal Fire or your

local emergency management authority broadcasts, texts or posts an official Evacuation Advisory for your area you won't be thinking about lipstick.

And that's appropriate. You can't eat or drink lipstick. You can't use it for first aid. It won't keep you warm, or dry. You can't open or charge anything with it. But as you grab your emergency supply kit (hopefully, carefully put together a long time ago and easily accessible), collect your backup hard drives, vital documents, family photos and irreplaceable art, wallet with cash or credit cards and pets, plan where you will stay and whom you will call—don't forget your lipstick.

I'm obviously writing as a woman who wears it and is semi-recognizable without it. However, the acquired wisdom I'm sharing here applies to anyone. If you aren't a lipstick wearer, consider it a metaphor for the one personal item that most identifies you when you look in the mirror. The one thing you not only never leave home without wearing—be it MAC Crème de Nude, your Guardian Angel necklace—but which you wear around the house even if there is no one else to see. The thing that makes you feel whole. Even if your safety is in question.

The reason? If the unthinkable is now thinkable, and you are either living or about to live as a headline in what until now has

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been other people's catastrophes, the simplest personal push-pin will become one of your emotional lifesaving anchors.

I discovered this as an evacuee from the 2017 Detwiler Fire, which on Sunday, July 16 unofficially launched the 2017 California wildfire season. In terms of property damage the most destructive wildfire season on record in California at the time, with a total of 9,133 fires burning 1,381,405 acres of land according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. The total economic cost, including fire suppression, insurance, direct and indirect economic losses, and recovery expenditures was estimated at about \$180 billion. In my community of Mariposa County, the Gold Rush gateway to Yosemite National Park, for the first time in its history the entire town of Mariposa was under mandatory evacuation as the Detwiler Fire literally licked at the doors of local businesses and homes, destroying 131 structures including 63 homes. By the time it was fully contained on August 24, Detwiler had burned 81,826 acres. The cause, still under investigation, was a firearm discharge in high-risk, extremely dry ranch land, instantly whipped by strong, low-humidity winds.

I received an evacuation advisory on Tuesday morning, July 18—the first of my life, including my 25 years in Mariposa County. An evacuation advisory means that a mandatory evacuation is possible and that citizens should be prepared to evacuate on short notice. I took it seriously. Heavy big backpack always kept

in the back of my primary vehicle, the Audi with 570-mile fuel range, with first-aid kit, portable food and water with chlorine tablets to purify untreated water if needed, portable solar charger, portable reflective blanket, extra athletic shoes, you name it. Without haste, I conscientiously detached the two 4TB external hard drives from both iMacs in my office from which my life and my business, starting with vital records and saved projects going back to 2009, could be recreated. Chargers and extra cables for my mobile devices.

Spot decisions: Which irreplaceable art on walls and furniture will I choose? Which clothing, extra clothing including footwear? (One suitcase. So much for those never-worn Giuseppe Zanotti strappy sandals with the fine silver mesh and 4" self-covered black velvet heels from 2005 which I was still saving for my next state dinner, ho ho—suddenly even more ludicrous than the day I bought them.) Books? I've spent a lifetime building my library, including many signed first editions. The spot decisions began with the big things—things for survival, then things for recovery should I lose everything, then what will still fit in the car (including 35-lb. unopened bag of dog food, with 75-lb. dog and blanket for dog on back seat), and finally, what I felt, on the spot, I honestly could not live without if I had nothing else; these were small items, sentimental things such as the first pair of earrings he bought me—small, silver drops inlaid with mother-of-pearl. As almost an afterthought I thought to grab my cosmetic case, the travel case with the handle and buckle and

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stocked with lipsticks and eye shadows and whatnot. Moisturizer and sunscreen were already in the backpack.

It took about two hours. I backed the loaded Audi out of the garage, responsibly parked it facing down the driveway, all ready to go for a quick escape, and returned to my studio where I was building a secure co-author website for manuscript development, saved research and rough interview notes. I thought what a pain it would be if the advisory expired, unnecessary after all. But the sky became ominously muddy—a sick, dark tan veiling a red ball of sun—with an ambient odor of smoke so sharp it was beginning to hurt my throat.

Around 3:15 p.m. a large Mariposa County SUV with two deputy sheriffs rolled up, in controlled haste. Simple words, with surreal portent: Mandatory evacuation. “How long will it take you to leave?” About fifteen minutes, I said. They moved on to the next neighbor. (Later, that neighbor would tell me he was hanging out with another neighbor, drinking vodka martinis in shot glasses, fatalistically pooh-poohing the encroaching conflagration. Big awakening imminent.) In that fifteen minutes I changed my clothes for what I would live in for the next seven days, as it would turn out. Took one last walkabout of my entire home, recording with my eyes and soul; closed the house and office, turned off all electronics left behind, locked all doors, and with Percy the Wonder Dog comfortable in the back seat, slowly headed out of harm’s way. The white signpost at the foot of my

driveway now had a turquoise sheet of paper with a huge bold black “X” tacked to it—X, for evacuated.

So, about lipstick? you ask. The narrative is important, for this reason: as the unthinkable suddenly becomes not just thinkable but—like that—Before ticking away in real time to After, we carry with us virtually nothing of what we possess and all that we are, and have ever been. With only how we show up now, with suitcase and dog at the door of our dear friend offering shelter; at the Chevron station with the fancy car and in a few days very possibly no home. At the table of the bed-and-breakfast, sitting quietly while other evacuee guests make the decision to flout the law enforcement and emergency roadblocks and sneak on back roads into their own precious properties like prowlers just to see for themselves, get out and touch the walls, save more treasure.

On the streets, gummy in a heat wave of unending 110° or higher days around us, fire engines with full right-of-way and the roar of tanker planes overhead incite incipient panic. We citizens are moving carefully, with exaggerated politeness and generous gestures, as though to call down angels or ward off another layer of potential catastrophe with niceness. The dead hot air is fraught with disturbing energy, but the massive cloud in the distance isn’t a thunderhead; it is the Detwiler Fire, creating its own weather.

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## Detwiler Fire, uncontained

For the seven days of my evacuation, day to day, day to day not knowing (for the emergency authorities never provide details beyond maps and percentage of containment, on the correct assumption that the public will panic and openly turn into back-road scofflaws), I retreated to the lovely, cool room the owners of the bed-and-breakfast had given me, at a caring discount. When I finally made it into this room, seeing my one suitcase (sized to fit a commercial airliner overhead compartment) stuffed with practical things like leggings, socks, easy T-tops and hoodies, an anorak and tall boots—rain? sleet? snakes?—and a pair of flipflops, sitting there triggered such a huge loneliness I knew that if I stopped moving, I would not stop weeping. And so, in the tidy dressing area, setting up the small photo of him in its frame, unpacking my cosmetics case—I caught a look at myself in the antique mirror of the heirloom oak vanity. And thought: “Gee, I’ve held up very well, considering. How about that.” I was expecting exactly the opposite, a basket case who looked it.

And the reason was lipstick. The creamy, soft matte pink hue called, of all things, “Snob.” Semiconsciously reapplied in refugee flight as though I were at the Philharmonic, merely touching up in the powder room at intermission. People had been commenting how “calm” I was, considering the emergency. People were impressed. Someone said I should do a

TED talk. I truly believe today that the graceful little motion of applying lipstick has not just a calming effect (for one can’t do it running or leaping, one must sit still), but a caring effect. If she is so mindful as to care about her lipstick, and being put together a bit, a stranger might think, then why do I need to be a basket case?

How we show up and what we give off, even unconsciously, has an effect on everyone around us. Consider the hive effect of one person, screaming in an empty stadium. Then consider the hive effect of tens of thousands of people in a crowded stadium, screaming. I’ve applied the Lipstick Rule many times since Detwiler, especially in scenarios of extreme stress or uncertainty ranging from professional pressure to personal setbacks. Just as our mothers taught us to always wear clean underthings in case we were ever in an accident and strangers might see, well, something—keeping the face comely (well-managed?) while facing down crisis is just as important. Maybe, much more. I know women who say that if they know they’re going to cry, say, anticipating a difficult event or touching performance, they don’t wear eye makeup. Well, if you wear eye makeup, does it make you a little more brave, more composed, so as not to make a mess of your mascara? Perhaps the same is true of lipstick.

The difference between lipstick and no lipstick (or, a lip bitten in extremis) is to normalcy what poise is to panic. Panic is so far

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gone it doesn't care. Panic is viral; calm is contagious. If one person is outwardly calm even if inwardly anxious, in an incendiary storm—whether California wildfire or social panic—the subliminal effect is remarkable. I experienced it, again and again that seven days as an evacuee. With even slight calm, a person just might wait a heartbeat instead of jamming the left-hand turn to beat the fire engine two blocks away. A person might quietly pay an exhausted firefighter's burger bill at the Branding Iron, instead of heedlessly plotting to trespass the road barrier and risk making the firefighter's job harder, even deadly.

When I was finally permitted to return home after Detwiler, it was a limited permission. The authorities don't tell you; they only report that the fire is 100% contained, PG&E has not yet switched power back on, you cannot reoccupy until they do but it is safe enough to visit. Such were the fierce shifting winds, fire suppression tactics, and amoebic crawl of Detwiler that even within just a mile and a half of my property, you could not tell there had ever been a fire, at all. I drove even more cautiously returning than evacuating, as I began noticing scorched, black patches increasingly carpeting the land the closer I came to home. Literally, on the right side of the road it was pitch black, with powdery white hot spots where a large tree probably once stood or retardant chemicals used. On the left, no fire effect whatsoever. The paved private road itself was a fire break, a testament to the skill of the fire professionals. My home was

on the right side of the road. Unseen until I could enter the driveway and reach the top. I had no idea if anything would be there when I did.

The white signpost was still at the bottom of my driveway, still bearing the turquoise sign with the sinister black X.

Filled with dread, I eased up: At the top, four firefighters, in full gear, were standing by their truck in front of my house, conferring. Pulling up even with the truck, I rolled down the window, held up my hand as if in surrender and said, "I'm the owner." The leader came over to me, opened my car door and gently helped me out. I held onto his arm and slowly walked over to the group with him. The four firefighters, twenties to mid-thirties with handsome, kind faces, watched me carefully. Presumably they had seen it all, from fainting to hysteria. I silently took it all in. In the center of the black landscape and skeletal remains of trees there was no damage to the buildings, not the slightest sign even of scorching. House, studio office, garage—untouched.

Carefully, the leader walked me around to the back. In fact, the fire had come within ten feet of my house. And that's when my knees began to give out. But I was wearing fresh lipstick.

# I, Versioning.

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We are everything we  
have ever been. But I,  
Robot—NOT.

# I, Versioning.

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## Waking with the sun, fresh, clean

windows and French doors wide open to the quiet country air. Birdsong from the branch of an ancient white oak, still healing from the great wildfire two summers ago. A glass of cold, fresh well water on the nightstand. There are no prescriptions in my medicine cabinet, not one. There are no handheld devices in the room, not one. Baby-bliss. The circadian life, no alarm set, primal well-being. Every day should be like this.

Oh, that's right, it's Saturday. First on my list, a menial and dirty task—which turned out to be anything but.

I, AI encountered my own ancient moonprint—I, AOL.

It started a couple of days ago, noticing 20 or 30 books stashed atop one of my studio bookcases. You know how it is, stuff you thought would make you smarter, spent good money on, didn't use, didn't miss, won't waste, so never threw out. Brand new and obsolete. All these years, weirdly invisible yet not, just looked past it since around the turn of the millennium, judging from the titles. Using my light 6-foot aluminum stepladder, I climbed and carefully brought the books down. A fine powder of dust filled my nostrils.

And the thing that put me sideways, actually kind of upset me for a few minutes, is that the book titles were so backward I was embarrassed. Why had I hung onto these books? Who was

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that, and who is this? Did we all really see ourselves as so with-it, compulsive early adopters, so cool we sniffed with contempt at anybody who didn't understand what bots are?

This simple housekeeping exercise became an eerie little voyage to the earlier me. Like Sherman and Mr. Peabody's Way-back Machine—a little didactic ambush showing up in the middle of Rocky and Bullwinkle, just to keep things real.

A relic from the day of Jeff Bezos' original garage headquarters about "Electronic Commerce." A book on how to make peace, or money—competing, not an issue—with AmericaOnline (that's AOL to you), which was ironic because it was a book about how to succeed in the new platform which was very openly destined to kill bookstores. Learning to Use the World Wide Web, ©1998, a year when <http://www>. began appearing at the bottom of network TV ads. Streaming media? No such thing—only downloading low-resolution clips with Kbps buffering. iPods, iPhones and iPads hadn't yet been invented. The only social media—another term not invented—was "chat rooms." Aliases in those online conclaves were embryonic precursors of avatars for future platforms for uncontrolled impulses. And obscenity and violent threats were policed—long ago in that galaxy far, far away.

Until that little apocalypse on the aluminum ladder, I thought of my curated library walls, probably a couple of thousand books

of all genres as touchstones to my fascinations. Not as a wall of dusty mirrors. Or a gallery of selfies, before selfies existed too.

How my self of twenty-four years ago, or even thirty minutes earlier, reacted atop the aluminum stepladder flew in the face of Alexa, Siri and every attempt at artificial immortality, is this:

We are everything we have ever been. And this is a wonderful thing. Because we aren't robots. For we are not preprogrammed for anything—except progression.

Versioning.

Now, if you want to get technical about this, versioning—in the sense of becoming, evolving, change—is the natural order of life. However rococo or ridiculous our fortress of denial, our bodies will prove the premise.

They're similes, but progression depends on our point of view about versioning. It doesn't matter if we take up incremental embalming (as I think of medically and cosmetically unnecessary plastic surgery while we are still alive). It doesn't matter if we believe, or don't believe, in any specific theories whether science- or faith-based, or where we fit actual unearthed dinosaur fossils into all of this. We can get with the cloud (cyber, digital, AI, what have you), or cling to print like a life raft. We can take our groovy leather headband from Woodstock out for walks or we can eschew animal products entirely, wearing arti-

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ficial leather and eating meatless meat. But versioning is assured. We change.

This conjures a whole new idea of “body clock.” Not the awareness of circadian rhythms, hunger pangs, or sleep cycles—but our body, as an actual, living clock. As a site called SkinAuthority explains, “[The] cycle of cell production and replacement slows as we age. It takes about 28 days for the average, middle-aged adult. As we grow older, this skin cycle slows to about 45-60 days in our 40’s and 50’s. It can further slow to about 60-90 days in our 50’s and 60’s.” For babies, this cycle is three to five days. Other cells, structures of our bodies, likewise in different ways or cycles. Continually versioning.

So one might say we’re both developers and new releases, but not of artificial intelligence. Life engineered, innovated. Early adopting, lucky setbacks. Incompatibility issues, testing, tested, upgrading, replacing—but always versioning. Bugs fixed, performance improvements.

Yes, of course I know that even for me, as for dinosaurs, iPods and Chevy Volts, progression inevitably gives way to versioning out. But I’ll never say, that’s just life. It’s my life. “Alexa, get lost.”

# Just because I can, does it mean I should?

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Indulging our talents,  
versus the better angels of  
our nature.

# Just because I can, does it mean I should?

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## When the better angels of my nature

prevail, and I opt for restraint, I've never regretted it.

“Once a cartoonist,” I used to say when something even slightly naughty popped out of my mouth—or from my pen. That quip served me for many years as an easy ticket to get away with naughtiness, straight-faced cattiness, or just a poorly managed bad mood. Someone’s cosmetic enhancement, for example:

“Just wet her lips and stick her to the wall.”

I was a cartoonist from the day I put a fat #2 pencil to the margins of the funnies at the kitchen table, around age three. I was popular in grade school, with original paper dolls for a dime a sheet, poster contests, entertaining my cousins and illustrating my letters and envelopes with spot drawings.

How you discover that you're onto something is that you are consistently rewarded for it. Pavlov, the pooch, the bell.

My gift for caricature surfaced in Mr. Ofelt’s seventh grade science class. Sitting in the back row of that classroom—the long, Formica-topped tables with small stainless steel sinks, smelling vaguely of formaldehyde, three kids to a table—rendering Mr. Ofelt’s striped bell bottoms, flowered shirt, long blond hair, sideburns, and open leather vest on my Pee Chee—my reward was cracking up the last row and Mr. Ofelt too, pretty much every weekday, in 8th period. And getting straight A’s in sci-

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ence. It's wonderful to be the teacher's pet. Distinguished careers are so often made of this.

Because we naturally default to whatever has worked for us in the past. Yes, Darwin. But you might say this is also the kernel of the 10,000 Hour Rule, made famous by author Malcolm Gladwell, who convincingly postulates that if the Silver Beatles, as they originally were, hadn't kept at it in grungy Hamburg clubs there would never have been a Beatles. (That, and the sudden appearance of genius manager-promoter Brian Epstein, not yet 30, in 1961.) In other words, given enough time, practice, false starts, restarts, appetite for solitude and willingness to burn midnight oil, we inevitably get better, even to mastery.

So I carried on, conspicuously drawing Adidas in the junior high school library to attract the attention of the cool boys, because I didn't have the goods to make the cheerleading or girls' varsity volleyball squads. (It didn't work.) On to high school, where I became political cartoonist for the weekly school paper and won first place in national journalism contests two years in a row. At 20, freelancing three times weekly for the Portland State University campus newspaper (for example, "Jimmy Carter and His Taft-Hartley Act"—a vaudeville metaphor for something nobody cared about). Ultimately—10,000 hour reward—international newspaper syndication, but for such a short time it was a breakthrough really only because I was picked up just as newspapers, in actual newsprint, and newspaper syndicates

began dying off like dodos in the nascent digital era. My accomplishment really was more about marketing to skeptics than skill with political caricature.

Still, in conventional syndication with growing exposure, where I indulged in caricature in almost every editorial cartoon, I was increasingly rewarded with invitations to speak or sit on panels at arcane cartooning conclaves, with the bonus of hanging out with and even befriending a few big names. With a compulsively PBS rather than popular touch, I acquired a healthy respect. A United States Senator had his press secretary call me, to ask politely if the senator might have a copy of the very unflattering cartoon of him that had been syndicated all the way to the Jerusalem Post. That was, I think, my 10,000 Hour Sweet Spot of caricature. There followed commissions, more submissions and, in 2013, an anthology of editorial portraits of women in the news. By then, illustration for the media Twitterverse in the retro mediums of graphite and watercolor was neither fast nor cost-effective enough for anyone concerned, especially the artist. Right-click stealing had already long been rampant; in syndication, I'd already suffered the compliment of having Pulitzer Prize winners literally trace my published work in their own style, and openly syndicating to their own far bigger lists, twice.

Today, I'm retiring from editorial caricature.

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Around 2015, I felt a creeping reticence every time I came up with a hot subject—target—and went through the organic pleasures of sketching and painting, scanning and formatting, right up to the moment of pushing the button to post or publish. Then stopped. On Election Day 2016, it seemed there was only one subject: not the obvious (since everyone was obsessing about him, anything I came up with would only be redundant), but his second press secretary, Sarah Sanders. I saw Sanders through to final art, just to get her out of my system. For four years, I've had Melania, McConnell, and Pelosi queued up, sketched in pencil but nothing more, literally gathering dust.

Because I've come to realize that, for me, caricature is mean spirited, even if unintentionally. And for what? Not money, for sure. Today, professional opinion and satire are an expensive risk. In 2019 even Mad magazine, the citadel of satirical caricature, finally went down. You can't make a living at it now. In fact, you might not survive trying to do so. Just ask Charlie Hebdo.

Caricature is a visual commentary, a subjective spot opinion as is all editorial work. People will always collect art, including caricature, of themselves; but would there be a market, since it's all about marketing, for the incomparable Al Hirschfeld today? If not thoughtfully handled, caricature has power not just to amuse, incite, or even persuade but to wound and even destroy people. By the caricature standard of success, nothing anyone who sees the caricature might or might not do for the rest of

their lives—including most of all the subject—will reverse whatever flash-burned onto their lizard brain. The hard drive never, ever truly forgets. Again, for what? Only one mean little reward for the artist is possible. You post, or publish, this thing with the conceit that it might be seen and that somewhere, someone felt at least some kind of visceral tic. Hey, another follower!

Casting bread upon such water is a dubious impulse. Think, for a moment, what actually happens to bread on water.

In fact, it's going beyond the merely satirical or witty to casual condemnation. Damning the subject—that is, target—as frivolous, vicious, stupid, evil, ridiculous, contemptible or just plain worthless. And in doing so, damning them to everybody they know or ever knew. Regardless of any future redemption, repentance or worthy accomplishments, and regardless of whatever goaded you to single them out and throw your stone, it's out there. Googleable, forever.

There's an interesting movement gaining notice in the last few years: people leaving their mobile devices at the door, when entering restaurants. Ditching social media for actual socializing. A backlash for authenticity. Those restaurants are becoming very, very popular. Maybe graphite and watercolor on Bristol paper, for publication on any platform, will make a comeback. And maybe, for the world's greatest jugglers, vaudeville isn't dead.

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Moments ago, I got up and shredded the dusty sketches. The better angels have so many other things to do.

that, and who is this? Did we all really see ourselves as so with-it, compulsive early adopters, so cool we sniffed with contempt at anybody who didn't understand what bots are?

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They're similes, but progression depends on our point of view about versioning. It doesn't matter if we take up incremental embalming (as I think of medically and cosmetically unnecessary plastic surgery while we are still alive). It doesn't matter if we believe, or don't believe, in any specific theories whether science- or faith-based, or where we fit actual unearthed dinosaur fossils into all of this. We can get with the cloud (cyber, digital, AI, what have you), or cling to print like a life raft. We

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can take our groovy leather headband from Woodstock out for walks or we can eschew animal products entirely, wearing artificial leather and eating meatless meat. But versioning is assured. We change.

This conjures a whole new idea of “body clock.” Not the awareness of circadian rhythms, hunger pangs, or sleep cycles—but our body, as an actual, living clock. As a site called SkinAuthority explains, “[The] cycle of cell production and replacement slows as we age. It takes about 28 days for the average, middle-aged adult. As we grow older, this skin cycle slows to about 45-60 days in our 40’s and 50’s. It can further slow to about 60-90 days in our 50’s and 60’s.” For babies, this cycle is three to five days. Other cells, structures of our bodies, likewise in different ways or cycles. Continually versioning.

So one might say we’re both developers and new releases, but not of artificial intelligence. Life engineered, innovated. Early adopting, lucky setbacks. Incompatibility issues, testing, tested, upgrading, replacing—but always versioning. Bugs fixed, performance improvements.

Yes, of course I know that even for me, as for dinosaurs, iPods and Chevy Volts, progression inevitably gives way to versioning out. But I’ll never say, that’s just life. It’s my life. “Alexa, get lost.”